

# **Theory of gender inequality**

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## Theoretical Perspective of Gender Inequality

Sociologists view gender inequality in different ways. Some see the gender inequality basically as **stable** and **ongoing** entity. Some sociologists see gender inequality as composed of many **groups in conflict**, competing for scarce resources. Other sociologists, gender inequality is produced and reinforced through daily **interactions** and the use of **symbols**. To still other sociologists analyzes gender inequality through the intersection of **gender**, **race**, and **class** (Schaefer, 2007). These four views, the ones most widely used by sociologist, are:

1. The Functionalist Perspective;
2. The Conflict Perspective;
3. The Interactionist Perspective; and
4. The Feminist Perspective.

# Theoretical Perspective of Gender Inequality

## 1. The Functionalist Perspective

Functionalism, also known as “**structural functionalism**,” is a **macro sociological** perspective that is based on the premise that society is made up of **interdependent parts**, each of which contributes to the **functioning** of the whole society (Mill, 1869). The functionalist perspective, which also emphasizes the way in which the parts of a society are structure to **maintain it stability**. Functionalist suggest that gender inequalities exist as an efficient way to create a **division of labor**, or a social system in which a **particular segment** of the population is clearly responsible for **certain acts** of labor and another segment is clearly responsible for other labor acts (Giddens, 2001).

## Theoretical Perspective of Gender Inequality (Functionalist Perspective)

According to Functionalists, any given element of social structure contributes to overall social stability, balance, and equilibrium. In this view point gender inequality maintain overall social **stability**, **balance**, and **equilibrium** in **pre-industrial** society as well as **contemporary society**.

### Pre-industrial society

Functionalist suggested that in preindustrial societies social **equilibrium** maintain by assigning **different task** to men and women. In their assigned hunting roles, **men** were frequently **away from home for long period** and centered their lives on the responsibility for **bringing food** to the family.

It was functional for **women-more** limited by **pregnancy**, **child birth** and **nursing-** to be assign to **domestic roles** near the home as gathers and **subsistence farmers** and as caretakers of children and household (Mill, 1869).

# Theoretical Perspective of Gender Inequality (Functionalist Perspective)

## Contemporary Society

**Talcott Parsons**, a leading functionalist thinker concerned himself with the role of the family in industrial societies. In parson's view, the family operates most efficiently with a **clear-cut sexual division of labor** in which **women** take the **expressive**, emotionally supportive role and **men** the **instrumental**, practical role, with the two complementing each other (Parsons & Bales, 1956).

*Expressiveness* denotes concern for the **maintenance** of **harmony**, **providing care** and **security to children** and offering them **emotional support** and the internal emotional affairs of the family (Giddens, 2001; Schaefer, 2007).



## Theoretical Perspective of Gender Inequality (Functionalist Perspective)

*Instrumentality* refers to an emphasis on tasks, focus on more distant goals, being the breadwinner in the family and a concern for the external relationship between one's family and other social institutions (Giddens, 2001; Schaefer, 2007).

Anthropologist **George Murdock (1949)** saw it as both practical and convenient that women should concentrate on domestic and family responsibilities while men work outside the home. On the basis of a cross-culture study of more than hundred societies, Murdock conclude that the sexual division of labor is present in all cultures. While this is not the result of biological 'programming', it is the most logical basis for the organization of society.

## Theoretical Perspective of Gender Inequality

### 2. The Conflict Perspective

Where the **functionalist see stability** and consensus, **conflict** sociologists see a social world in **continual struggle**. The conflict perspective assumes that social behavior is best understood in terms of conflict or tension between competing groups.

In relationship to gender, Conflict theory explains that **gender inequality** came to **exist** because the **men** are trying to **maintain power** and privilege **at the cost of the women's benefit**.

Men have become powerful in industrial times because their size, physical strength, and freedom from childbearing duties allowed them to dominate women physically (Schaefer, 2007). In contemporary societies such considerations are not so important, yet **cultural beliefs** about the sexes are **long establishment**, as anthropologist **Margaret Mead** (1973) and feminist sociologist **Helen Mayer Hacker** (1974) both stressed.

## Theoretical Perspective of Gender Inequality (Conflict Perspective)

If we use an analogy of Marx's analysis of class conflict, we can say that **males** are like the **bourgeoisie** or **capitalist**; they **control** most of the society's **wealth, prestige, and power**.

**Females** are like the **proletariat**, or workers; they can acquire valuable resources only by following the dictates of their bosses.

**Men's work** is uniformly **valued**; **women's** work (whether unpaid labor in the home or wage labor) is **devalued** (Schaefer, 2007).





## Theoretical Perspective of Gender Inequality (Interactionist Perspective)

### 3. Interactionist Perspective

While functionalist and conflict theorists who study gender stratification typically focus on macro-level social forces and in institutions, interactionist researchers tend to examine gender stratification on the **micro level** of **everyday behavior**. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, **gender inequality** is **produced** and reinforced through the **socialization process** as well as **daily interactions** and the **use of symbols**.

In response to this phenomena, the sociologist **Charles H. Cooley's** developed the theory of the **'looking-glass self'** (1902). In this theory, **Cooley argued that an individual's perception of himself or herself is based primarily how society views him or her**. In the context of gender inequality, if **society**, that man will **consider** himself as **masculine**. Men and women are expected to perform their gender to the point that it is naturalized, and thus, their status depends on their performance.

✓ **Looking Glass Self:** what you think others believe about you

- Perception
- Imagine
- Evaluate

Example:  
How to impress



## **Theoretical Perspective of Gender Inequality**

### **The Feminist Perspective**

The feminist movement has given rise to a large body of theory which attempts to explain gender inequalities and set forth agendas for overcoming those inequalities. There are three main feminist perspectives-

- a. Liberal feminism
- b. Radical feminism
- c. Black feminism

## Theoretical Perspective of Gender Inequality (Feminist Perspective)

### Liberal feminism

Liberal feminism looks for explanations of gender inequalities in **social** and **cultural attitudes**. They draw attention to many separate factors which contribute to inequalities between men and women. For example, liberal feminist are concerned with sexism and **discrimination against women** in the **workplace**, **educational institution** and the **media**. They **emphasis** that the **equality in law** is important to eliminating discrimination against women (Giddens, 2001; Mill, 1869).



## Theoretical Perspective of Gender Inequality <sup>(Feminist Perspective)</sup>

### Radical feminism

Radical feminist believe that **men are responsible** for and benefit from the exploitation of women. The analysis of **patriarchy- the systematic** domination of female by males is the central concern to this branch of feminism. They concentrate on the **family** as one of the primary sources of **women's oppression** in society. According to this view, **domestic violence, rape and sexual harassment** are all part of the **systematic oppression** of women as inevitable in all **male dominated societies**, whether capitalist, socialist, or communist (Giddens, 2001; Mill, 1869).



## Theoretical Perspective of Gender Inequality (Feminist Perspective)

### Black feminism

Black feminism **concentrates** on particular **problems facing black women**. Black feminist have seen, factors such as **class** and **ethnicity**, in addition to gender, as essential for understanding the **oppression** experienced **by non-white women**. Black women are multiply **disadvantaged**, they argue, on the basis of their **color**, **sex**, **class** position. **American black feminist** emphasize the influence of the powerful legacy of **slavery**, **segregation** and the civil right movement on gender inequalities in black community (Giddens, 2001; Mill, 1869).