

Gender identity

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Abstract

According to some sociologists, gender is socially constructed. However, they do not actually mean that our genders are created purely because of the society we live in, but rather that they are affected by the society that we live in. They are pointing out that the way in which gender is seen as in some way controlled. Surely the social constraints of a certain discourse do effect our thinking, and this is in no way different when thinking about gender. In this way then we could say that an understanding of gender is that any attempt to universalize such as a thing would be brought down by the fact that it is a social construction.

This study is considering how cultural definitions of masculinity and/or femininity have shaped representations of men's and women's in our societies. The study also is looking into femininity and masculinity in Turkish culture. In order to understand this relation, there are some examples of cultural definitions from Turkish society has presented.

Keywords: gender identity, culture, masculinity, femininity

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Cinsel kimlik

Özet

Bazı sosyologlara göre cinsiyet sosyal bir oluşumdur. Bu tanıma göre cinsiyetin, tamamiyle içinde yaşadığımız toplum tarafından oluşturulduğu anlamından çok toplum tarafından etkilendiği üzerinde durularak cinsiyetin toplumsal kontrol altında olduğu konusunda araştırmalar süregelmektedir. Kesinlikle, düşüncelerimizin toplumsal kısıtlamaların etkisi altında olduğu gerçeği kaçınılmazdır ve bu gerçek cinsiyet hakkındaki düşüncelerimizden farklı değildir.

Bu nedenle cinsiyet anlayışının evrensel sosyal bir yapı ve oluşum olduğu gerçeğinden yola çıkarak bu çalışma, kadınlık, erkekliğin yaşadığımız toplumlarda kültürel oluşumunu ve cinsiyetin sosyal açıdan nasıl temsil edildiğini ele almaktadır. Çalışmada ayrıca Türk toplumunda cinsiyet kavramı ele alınarak Türk toplumunda kadınlık ve erkekliğin kültürel oluşumu ve cinsiyetin sosyal açıdan nasıl temsil edildiğine ilişkin örneklemelere yer verilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: cinsel kimlik, kültür, erkeklik, kadınlık

Introduction

In the sociological debate perhaps the most influential theory of the emergence of gender identity is that of Sigmund Freud. According to him, “the learning of gender differences in infants and young children is centered on possession or absence of the penis. This is symbolic of masculinity and femininity” (Giddens and Griffiths, 2006).

Although many writers have made use of Freud’s approach in studying gender development, they have usually modified it in major respects. An influential example is Chodorow. She reverses the Freudian emphasis to some extent. According to her, masculinity, rather than femininity, is defined by a ‘loss’, the forfeiting of continuing close attachment to the mother (Chodorow, 1988). “Thus, men later in life unconsciously feel that their identity is endangered if they become involved in close emotional relationships with others. Women, on the other hand, express and define themselves mainly in terms of relationships” (Giddens and Griffiths, 2006). A similar definition

was propounded by Harris, “Gender identity has been defined as an individual’s own feelings of whether he or she- a boy constructs his gender identity based upon his biology which influences messages he receives from his environment about how he ought to behave” (Harris, 1995). This can be summarized in his work with the following equation:

Gender identity = biology + dominant cultural norms + subcultural influences + unique circumstances (Harris, 1995).

He claims that behavior expected of men and women in any given culture defines masculinity and femininity. However, as he says if masculinity and femininity determined by culture then we should also ask, how much human behavior can be accounted for by biology, and how much is determined by culture. According to Collier and Yanagisako, “the biological difference in the functions of females and males in human reproduction lies at the core of the cultural organization of women’s and men’s relations” (Brod and Koufman, 1994). Such assumption presumes that sex itself is more a social construction than a biological construction. However, this is not axiomatic.

According to Foucault, in the case of sex, it is the practice of discovering a truth about sexuality from the prevalent discourse so that it can be seen as the product of a discourse. According to Foucault, sexuality is socially constructed. However, he does not actually mean that our sexual instincts and desires are created purely because of the society we live in, but rather that they are affected by the society that we live in Foucault trace some main points about sexuality. He has taken it from an historical and sociological viewpoint rather than taking a psychological stance focusing on the individual. In this way he avoids making any universal claims that uses limited evidence, instead he looks at the prevalent discourse of certain periods of time (Foucault, 1976).

Due to the fact that he places sexuality within the constructs of a discourse according to place and time, the picture he presents is one of an ever changing process, thus we are left with an open ended view of sexuality that changes according to time and place. In his studies of sexuality he is constantly pointing out that the way in which sexuality is seen as in some way controlled. Surely the social constraints of a certain discourse do effect our thinking, and this is in no way different when thinking about sexuality. In this way then we could say that the contribution Foucault makes to an understanding of sexuality is that any attempt to universalize such as a thing would be brought down by the fact that it is a social construction (Foucault, 1976).

