



GENDER EQUALITY: UTOPIAN AND REALISTIC

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What do we mean by gender equality?

- Equal numbers of women and men at all levels of governments and other major institutions?
- In the workplace, equal salaries and open access to all jobs? In the family, shared parenting?
- Cultural productions and media that feature women's perspectives and values as often as men's?
- Protection from sexual exploitation and domestic violence?
- Do we mean political participation, economic access, and reproductive rights for women throughout the world?

Who gets compared?

- Does gender equality refer only to women or to perfect equality between women and men, which might mean advantaging some men?
- Which women and men are not equal? Who gets compared?

Gender equality or gender transformation?

- Do we mean doing away with the binary – the division of so much of society into men's spheres and women's spheres?
- Do we mean dismantling the legal and bureaucratic structure of gender?
- Do we mean the acceptance of multiple genders and sexualities?

Beyond the binaries

- Going beyond beyond -- doing away with gender altogether.
- A utopian or dystopian vision?
- May be impossible to imagine.
- What is *realistic* when it comes to gender equality?

Do-able degendering

- Structuring work organizations for gender neutrality.
- Consciously countering the informal denigration of women on work teams.
- Parenting that scrupulously divides child care and household work evenly between the responsible adults of a household.
- Interaction that doesn't start with gender division.
- Socialization of children that isn't based on feminization and masculinization.

Institutionalization of gender inequality

- Gender inequality is built into gender as a social institution – a legal and bureaucratic means of dividing the populace into two categories – “men” and “women” – and treating them differently.
- Most social institutions (schools, governments, work organizations, the military, religion, the family) are gendered with practices that privilege the men over the women in the same racial and social class group.
- Even if social institutions approach gender neutrality in their formal policies and practices, gendered interactions on a face-to-face informal level tend to disadvantage women.

Individual gendering

- From birth, individuals are intensely gendered – feminized and masculinized
- They usually incorporate the social meanings of their gender categories into their personalities and behavior in order to be proper members of their social groups.
- By constantly doing gender, they legitimize and perpetuate the gendered social order.

Breaches to structure of gender inequality

- Women in positions of authority
- Movement for homosexual equality, especially marriage and parenting, which upends traditional expectations of gendered family behavior
- Genderqueers, who refuse to abide by the conventional gender norms and expectations.
- Yet we are still left with a social order that is generally gender unequal

Practical feminism

- Gender balancing and gender mainstreaming
- Work within the current gendered social order
- Use tactics of gender balance – equal numbers of women and men, parity
- Gender mainstreaming – making sure that the policies of the government take gender into account to make sure that women are not short-changed by them.
- **Practical feminism**

Transnational feminism

- Other problems need more of a counter action confronting current policies of gender segregation in the workplace and lower pay for women's work by affirmative action.
- The global economy exploits poor women as cheap labor, and economic restructuring often reduces social-service benefits to mothers and children.
- These economic problems are an arena for a **transnational feminist gender politics.**

Body feminism

- Protection of women's bodies against unwanted pregnancies and sterilizations, abortions of female fetuses, genital mutilation, rape, beatings, and honor murder.
- The sexual integrity of women and girls needs protection from forced prostitution, exploitative sex work in pornographic productions and strip clubs, and unwanted arranged marriages.

Lesbian feminism

- Lesbian, gay, and transgendered people need to be able to live free of discrimination and violent attacks.
- Many lesbian women also want their own physical space and cultural communities, where they can be safe from sexual harassment and men's domination, nourish their loves and friendships, and produce books, music, art, and drama that reflect their different ways of thinking and feeling.

Standpoint feminism

- Standpoint feminists argue that women's experiences and distinctive outlooks on life have to be included in the production of knowledge, especially in science and social science research.
- It is not enough to just add women subjects to research designs; questions have to be asked from a critical feminist perspective, data have to include women's voices, and analysis has to reflect the viewpoints of those who have been marginalized and silenced.

