

Original First Three Paragraphs

In the discourse of history, scientists have tried to come up with different scientific explanations that would draw an arbitrary boundary between men and women. Scientist has also created different theories and concepts pertaining to women that have contributed to the world's perception and construction of women. Today, many of us would like to think of this era as one that has disappeared long ago. Certainly, science has brought a lot of knowledge to the community, but a lot of its past theories are still present and engraved in the scientific community. It is important to understand the causes of women's oppression, understanding that it is not a biological concept but rather a socially constructed concept. By changing these roots in the society, then there is a possibility to hope for a sexually egalitarian society in the future. This paper will examine the common arguments put forth about the biological basis of sex and argue against their validity as a basis for understanding gender, in particular to women. It will provide an overview of the scientific theories put over forth over time to define women's roles and character. Anne Fausto-Sterling will be referenced at length because she has extensive research investigating claims of social determinism. Finally, the paper will suggest that theories of biological determinism function to reflect everyday culture and social/political values. As such, they support popular myths about gender which can oppress and limit's women's possibilities.

Most of the early researchers in science were men. The early research on gender specifically focused on gender specifically focused on gender comparisons, and it was often influenced by sexist biases. Looking back in the discourse of history, there are many theories that are often socially constructed to condemn women. These theories depict women in a very meaningless position in our society. In addition, these theories have created boundaries that have impacted women's right and status in her society. One of the most popular scientific researches is perhaps the by Charles Darwin. Darwin's famous work on biological determinism, his theories of Natural and Sexual Selection directly resulted in allusion of the great differences between men and women, but most of all the believe in male as a superiority race. His published work "On the Origin of Species (1859) attempts to explain the variations among individuals of a species and among different species."(Newman,2) Theories such as "the survival of the fittest", "struggle for existence" are created by Darwin in terms to explain why natural selection was unfavorable for species, and how this struggle are placed on males to possess the females. Darwin than "formulated the laws governing variation and inheritance with respect to all species and genera."(Newman,3) These laws in Darwin, Descent of Man (1872) states how men's physical and mental superiority are over women. To meet society demand, men had to go out and hunt which made them much stronger than women and capable to in physical strength work. Moreover, Darwin's state how man's natural ability in fighting required them to have greater courage, intelligence and imagination than women.

But merely bodily strength and size would do little for victory, unless associated with courage, perseverance, and determined energy. With social animals, the young males have to pass through many a contest before they win a female, and the older males have to retain their females by renewed battles. They have, also, in the case of mankind, to defend their females, as well as their young, from enemies of all kinds, and to hunt for their join subsistence. But to avoid enemies or to attack them with success, to

capture wild animals, and to fashion weapons, requires the aid of the highest mental faculties, namely observation, reason, invention, or imagination. (Darwin, 1890, p.576)

Revised Introductory Paragraphs

As far back as the Enlightenment period scientists have formulated theories to explain the differences between men and women. These theories have influenced perceptions of gender tremendously; in turn impacting the roles men and women occupy as well as the rights they are granted. Accordingly, it is believed that human evolutionary history deeply informs the male and female character, and hence their personal relationships. Over time, theory has evolved according to paradigm shifts in science, and women have gained many rights and freedoms that they previously lacked. However, recent gender research demonstrates that women are still very much defined by a biological analysis of their gender. This model, known today as sociobiology or essentialism, has been challenged by the view that gender is socially constructed. Since the 70s feminists have taken a hard look at all fields of intellectual inquiry in arguing that essentialism is not sound science, but instead a reflection of beliefs and values about gender which are embedded in society. This supports gender stereotypes as well as a system of male dominance that oppresses women. A historical overview of the common arguments put forth about the biological basis of gender reveals the power of science to define women in ways that are not only restricting, but also condemning. Feminist scientist Anne Fausto-Sterling merits considerable discussion in this regard because her work effectively and methodically refutes essentialism in promoting the constructionist view. She claims that scientists studying gender “peer through the prism of everyday culture, using colors so separated to highlight their questions, design their experiments, and interpret their results. More often than not their hidden agendas, non-conscious and thus unarticulated, bear strong resemblance to broader social agendas” (Fausto-Sterling, 1985, p.9). She believes that understanding the social construction of a gender as a root cause of inequity allows the potential for a more egalitarian relationship between the sexes.

