Gender Inequality and Feminism Example

Gender inequality is a concept which has been occurring over a number of years and due to gender differences it fuels up gender inequality, which gave rise to gender socialization. Gender socialization is the process of learning gender roles which emerge from society and nowadays social media, throughout this process men and women learn their roles in society. The most common attribute we ascribe to women is that they can be vulnerable and sensitive, on the other hand, men hear the phrase “toughen up and be a man” implying that men shouldn’t be sensitive and vulnerable like women. Gender inequality is still common until this day even though we have emancipated into modern times. This could be seen from the family friendly measure of maternity leave and paternity leave in Malta. The way in which they are formulated implies that women should stay at home and take care of the child rather than the father. This is one of the many gender inequalities which fuel up the feminist movements.

The feminist sociological theory transpired as a challenge to the only form of sociology which existed during those times which was male stream sociology. There are many forms of feminism, liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism, black feminism and postmodern feminism. Even though these approaches are vast they still
share common characteristics firstly, they understand that there is inequalities in power and status in men and women. Secondly, women should be in control of their sexuality and the way they reproduce instead of men dominating over them. Thirdly, there are laws and cultural norms which make women oppressed in education and in the workforce. Lastly, due to patriarchy in society it damages the relationship between men and women.

Radical feminism originated in the second wave of feminism and they had one main aim and this aim is that women are oppressed due to social roles and institutional structures which are being formulated by patriarchy. Women are exploited as they work in childcare and they are housewives therefore their power is oppressed. Due to men working and women staying at home the family is the main source of how women are oppressed in society. Firestone (1972) understood that women are oppressed mainly by their biology as they have to give birth to children whilst men don't have to. On the other hand, Andrea Dworkin had the belief that rape, violence and pornography are the main hub where men gain and secure their power over women. A statistic which was conducted by the U.S Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics emphasizes on this idea. As, in 1981 the total rape on women was 479,000 which were completed, on the other hand 1,032,000 were attempted rapes. This study continues to emphasise the idea that males used rape in order to secure their dominance over women.

The radical feminists understood that power is a positive attribute and it should be experienced in a dualistic manner but they understood that one party being the male party and the female party will still experience a form of oppression. Rosemarie Tong makes a differentiation between two forms of radical feminists, the radical libertarian feminists and the radical cultural feminists. Firstly, the radical libertarian feminists understood that gender differences could be eliminated or even decreased and their main aim was to remove any form of segregation between the sexes. For instance males should adopt female characteristics such as sensitivity and women should adopt male characteristics such as assertiveness and this will promote androgyne and will promote gender equality. Secondly, the radical cultural feminists honour female characteristics such as sensitivity and compassion and dishonour masculine characteristics such as courage and independence. Tong (1998) viewed that males shouldn’t be women and women shouldn’t be males. Tong understands that there are two forms of radical feminism and there are distinct but these approaches represent real and important differences in society.
Complementary to black feminism according to Marxist feminism women are discriminated in two ways being workers and being women. Marxist feminism takes a Marxist approach, where capitalism is the main reason why women are oppressed in society as they don't work. Like the radical feminists, women's unpaid work as being housewives is the main aim why women are oppressed. Both capitalism and men benefit from women not working as the capitalist system will have new works being reproduced at no cost and men will have power over women as they have ownerships. Since women didn’t work they didn’t have any form of ownership rather the men owned everything as, they worked and had the monetary value to buy assets and this meant that they didn't have any form of power in society.

Engels understood that material and economic factors make women inferior to men as patriarchy's main source is private property. Engels (1884) suggested that men became so powerful in terms of invention and control in production that this control made women suppressed to become serves to men. Capitalism therefore intensifies patriarchy by providing wealth and power in the hands of men, moreover this wealth transferred power to men over women as they have both a wage and property. Nonetheless, he pointed out that unless there is no segregation between men and women in the work force and women do join the work force then this inequality will never be removed. Despite the inequality over women men also faced their own form of inequality as capitalism overworked men for a low wage whilst women got paid nothing despite of their long hours being housewives. Men worked in factories for long hours on end, tied to machines, do their work and earn low wages whilst women where the foundations of the family as they served the family with care.

