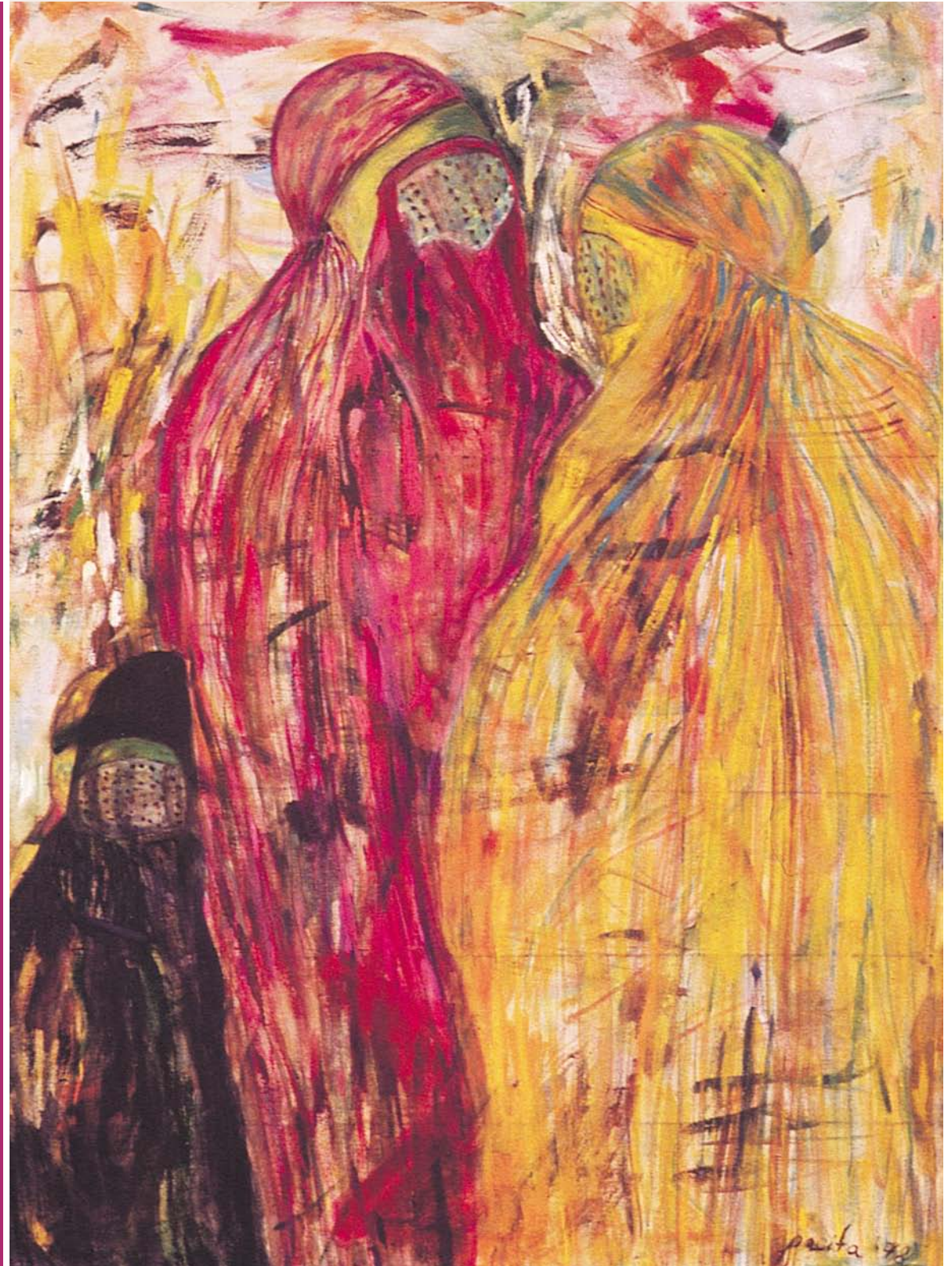


Chapter

11

Sex and Gender



Pacita Abad,
Women in Burkah

Chapter Outline

ISSUES OF SEX AND GENDER

Gender Differences in Behavior:
Biology or Culture?
The Dominant Position in
Sociology
Opening the Door to Biology

GENDER INEQUALITY IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Sex Typing of Work
Prestige of Work
Other Areas of Global
Discrimination

HOW FEMALES BECAME A MINORITY GROUP

The Origins of Patriarchy

GENDER INEQUALITY IN THE UNITED STATES

Fighting Back: The Rise of
Feminism
Gender Inequality in Health Care
Gender Inequality in Education
Gender Inequality in Everyday Life

GENDER INEQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE

The Pay Gap
The Glass Ceiling and the Glass
Escalator
The “Mommy Track”
Gender and the Control of Workers
Sexual Harassment and Worse

GENDER AND VIOLENCE

Violence Against Women
Feminism and Gendered Violence
Solutions

THE CHANGING FACE OF POLITICS

GLIMPING THE FUTURE—
WITH HOPE

SUMMARY AND REVIEW

In Tunis, the capital of Tunisia, on Africa’s northern coast, I met some U.S. college students, with whom I spent a couple of days. They wanted to see Tunis’ red light district, and I wondered if it would be worth the trip. I already had seen other red light districts, including the unusual one in Amsterdam where the state licenses the women, requires medical checkups (certificates must be posted so customers can check them), sets the prices, and pays the prostitutes social security benefits upon retirement. The women sit behind lighted picture windows while customers stroll along the canal side streets and browse from the outside.

This time, the sight turned my stomach.

