

## Gender Inequality

Gender inequality refers to unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals based on their gender. It arises from differences in socially constructed gender roles as well as biologically through chromosomes, brain structure, and hormonal differences. Gender inequality stems from distinctions, whether empirically grounded or socially constructed.

Men and women are not equal in some respects, and that is a good thing. In humans, biological sex is determined by five factors present at birth: the presence or absence of a Y chromosome, the type of gonads, the sex hormones, the internal reproductive anatomy (such as the uterus in females), and the external genitalia. People with various sex characteristics that do not allow them to be distinctly identified as male or female are intersex. People whose internal experience that differs from their biological sex are transgender or transsexual. Males on average weigh more and are taller than females.

Even when accounting for height and weight differences, men have slightly bigger brains than women, though this does not necessarily mean they are smarter. Researchers from Harvard found that certain parts of the brain were differently sized in males and females, which may help balance out the overall size difference. The study found that parts of the frontal lobe, responsible for problem-solving and decision-making, and the limbic cortex, responsible for regulating emotions, were larger in women. In men, the parietal cortex, which is involved in space perception, and the amygdala, which regulates sexual and social behavior, were larger. While men have slightly more neuron packed grey matter women have 10 times more white matter than men. White matter consists of connections between neurons, this means that women's brain works faster than men's.

Gender roles and stereotypes are an example of socially constructed gender distinctions. Gender roles are the social and behavioral norms that are generally considered appropriate by a particular society for either a man or a woman in a social or interpersonal relationship. Gender roles are also culture based, with most cultures distinguishing only two genders, Research has shown that gender stereotyping and labeling is acquired at a very young age, and that social interactions and associations play a large role in how genders are identified.

Traditionally in Western society the female stereotypic role is to marry and have children. She is also to put her family's welfare before her own; be loving, compassionate, caring, nurturing, and sympathetic; and find time to be sexy and feel beautiful. The male stereotypic role is to be the financial provider. He is also to be assertive, competitive, independent, courageous, and career-focused; hold his emotions in check; and always initiate sex. These sorts of stereotypes can prove harmful; they can stifle individual expression and creativity, as well as hinder personal and professional growth.

Stereotypes about men and women have a huge impact on our beliefs about how they should (or should not) behave. Consequently gender stereotypes reinforce social status and gender hierarchies. Men and women who behave in ways that contrast with these traditional stereotypes – such as career women or stay-at-home dads – are likely to be evaluated negatively by others. A lifetime of exposure to what women and men should be, how they should behave and who they should represent drives and reinforces unconscious and unseen biases.

Studies have shown that both men and women have unconscious gender biases. For example, people view men as more capable leaders, and men are rewarded more highly than women – just having a male name is more likely to get you the job. If you are a mother, your chances of getting the job are reduced by 70%. Often we don't even think about the stereotypes or prejudices we hold and may hurt or disadvantage people without realizing it. We may think that we are simply behaving in ways that accurately reflect the realities or abilities of men and women but we are actually discriminating and reinforcing inequality.

Stereotypes and prejudices about gender are harmful because they ignore the fact that each individual has his or her own abilities, strengths, weaknesses, desires, thoughts and feelings. Our sex and gender are part of who we are, but these characteristics do not define us. These prejudices have negative real world consequences for millions of people.

In many countries, there is a significant gender income gap that favors males in the labor market. For example, the median full-time salary for U.S. women is 77% of that of U.S. men; this gap has barely narrowed since the mid-1990s. And while the contribution of men to housework and childcare has grown significantly over the past 25 years, but is still far below women's contribution. Many women continue to have 'two' jobs, one at the workplace and one at home. Childcare is very expensive in the United States. And we are way behind most European countries and many Asian countries in terms of offering affordable, high-quality care; also in relation to maternity leave.

In addition to income disparity there is occupational segregation based on gender. As women entered the workforce in larger numbers since the 1960s, occupations have become segregated based on the amount femininity or masculinity presupposed to be associated with each occupation. Census data suggests that while some occupations have become more gender integrated (mail carriers, bartenders, bus drivers, and real estate agents), occupations including teachers, nurses, secretaries, and librarians have become female-dominated while occupations including architects, electrical engineers, and airplane pilots remain predominately male in composition. This poses challenges for either people of either sex who wish to engage in an occupation that is dominated by the opposite sex.

The *glass ceiling* effect is also considered a possible contributor to the gender wage gap or income disparity. This effect suggests that gender provides significant

disadvantages towards the top of job hierarchies which become worse as a person's career goes on. The term glass ceiling implies that invisible or artificial barriers exist which prevent women from advancing within their jobs or receiving promotions. These barriers exist in spite of the achievements or qualifications of the women. The inequality effects of the glass ceiling are more prevalent within higher-powered or higher income occupations, with fewer women holding these types of occupations.

Gender inequality and discrimination is argued to cause and perpetuate poverty and vulnerability in society as a whole. Gender Equity Indices seek to provide the tools to demonstrate this feature of equity. The Gender Inequality Index (GII) is a new index for measurement of gender disparity that was introduced in the by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This index is a composite measure which captures the loss of achievement, within a country, due to gender inequality, and uses three dimensions to do so: reproductive health, empowerment, and labor market participation.

The reproductive health dimension measures women's access to health care; especially during pregnancy and childbearing years. The empowerment dimension measures the share of government seats held by each sex, as well as higher education attainment levels. The final dimension of the Gender Inequality Index is the labor market dimension, which measures women participation in the workforce.

The five highest ranked countries in terms of gender equality are the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland and Norway. The bottom five are Yemen, Afghanistan, Niger, Saudi Arabia and the Congo. The United States is ranked 22<sup>nd</sup>, behind most other developed nations.

Gender inequality in the United States has been diminishing throughout its history and significant advancements towards equality have been made beginning mostly in the early 1900s, and emerging as a powerful sociopolitical force beginning in the 1960s, the feminist movement has lobbied for the rights of women and minorities. Feminists have fought hard to challenge and redefine traditional stereotypic gender roles. However, despite this progress, gender inequality in the United States continues to persist in many forms, including the disparity in women's political representation and participation, occupational segregation, the gender pay gap, and the unequal distribution of household labor.

Overcoming stereotypes and unconscious bias can only be achieved if we are all willing to address our own immediate judgments and can put in place practices and procedures to mitigate their potential effects. We can all try to learn more about people, especially those who are different from us, and understand and value our similarities and our differences. If we are more conscious of our assumptions we can also choose how we respond

Promoting gender equality means valuing men and women equally and promoting the right of men and women to have the same opportunities for the achievement of

important goals in society such as education, employment and income and to contribute to political, social, and cultural development at all levels. This sort of gender equality will lead to a more socially enlightened society that we can all reap the rewards of.