This of course can be used to alter a discourse in such a way to fit in with a certain discursive strategy. There continues to be much debate and discussion about biological and cultural connections and facts. Consequently, it may reasonable to see body as representing encoded social meanings, as an image of society or even a metaphor for society as they are formed or represented in a culture. As Gatens says, “the body as a blank slate, as nothing apart from the cultural meanings constituting it, whereas, in reality, the body is not quite as receptable, but the very medium through which meanings are produced” (Thapan, 1997). This study revolves around how cultural definitions of masculinity and/or femininity have shaped representations of men’s and women’s bodies. In the main part of the study is looking into femininity and masculinity in relation to the body through Turkish culture. In order to understand this relation, some examples of cultural definitions from Turkish society has presented.

Gender identity in society

In attempt to develop a theory of gender identity inspired by Beauvoir’s famous formulation “one is born, but rather becomes women” it becomes clear that in saying that one becomes a woman, “Indeed, one is one’s body from the start, and only thereafter becomes one’s gender” (Thapan, 1997). In his study, beauvoir introduces the notion of the body as a situation. Firstly, the body is a material reality and

something which is tangible and can be held. It always has a meaning, because it has already been defined in a social and cultural context. Secondly, the body as a situation has a special obligation to come within the cultural and social definition assigned to it. (Thapan, 1997). Moreover, according to Harris, “every culture has a gender system that contains shared expectations for men and women behavior, social norms, or roles that vary from culture to culture” (Harris, 1995). In attempting a definition of that femininity and masculinity are culturally constituted across diverse socio-cultural contexts.

In Turkish society traditional attitudes about gender roles for women are put into practice by socialization and men and women internalize their gender roles (Dilek, 1997). For example, despite to Western countries parents in Turkey encourage their daughters to be dependent and obedient on their parents or husbands, whereas sons are allowed to be independent because they are expected to cope with the outside world (Ataca, Sunar, and Kağıtçıbaşı, 1994). Moreover, Turkish law is also endorses a patriarchal family model that the husband is the head of the family in terms of the most say concerning the family’s place of residence (Hortaşcu, Kalaycıoğlu, and Rittersberger-Tilic, 2003).

Color - clothes codes and the body

Silverman defines that, “clothing not only draws the body so that it can be seen, but also maps out a society’s gender dress codes” (Davis, 1997). In Turkish society gender color-clothes codes and rules are routinely divided as well as in other societies. For instance, a very common in other words, pink for girls and blue for boys. In this sense, gender enters into such codes and rules from their birth. That is to say, clothes for women and men becomes a purpose that keeps women and men in their place.

Yet, gender differences become visible by fashion, as Davis indicates in her study. Moreover, fashion can also be used to indicate social change and progress by its prescriptions around gender-appropriate dress (Davis, 1997). In this sense, regulation of gender through dress codes can be also change in tandem widespread social change. For

instance, the 60's movement produced new dressing codes as well as several cultural changes in the 60's Turkish society such as whereby women are now permitted to wear jeans or tight trousers.

Locations and the body

According to Thapan, bodies and locations are gender-marked through a consideration of the domains and activities of men and women in society (Thapan, 1997). A similar definition written by Brod and Kaufman is that, in the daily ritual of human experience one can find the roots which form the basis of the socially constructed person, that Bourdieu calls as "the socially informed body" (Brod and Kaufman, 1994).

The household, in more ways than one, is located at the center of women's lives of their daily activities in Turkey. Especially starting with women's typical household activities, we can see how their movements are choreographed by certain implicit cultural rules governing the use of location-place. For instance, cooking, childcare, and cleaning as social roles of the sexes. Moreover, delineation of inner location, such as the household defined as safe, legitimate place for women. For example, in Turkish culture, everyday expressions of mothers to their young daughters; 'What work do girls have on the street?' or 'you must come back home immediately from school!' carry implicit references to shame, honor, female sexuality and its regulations in the society. This is an example of female codes of morality and sexuality which indicate how rules regarding the use of space are defined.

According to Thapan, "the recognition of the household as women's space and women's responsibility is an opinion that is widely expressed, whether or not this is contrasted with the activities and spaces of men" (Thapan, 1997). For instance, in contrast with English culture there are Turkish coffee shops, which are called 'Kahvehane', that only allow men in Turkish society. This is in clear evidence in the norms governing the perceptions of the female and male body, and the rules underlying women's and men's activities. Consequently, we

can see how locations are gendered and circumscribed through their representations in Turkish culture. Hence, within to speak of space and femininity in Turkish society, these examples show how the female body is controlled by the patriarchal masculine social power throughout those patterns of physical space with daily practices.

The body and military service

The gendered associations of military service and to undergo some form of military service have been, at least until very recently, one of the most prominent features of sexual division of gender. For instance, in ninetieth century America, especially with the impact of the Civil War, masculine virtue was represented by a man's willingness to sacrifice self-interest to serve his country, while the wounding or scarring of a man's body became the visible symbol of his courage and patriotism. Especially, in Turkish society, only men are expected to fight or to be prepared to fight. Conversely, women are often formally barred from such activities.