We ended up on a wharf that extended into the Mediterranean. Each side was lined with a row of one-room wooden shacks, each one crowded up

against the next. In front of each open door stood a young woman. Peering from outside into the dark interiors, I could see that each door led to a tiny room with a well-worn bed.

**In front of each open door
stood a young woman.
*I could see that . . .***

The wharf was crowded with men who were eyeing the women. Many of them wore sailor uniforms from countries that I couldn’t identify.

As I looked more closely, I could see that some of the women had runny sores on their legs. Incredibly, with such visible evidence of their disease, customers still entered. Evidently the \$2 price was too low to resist.

With a sickening feeling in my stomach and the desire to vomit, I kept a good distance between the beckoning women and myself. One tour of the two-block area was more than sufficient.

Out of sight, I knew, was a group of men whose wealth derived from exploiting these women who were condemned to live short lives punctuated by fear and misery.

In this chapter, we examine **gender stratification**—males' and females' unequal access to power, prestige, and property. Gender is especially significant because it is a *master status*; that is, it cuts across *all* aspects of social life. No matter what we attain in life, we carry the label *male* or *female*. These labels carry images and expectations about how we should act. They not only guide our behavior, but they also serve as a basis of power and privilege.

In this chapter's fascinating journey, we shall look at inequality between the sexes around the world and in the United States. We shall explore whether it is biology or culture that makes us the way we are, and review sexual harassment, unequal pay, and violence against women. This excursion will provide a good context for understanding the power differences between men and women that lead to situations such as the one just described in our opening vignette. It should also give you insight into your own experiences with gender.

Issues of Sex and Gender

When we consider how females and males differ, the first thing that usually comes to mind is **sex**, the *biological characteristics* that distinguish males and females. *Primary sex characteristics* consist of a vagina or a penis and other organs related to reproduction. *Secondary sex characteristics* are the physical distinctions between males and females that are not directly connected with reproduction. Secondary sex characteristics become clearly evident at puberty when males develop more muscles and a lower voice, and gain more body hair and height, while females form more fatty tissue and broader hips, and develop breasts.

Gender, in contrast, is a *social*, not a biological characteristic. **Gender** consists of whatever behaviors and attitudes a group considers proper for its males and females. Consequently, gender varies from one society to another. Whereas *sex* refers to male or female, *gender* refers to masculinity or femininity. In short, you inherit your sex, but you learn your gender as you are socialized into the behaviors and attitudes your culture asserts are appropriate for your sex.

The expectations associated with gender vary around the world, as illustrated in the photo montage on the next page. They vary so greatly that some sociologists suggest we replace the terms *masculinity* and *femininity* with *masculinities* and *femininities* (Beynon 2002).

The sociological significance of gender is that it is a device by which society controls its members. Gender sorts us, on the basis of sex, into different life experiences. It opens and closes doors to power, property, and even prestige. Like social class, gender is a structural feature of society.

Before examining inequalities of gender, let's consider why the behaviors of men and women differ.

Gender Differences in Behavior: Biology or Culture?

Why are most males more aggressive than most females? Why do women enter "nurturing" occupations such as nursing in far greater numbers than men? To answer such questions, many people respond with some variation of "They're just born that way."

Is this the correct answer? Certainly biology plays a significant role in our lives. Each of us begins as a fertilized egg. The egg, or ovum, is contributed by our mother, the sperm that fertilizes the egg by our father. At the very moment the egg is fertilized, our sex is determined. Each of us receives twenty-three pairs of chromosomes from the ovum and twenty-three pairs from the sperm. The egg has an X chromosome. If the sperm that fertilizes the egg also has an X chromosome, we become a girl (XX). If the sperm has a Y chromosome, we become a boy (XY).

That's the biology. Now, the sociological question is: Does this biological difference control our behavior? Does it, for example, make females more nurturing and submissive and males more aggressive and domineering? Let's consider the positions that sociologists take.

gender stratification

males' and females' unequal access to power, prestige, and property on the basis of their sex

sex biological characteristics that distinguish females and males, consisting of primary and secondary sex characteristics

gender the behaviors and attitudes that a society considers proper for its males and females; masculinity or femininity



India



Brazil

To express their gender, people follow the guidelines of their culture. As you can see from these photos, the guidelines for demonstrating femininity and masculinity vary widely from one culture to another.

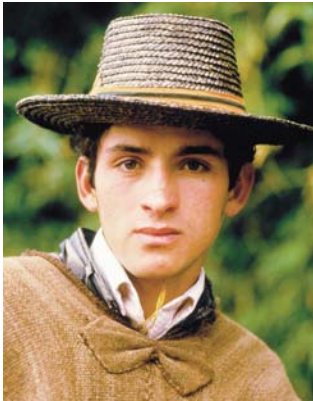


Republic of Georgia

Mexico



Kenya



Chile



Ivory coast



Tibet

The Dominant Position in Sociology

The dominant sociological position is that social factors, not biology, are the reasons we behave the way we do. Our visible differences of sex do not come with meanings built into them. Rather, each human group makes its own interpretation of these physical differences and on this basis assigns males and females to separate groups. There, people learn what is expected of them and are given different access to their society's privileges.

Most sociologists find compelling the argument that if biology were the principal factor in human behavior, all around the world we would find women to be one sort of person and men another. In fact, however, ideas of gender vary greatly from one culture to another—and, as a result, so do male-female behaviors. The Tahitians in the South Pacific stand in remarkable contrast to our usual expectations of gender. They don't give their children names that are identifiable as male or female, and they don't divide their labor on the basis of gender. They expect *both* men and women to be passive, yielding, and to ignore slights. Neither