Multiracial, multiethnic feminism

- Multiracial/multiethnic feminisms are part of a powerful political movement to redress past and present legal and social discrimination of disadvantaged women in many societies

A revolutionary feminism

- Gender divisions still deeply divide modern society, and it is this automatic division of people into what becomes two unequally valued categories that causes the persistence of gender inequality.
- It is this gendering that needs to be challenged for lasting social change, with the long-term goal of not just minimizing, but of doing away with binary gender divisions completely.
- That means dismantling the matrix of domination embedded in the major social statuses -- gender, social class, racial ethnic, and sexual identity.

Utopian feminism

- ***If the gender inequality is to be finally eradicated, legal and bureaucratic degendering must be the ultimate feminist goal.***

What degendering is, and isn't

- Degendering doesn't mean not thinking about gender.
- Degendering starts with the recognition that gender is a binary system of social organization that creates inequality because of the ways women and men are differently treated.
- Degendering attacks the structure and process of gender – the division of people into two social statuses and the social construction of gender differences that make them different and unequal.

heuristic, asking what if?

- What if we did not divide people by gender? (What would and would not change in a society?)
- What if we did not divide household tasks and child care by gender? (How do same-gender couples structure family duties?)
- What if we did not allocate positions in the work force by gender? (How do organizations of all women or all men allocate their jobs?)
- What if we did not form personal and group identities by gender? (Don't we all have individualized characteristics and multiple group memberships?)

Intersections and gender complexity

- Gender is intersected by racial ethnic group, social class, national identity, religious affiliation
- Gender has individual variations, such as age, sexual orientation, relational and parental statuses, and physical status.
- Multiple genders undercut the strength of the two-gender structure.

Blurred gender boundaries

- Recognition of similarities of women and men in behavior and emotions
- Melding of women's and men's work -- women combat pilots, astronauts, and firefighters and men nurses, secretaries, and nursery school teachers
- Overlaps in family roles

Stop comparing women and men

- Constant comparisons are insidious because they assume essential male and female natures.
- Do not recognize the extent to which masculine and feminine characteristics are situational, interactive, or simply stereotypes.
- Fail to see that gender is part of the intersectionality of multiple and simultaneous sources of privilege and disadvantage.

sex, sexuality, and gender

- Procreative and other biological differences are themselves part of the gendered social order, which socially constructs how women give birth and how they mother.
- Female and male bodies are socially constructed to be feminine and masculine – a different order of “opposites.”
- Degendering would diminish the social construction of sex differences; it won’t affect truly natural physiological differences.

Practicing degendering

- Not assigning tasks in the home and workplace by gender
- Not grouping children by gender in schools
- Challenging gender expectations in face-to-face interaction
- Not using gender categories in language
- Not ticking off M/F boxes

What degendering won't do

- Where women are severely disadvantaged, degendering may not be the best strategy to achieve women's rights. Gender sensitivity may be necessary to bring attention to how seemingly neutral policies are insidious for women.
- Degendering will not do away with wars and hunger and economic disparities.
- Degendering won't by itself demilitarize, work for peaceable solutions to conflicts, grow and distribute food, level the gaps between social classes.

What would a world without gender be like?

- Can we think the impossible and envisage societies where people come in all colors, shapes, and sizes and where body characteristics are not markers for status identification or for predetermined allocation to any kind of activity?
- Imagining such a world
- Utopia or dystopia?

***“All that was solid
melted into air”***

“There are moments in history when a crack in time seems to open and swallow the known world: solid-seeming institutions, rotted from within, collapse or are discarded, settled beliefs are unsettled; old truths are discovered to be provisional; acts that were forbidden are permitted or even required; boundaries thought impassable are passed without comment; and outrageous and unreal events...flood in profusion from some portal of future that no one was guarding or even watching.”

A utopian vision

I think that in the not-too-far future, we will see this crumbling of gender divisions and statuses – and I think that is a utopian vision.