

## GENDER

### I. Introduction

A. The investigation of cultural constructions of gender is frequently an arena for a version of the nature-nurture debate.

B. *Sex* refers to biological differences, while *gender* refers to the cultural construction of male and female characteristics.

C. Sexual dimorphism refers to marked differences in male and female biology *besides* the primary and secondary sexual features (for example, the average difference in height and weight between men and women is an aspect of sexual dimorphism, but *not* the differences in genitalia and breasts).

#### D. Definitions

1. Gender roles are the tasks and activities that a culture assigns to the sexes.

2. Gender stereotypes are oversimplified but strongly held ideas of the characteristics of men and women.

3. Gender stratification describes an unequal distribution of rewards (socially valued resources, power, prestige, and personal freedom) between men and women, reflecting their different positions in social hierarchy.

### II. Recurrent Gender Patterns

A. Cross-culturally the subsistence contributions of men and women are roughly equal.

B. In domestic activities, female labor dominates, while in extradomestic activities, male labor dominates.

C. Women are the primary caregivers, but men often play a role.

### III. Gender among Foragers

#### A. Economic Roles and Gender Stratification

1. Roughly equal contributions to subsistence by men and women correlates with decreased gender stratification.

2. As women's contributions to subsistence become differentially high or low, gender stratification increases.

3. Gender stratification is lower when domestic and public spheres are not clearly distinguished.

## B. The Public-Domestic Dichotomy

1. Strong differentiation between the home and the outside world is called the domestic-public dichotomy, or the *private-public contrast*.

a. The activities of the domestic sphere tend to be performed by women.

b. The activities of the public sphere tend to be restricted to men.

2. Public activities tend to have greater prestige than domestic ones, which promotes gender stratification.

## C. Sex-Linked Activities

1. All cultures have a division of labor based on gender, but the particular tasks assigned to men and women vary from culture to culture.

2. Almost universally, the greater size, strength, and mobility of men have led to their exclusive service in the roles of hunters and warriors.

3. Lactation and pregnancy also tend to preclude the possibility of women being the primary hunters in foraging societies.

4. However, these distinctions are very general, and there is always overlap (!Kung San are used as an example).

## D. Natural Form of Human Society

1. Before 10,000 years ago, all human groups were foragers.

2. In foraging societies, the public-domestic spheres are least separate, hierarchy is least marked, aggression and competition are most discouraged, and the rights, activities, and spheres of influence of men and women overlap the most.

3. Relative gender equality is most likely the ancestral pattern of human society.

## IV. Gender among Horticulturalists

A. Martin and Voorhies (1975) studied 515 horticultural societies to investigate how gender roles and stratification varied according to economy and social structure.

1. Women were found to be the main producers in horticultural societies.

2. In half of the societies, women did most of the cultivating.

3. In a third of the societies, men and women made equal contributions to cultivation.

4. In only 17% of the societies did men do most of the work.

5. Women dominated horticulture in 64% of the matrilineal societies and in 50% of the patrilineal societies.

#### B. Reduced Gender Stratification—Matrilineal, Matrilocal Societies

1. Female status tends to be relatively high in matrilineal, matrilocal societies (e.g., Minangkabau).
2. Reasons for high female status were that women had economic power due to inheritance, and the residence pattern lent itself to female solidarity.
3. A matriarchy is a society ruled by women.
4. Anthropologists have never discovered a matriarchy, but the Iroquois show that women's political and ritual influence can rival that of men.
  - a. Warfare was external only, as is typical of matrilineal societies.
  - b. Women controlled local economy; men hunted and fished.
  - c. Matrons determined entry in longhouses and also had power of impeachment over chiefs.

#### C. Reduced Gender Stratification—Matrifocal Societies

1. A survey of matrifocal (mother-centered, often with no resident husband-father) societies indicates that male travel combined with a prominent female economic role reduced gender stratification.
2. The example of the Igbo (Nigeria) demonstrated that gender roles might be filled by members of either sex.

#### D. Increased Gender Stratification—Patrilineal-Patrilocal Societies

1. The spread of patrilineal-patrilocal societies has been associated with pressure on resources and increased local warfare.
  - a. As resources become scarcer, warfare often increases.
  - b. The patrilineal-patrilocal complex concentrates related males in villages, which solidifies their alliances for warfare.
2. This combination tends to enhance male prestige opportunities and result in relatively high gender stratification (e.g., highland Papua-New Guinea).
  - a. Women do most of the cultivation, cooking, and raising children, but are isolated from the public domain.
  - b. Males dominate the public domain (politics, feasts, warfare).

## **V. Sexualities and Gender**

### **A. Sexual Orientation**

1. All human activities, including sexual preferences, are to some extent learned and malleable.
2. Sexual orientation refers to a person's habitual sexual attractions and activities.
  - a. Heterosexuality refers to the sexual preference for members of the opposite sex.
  - b. Homosexuality refers to the sexual preference for members of the same sex.
  - c. Bisexuality refers to the sexual preference for members of both sexes.
  - d. Asexuality refers to indifference toward or lack of attraction to either sex.

### **B. Sexual norms vary considerably cross-culturally and through time.**

1. There tends to be greater cross-cultural acceptance of homosexuality than of bestiality and masturbation.
2. Flexibility in human sexual expression is part of our primate heritage.
  - a. Masturbation exists among chimpanzee and other primates.
  - b. Homosexual behavior exists among chimpanzee and other primates.
3. Sexuality is a matter that culture and environment determine and limit.

## **VI. Gender among Agriculturalists**

### **A. With agriculture, women become cut off from production.**

1. Martin and Voorhies (1975) found that women were the main workers in only 15% of the agricultural societies, down from 50% of the horticultural ones.
2. Martin and Voorhies (1975) found that males dominated the cultivation in 81% of the agricultural societies, up from only 17% of the horticultural ones.
3. This shift is due in part to the increase of heavier labor that characterizes agriculture and the increase in the number of children to raise.

### **B. Social changes that accompany agriculture also functioned to reduce the status of women.**

1. Belief systems started to contrast men's valuable extradomestic labor with women's domestic role, now viewed as inferior.
2. The decline of polygyny and the rise of the importance of the nuclear family isolated women from their kin and co-wives.

3. Female sexuality is carefully supervised in agricultural societies, which results in men having greater access to divorce and extramarital sex.

C. However, there are many exceptions to this, wherein women still do most of the cultivation work and have a correspondingly high status (e.g., Betsileo).

## **VII. Patriarchy and Violence**

### **A. Patriarchal Societies**

1. The male role in warfare is highly valued.
2. Violent acts against women are common and include dowry murders, female infanticide, clitoridectomies.

### **B. Domestic Violence**

1. Family violence is a worldwide problem.
2. Abuse of women is more common in societies where women are separated from their supportive kin ties (e.g., patrilineal, patrifocal, and patrilocal societies).