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Q1(e)

How do sociologists construct gender in their analysis on social inequality?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · Sociology GS 1 · 10 marks · Stratification and Mobility: Concepts

Stratification and Mobility: Concepts - equality, inequality, hierarchy, exclusion, poverty and deprivation; Theories of social stratification - Structural functionalist, Marxist, Weberian; Dimensions - Class, status groups, gender, ethnicity and race; Social mobility - open and closed systems, types, sources and causes.

Core demand of the question

- How do sociologists construct gender in their analysis on social inequality?
- Keep the answer within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Gender is constructed as a social relation of power, not as a natural residual.

Oakley, West and Zimmerman, Connell, **Walby**, and Harding named labour, doing, order, and standpoint.

Class analysis without unpaid care hides inequality.

NFHS, **SHGs**, and feminised gig and garment work are the Indian files.

Construction is a method of measurement, not a denial of harm.

Introduction

Sociologists do not treat gender as a natural leftover after class is measured. They construct it as a social relation of power that organises labour, honour, and the body, and that intersects with caste and class.

Body

How the construct is built

- Ann **Oakley** distinguished sex as biology from gender as socially taught work and identity, and she made housework visible as labour.
- Candace West and Don Zimmerman treated gender as something people do in interaction, not a fixed trait.
- R. W. Connell mapped masculinities and the gender order. Sylvia **Walby** named patriarchy as a system of related structures.
- Sandra Harding and Dorothy Smith placed standpoint in method, so inequality is read from everyday care as well as from the wage.

In the analysis of inequality

- Class tables that code only the male earner bury unpaid care and the double day.
- Intersection with caste and race, after Patricia Hill Collins and Indian Dalit feminist work, stops a single "women" residual.

- **NFHS** files on anaemia, agency, and sex ratio, and SHG membership, become gender data when unpaid work and mobility are named.
- Gig platforms and garment export lines show how "flexible" work is often feminised precarity, not a gender-neutral market.

What construction does not mean

- It does not mean inequality is imaginary. It means the categories used to measure it are theoretically chosen.

Flow diagram

Gender as relation -> Labour care wage
Gender as relation -> Interaction doing gender
Gender as relation -> Patriarchy and standpoint
Labour care wage -> Social inequality
Interaction doing gender -> Social inequality
Patriarchy and standpoint -> Social inequality

Conclusion

Sociologists construct gender as a relation of power in labour, interaction, and the state. **Oakley**, Connell, **Walby**, and Harding supply the tools. Inequality analysis that leaves gender unconstructed simply repeats the male public actor as the normal case.

Facts & figures

Oakley

Separated sex and gender and treated housework as work in the study of inequality.

Walby

Analysed patriarchy as linked structures: household, paid work, state, violence, sexuality, culture.

NFHS

Supplies indicators of women's health, decision-making, and sex ratio that class tables alone miss.

SHGs

Self-help groups make women's credit and public meeting visible as organised economic actors.