

#Choose to challenge - the value of women

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I choose to challenge the value of women in South Africa based on gender roles and socialisation, leading to female inferiority and male superiority. The social constructionist theory explains that; when gender becomes a system of classification within a society, there develops a system that influences the access and division of power, status and material resources (Li & Karakowsky 2001). A community based on a gendered hierarchy structure will find it more challenging to eradicate inequality between the two sexes because it culturally defines and implements gender hierarchy. A gendered society does not exist in isolation; it is carried out and developed by individuals. Some South Africans display their gender roles based on cultural, societal and psychological behaviours of being a man or a woman. Keeping this in mind may help understand specific societal issues that South African women face. This essay investigates some prominent features that societal organisation has placed on gender that may lead to more significant problems if unattended.

Cultural socialisation

Development and growth is a part of the human journey that we cannot ignore. As we grow older, we mature and progress further into human society. The thoughts and behaviour of our parents and guardians shape us. We become socialised by being taught how to behave in a way or manner that is acceptable to society. Family influences how we view our role in society. We assert culture based on family notions and values (Andrews 2020). When a gendered hierarchy affects family culture, individuals absorb the context of gender differentiation roles as a part of their cultural knowledge. They tend to exercise gender differentiation roles as a part of their culture. People tend to become what they learn (Li & Karakowsky 2001). Behaviour and attitude towards women are also influenced by culture and religious belief systems if common cultural knowledge understands the

.primary cultural beliefs of what it means to be a woman or a man. People are likely to rely on their shared cultural knowledge to shape who they are as men or women in cultural and religious belief systems. Family culture is said to be the most influential in creating gender beliefs and roles and is prevalent in most races and ethnicities. When it comes to running a household in many families, women and men take on different responsibilities according to their gender. Women are entrusted with care work and unpaid labour, and men are the breadwinners. This 'cultural' division of household work along gender lines can become so elaborate that they differentiate between feminine and masculine behaviours (Andrews 2020). Certain chores become associated with what it means to be a man or a woman. Household work is associated with women, which leads to social inequalities as they have less time for leisure than their male counterparts.

These gender roles continue to be prevalent in South Africa. Women spend more time on unpaid domestic work than their male counterparts (Harrichurran 2001). Understanding the prevalence of gender roles may help understand the notion of male superiority over their female counterparts. Full integration of females into their society cannot occur if both the public and private spheres do not fully integrate females. Women have, on average, 37 minutes less time to themselves to socialise than men (Harrichurran 2001). Social inequalities occur on different levels. Traditional notions of sexism and other forms of oppression can develop from the conventional division of domestic work. Family and culture undeniably shape women's attitude towards life, affecting their success, dreams and personality (Andrews 2020).

Cultural participation

Looking at the effect that culture has on certain female attitudes may help us understand why 2.3 per cent of South African women think it is normal and acceptable for men to hit women. An alarming 33.8 per cent of South African women believe it is fair to be physically punished by their partners when committing wrongs such as: burning the food, leaving children unattended, refusing to have sex, arguing and going out without consent. These are five characteristics that most cultures associate with being a good woman.

According to the 2018 South African crime statistics, it will remain tricky to eradicate violence against women when some women still think it is okay for men to punish them (STATS SA 2018). Are South African women their own worst enemy, or are they unintentionally participating in a culture that does not benefit but harms them? To eradicate gender-based violence in South Africa, teaching more inclusive gender constructs should be included. Culture is behaviour, patterns and thoughts that are passed down from generations. To try and change these patterns, gender blurring developed in the

1970s. Gender blurring is when a man behaves in a manner characteristic of a woman, and a woman acts like a man. Blurring gender roles is when roles exercised by men and women within a society become un-gendered. Domestic work that keeps a home running should not be associated with gender. Cooking and cleaning up should not be seen as a gendered trait but rather as an essential life skill that one should acquire (Andrews 2020).

Girls and boys should be treated with cultural consistency where possible. We need to change the culture to change our society because 'culture does not make people, people make culture' (Adichie 2014). Talks of cohesive spaces where everyone operates on the same level within a household need to take place. Children need to understand equal rights from a young age. Seventy-three per cent of South African women agree that men and women should have equal constitutional rights, whereas 67 per cent of men agree. What raises concern is that a lower percentage of men think that male constitutional rights should not be similar to that of females. If families do not believe in operating on an equal level within a household, it could explain why they do not believe in equal constitutional rights. We cannot shy away from the fact that most South Africans do not know or understand their constitutional rights and may think that rights refer to males and females playing the same roles (STATS SA 2018).

Social cohesion and gender role reforms

We cannot transform our society when we continue to treat our women unequally and unfairly. We need to create platforms where multiple voices on social cohesion and gender role reform are heard. If we do not have honest conversations on reform, we will continue to live in a society that produces individuals who oppress women. We need to ask ourselves who we are as citizens of this country and how should we behave towards women. Constant integration needs to take place. We cannot ignore our cultural epistemology and how it has shaped our thinking. But we can look at it and reflect on how we can use it to change our future (Segalo 2015).

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