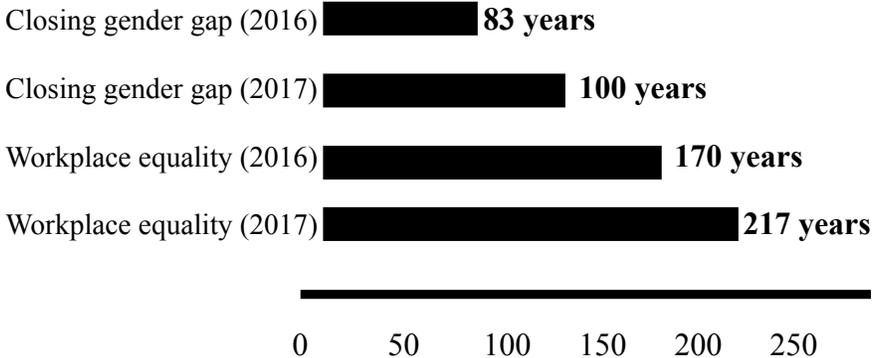
According to Brod and Kaufman, "one way of understanding military life and its relations with gender is in terms of the construction of the masculine body" (Brod and Kaufman, 1994). The masculine body is associated with the collective body of men. The shaping may often be literal such as close haircuts and uniforms. Consequently, the course of military training around socially constructed bodily needs and functions that are linked to strong and hegemonic definitions of masculinity in Turkish society. This also indicating how rules regarding the use of the institution itself perpetuates the perception of the female- male body.

Gender in economy

According to data's from the World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2017 "The equality gap between men and women would take 100 years to close" (URL-1). From this submission World Economic Forum claims that, this significant differences in economic participation and political empowerment between genders continue to endure across the world. Unlikely according to World Economic Forum's figures,

“women will have to wait 217 years before they earn as much as men and are equally represented in the workplace” (URL-1) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Prediction worsen on how long it will take to close gap (URL-1)



World Economic Forum’s report also suggest that, women in the world earn less not just because of “gendered salary differences”, unfortunately because women are forced to do unpaid or part-time work than men in their countries social economic system. Strangely, this ‘economical gender gap’ is also exist in well-educated white-collars in such work areas like professionals, managerial, administrates and senior roles in governmental departments and private companies. According to data’s from the World Economic Forum unfortunately, women in Turkey coming 131st on the list with a gender equality score of 144 countries (see Table 2).

According to Özbilgin and Woodward, the Turkish state has been pursuing an explicitly ideological approach to promoting gender equality in employment as part of its modernization project since the 1920s within three decades of government action unfortunately progress towards gender equality in work place has been slow (Özbilgin and Woodward, 2004).

Table 2. How countries perform on the Global Gender Gap (URL-2).

How countries perform on the Global Gender Gap			
Rank	Country	Rank	Country
1	Iceland	131	Turkey
2	Norway	136	Morocco
3	Finland	137	Lebanon
4	Rwanda	138	Saudi Arabia
5	Sweden	139	Mali
6	Nicaragua	140	Iran
7	Slovenia	141	Chad
8	Ireland	142	Syria
9	New Zealand	143	Pakistan
10	Philippines	144	Yemen

Conclusion

According to Foucault, sexuality is socially constructed. However, he does not actually mean that our sexual instincts and desires are created purely because of the society we live in, but rather that they are affected by the society that we live in. He is pointing out that the way in which sexuality is seen as in some way controlled. Surely the social constraints of a certain discourse do effect our thinking, and this is in no way different when thinking about sexuality. In this way then we could say that the contribution Foucault makes to an understanding of sexuality is that any attempt to universalize such as a thing would be brought down by the fact that it is a social construction. This of course can be used to alter a discourse in such a way to fit in with a certain discursive strategy. There continues to be much debate and discussion about biological and cultural connections and facts. Hence, it may reasonable to see body as representing encoded social meanings, as an image of society or even a metaphor for society as they are formed or represented in a culture. Consequently, even some sociologists defines gender is socially constructed definitely the social constraints of a certain discourse do effect our thinking,

and this is in no way different when thinking about gender. In one point it is seen as in some way controlled. Perhaps our genders are affected by the society that we live in rather they are created purely because of the society we live in.

Clearly, through the study we can see how our culture has shaped representations of men's and women's bodies. As well, while the body has always been a matter of social concern, the definitions surrounding representations of male's and female's bodies are constructed differently through cultures and historical periods of time. As per the examples from Turkish culture, the study shows how cultures speak and constitute differently about genders, bodies and sexualities. Relating femininity and masculinity with location, the study also shows how women's bodies are situated in various cultural definitions of identities and spaces in patriarchal culture where men stands as one and women stands as other.

Moreover, in examples, such as the representation of gender by clothes the study has pointed out how cultures shape gender's bodies by clothing codes, and how rules and regulations of gender can be influenced by changing norms and values. In this way then we could say that an understanding of gender is that any attempt to universalize such as a thing would be brought down by the fact that it is a social construction.

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