On the other hand, the liberal feminists held the view in which freedom is of fundamental value rather than a value which should be earned. They wanted small changes in politics, the economy and society and, they understood that both men and women suffer from some form of inequality. Women face inequality as they might have skills which are important in the workforce whilst men don't spend time with their children due to their work. They explain this inequality through social and cultural attitudes, liberal feminists have a main goal which is to expand rights and opportunities for women. Nonetheless by removing any form of cultural and legal barriers such as preventing discrimination in the workplace by not providing equal pay. Moreover, the Equal rights
amendment was an objective which was reached to promote mainstreaming by the liberal feminists as the amendment stated;

"Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex."

Therefore, inequality wasn’t understood in terms of biological differences rather in social and cultural attitudes. They wanted to remove inequality in the public sphere by providing equal pay and having the same access to education. A criticism to liberal feminism is that they focus only on the initial inequalities of women and they don't explain how they have developed.

Thirdly, black feminism was a criticism to feminism as a whole as they believed that feminism is only concerned with white women who are middle class and educated. Hooks (1981) believed that not only are they discriminated by other feminist theories but also males, as they don't take into account problems faced by black women. During those times black women were not only discriminated by their gender but also for the colour of their skin, nonetheless they wanted to eliminate the merging of race and gender. Past black feminist writings make it evident that slavery and civil rights movement on gender inequality were present, an aspect which is of significance in sociology is intersectionality and according to Crenshaw (1989)

“It is an approach which seeks to understand the complex interconnections of each individual.”

Moreover, the feminists emphasise this idea of intersectionality that black women cannot be broken down into a single social section such as class and gender. In this case; being gender and ethnicity, Collins (2000) agreed with intersectionality. Moreover, intersectionality was further developed by the black feminists and it dominated other theories.

Lastly, postmodern feminism is concerned with women who have developed due to the fact that they were let down by previous gender inequality theories. They criticise the early feminist theories as the movements tended
to discriminate against women, but they still accept each standpoint to be valid. For example the black feminist movement believed that previous feminist movements didn't take into account black women but only white and middle classed women. Nonetheless, postmodern feminists concluded that women have a universal basis on which they agree upon including identity and similar experiences such as childbirth. They disregard the objective that there is a theory which explains the position of women in society rather women construct their own identities and their own experiences. Gender for them is only one part of their identity, Sigmund Freud a psychoanalyst viewed women just the same as men but they lacked a penis and they envied males in this manner. They also worked on deconstructing features in society such as deconstructing the male language and how people view them from a masculine point of view.

Sylvia Walby (1990) argues that there are six patriarchal structures which make women oppressed. She understood that patriarchy is central in order to understand society from a feminist point of view. Agreeing with black feminism she takes into account that women have various ethnicities and social classes and she believes that these structures can change. These structures include paid work, household production, culture, sexuality, violence and the state. Paid work entails women having less job opportunities and even though men and women might do the same amount of work women are paid less. Household production is when men benefit from women staying at home, raising the family and don’t get paid for this work. Culture includes a segregation between men and women and the various expectations of behaviours from the sexes but she expects that these behaviours will change by time. Nowadays the sign of femininity is sexual attractiveness to men, but the increase in pornography threatens women and increases power to males. Sexuality is when women are pressured to be with males and marrying them and women who are sexually active are regarded as prostitutes. Violence is when women are violently abused which promotes more control on women. The state, to Walby is still patriarchal, racist and capitalist, she observed that women in society have almost no position in the public sphere and have no equal opportunities compared to men.

Even though in some countries inequality is diminishing in other countries inequality is still very present. For example in Saudi Arabia women are massively oppressed as they are considered to be minors under males.
Whenever a woman needs to leave the house the male has to be present without him the woman couldn't leave the house even if it is an emergency. Also in South Korea female workers earn a third less than males even though they do the same work and the same amount of hours.

To conclude, many feminists created theories which may be equally valid for the specific time period in which they were constructed but gender inequality still hasn't diminished completely. Along time these feminist theories helped women gain their rights and their position in society. Without these theories women would still be in the same position they were a long time ago women without ownership and women without the right to vote. Thanks to these theories women developed over time and it helped to shape their identity and their status in society.

References


