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**Question: Is Gender Relations Changing in the 21st Century? What are the areas of change and the factors driving this change?**

**What are Gender Relations?**

Gender is a state of being a male or female. In most cases, it’s typically defined with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological differences. Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) defines it as ‘relations between men and women, both perceptual and material’ It is not determined biologically as a result of sexual characteristics of either women or men but is constructed socially.

Gender relations refer to relations between men and women that are socially determined by culture, religion, or socially acceptable ways of thinking or being. These relationships between men and women, as they exist in most societies, are characterised by the marginalisation of women in decision making and other forms of power sharing in the home and places of authority.

**Is Gender Relations Changing in the 21st Century?**

Prior to the 21st century, particularly in the 19th century, men and women had sharply defined gender roles. The woman’s sphere of influence was within the home. Wives, daughters and sisters were left at home to ensure that all domestic responsibilities were being fulfilled; responsibilities like cooking, cleaning and childcare. As new ideas about the female bodies emerged, it became taboo for women to express their sexual desires. Women were idolized as caregivers, and those who bucked this role were condemned as prostitutes. During this period, patriarchy was the only socially acceptable form of familial organisation; men were the voice of their families, as well as their society.

Men, on the other hand, lived a very public lifestyle; socialising through work, attending public events, visiting clubs and/or bars. It was during this period that the idea of the male “breadwinner” became more influential. Being able to provide a financially stable lifestyle became intertwined with self-worth and women were expected to abandon their careers once they got married.

In the mid-1800s, women bean to buck these traditional roles and become more involved in changing world and in addressing gender inequality. This can be seen in particular movements such as the Temperance Movement, The Declaration of Sentiments and the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848.

By the 20th century, the rapid change induced by the Industrial Revolution reinforced traditional gender roles of the early 19th century. There was a resurgence in the idea that women are the weaker, morally upstanding sex. Then, ideas regarding women that had begun to dissipate, resurfaced; ideas such as, women should not participate in politics, women should rear children, women should not express their sexual desires etc. However, women’s suffrage, granted in 1920, emboldened many women as they began to see themselves as politically equal to their male counterparts.

World War II catalysed a revolution in social construct. As men went to war, women had to perform jobs that were previously held exclusively by men. The female workforce was essential to the United States’ success in the war and many women enjoyed working and wanted to do so after the war effort. However, after the war ended, men wanted to return to their traditional role on patriarch, unwittingly cultivating feelings of dissatisfaction among female working class.

Today, traditional roles have been exchanged for a mutual relationship in which both sexes are recognized to have personal aspirations, hopes and dreams. Men are no longer solely responsible for domestic responsibilities. The roles of women are still developing and changing, depending on need, circumstance and personal choice. Men and women both are establishing their roles within the twenty-first century society. And there are many men who demonstrate just how far the male-female relationship has developed and how it can work and be equal.

**What are the areas of change and the factors driving this change?**

The change in gender roles today is significantly different to how gender roles past were perceived. Our roles are considered as much more of an equal balance, sharing responsibilities and expectations.As for employment, most couples will now have a full-time job and will share financial responsibilities for their home. In the past, a full-time job and financial responsibility were expected in the role for men. Now that couples can both work, there will be less pressure on finances.

More so, in the home, both men and women now equally share responsibilities in caring for their home. Gender roles past would have expected the woman to carry out the daily household chores, the cooking and the cleaning, whereas now the jobs at home are very much shared.

In the childcare sector, the pressures of supporting a family and perhaps paying for childcare has changed the role for women, from the one most associated with the past, a full-time stay at home mother. Now most women work full-time or at least part-time, so that they can contribute towards the family’s finances.

Furthermore, in some families we are seeing a complete role reversal from the past where the woman is going out to work full-time and the man stays at home to look after the children and carry out the household chore**s.**

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, attitudes toward working women have come a long way in the last five decades. There is still a long way to go toward true equality, though. It remains to be seen how views on gender roles and women at work will evolve in the years ahead.

# References

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