Beliefs about gender did not spring suddenly out of the new science of the Enlightenment, but were in fact rooted in the religious discourse of the time preceding it. During the period of Early Modern Europe and for many centuries before, the church “equated women and their bodies with sin, carnality, and spiritual death”(Brauner, p.34). In the 15th century two Roman Catholic German inquisitors, Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, wrote the *Malleus Malificarum*, or *The Hammer of [female] Witches*, which popularized the practice of witch hunting (Brauner, 1995, p.133). The book included a section titled *Why is it that Women are Chiefly Addicted to Evil Superstition?* (Brauner, 1995, p.34). Because the female sex was more fragile than the male, Satan could corrupt them more easily. Moreover, women were considered to be gullible and impressionable, and Satan could therefore easily tempt them. As they were careless with their tongues and deceptive, evil spread among them easily. The Biblical myth of creation upheld the view of women as a ‘carnal abomination’ in that Eve was formed from a bent rib, so she was therefore defective, an “imperfect animal” (Brauner, 1995, p. 34). The social atmosphere of Early Modern Europe divided gender in such a way that women were naturally implicated as scapegoats, criminals and purveyors of sin. It was thus fair for women to be strictly confined to the private and domestic areas of life, where men could control them.

As Europe entered the Enlightenment period, science became the measure of truth, rather than superstition. The early scientific research on gender was conducted exclusively by men and was deeply influenced by historical biases against women. These early theories continued to establish arbitrary boundaries that denied women rights and status. Among these theories Charles Darwin's work on biological determinism is primary. His theories of Natural and Sexual Selection, as presented in "On the Origin of Species (1859) (Newman, 1985, p.2), were based on observations of differences between men and women. He concluded that men were unquestionably the superior sex. Concepts such as "the survival of the fittest" and the "struggle for existence" required the male to compete with other males for mates in order to procreate as much as possible. The concepts were seen as evidence of men's physical and mental superiority in comparison to women. In *Descent of Man* (1890), Darwin wrote:

Original Conclusion

If the world is free from the previous biological theories labeling men and women into such distinction, both men and women may experience this world in a more respected manner between the same species. Since the 18th century, scientists have tried to draw an arbitrary boundary between the two sex. However similarities are more common between the two than the society want it to look like. By creating biological explanations of how male as the superiority species, it replies to the status quo in this one of male dominance. As one of the popular quotes suggest "Controversy can only be resolved by some future society in which the psychosocial environment does not vary as a function of a biological sex." (Dr. Hallman) There will be less violence between the two sex and women will be able to experience the society that has been taken away from them since the 18th century. Despite the huge progress that the society is striving towards equality, many are still left behind. Often those who are left behind are those who are still believing in the myths of biological theories that place men the power over women.

Revised Conclusion

Free from our belief that the difference between genders is biologically determined; men and women will have far more freedom to forge their sexuality and identity. The arbitrary boundaries between the sexes that first religion and then science has drawn are ultimately punitive and restrict the human potential. The system of male dominance is such that not only women, but also many men, are repressed by the hierarchies of power it establishes. D.Halpern, as presented by Dr. A Coury (2003), comments "The controversy between men and women can only be resolved by some future society in which the psychosocial environment does not vary as a function of a biological sex" (Coury, 2003, *Gender Psychology* 320).

Despite the huge progress that women have made in their struggle for liberation and equality, essentialism reveals they still have a long way to go. Fausto-Sterling's "new vision challenges the hunt for fundamental biological causes at its very heart, stating unequivocally that the search itself is based on a false understanding of biology." (Fausto-Sterling, 1985, p.8). People are much more complex, than their biology, and the question is not so much how men and men are different, but what possibilities will

emerge if they are considered to be very much the same, and difference is a celebrated aspect of the individual, rather than a prescription accorded by sex.

But merely bodily strength and size would do little for victory, unless associated with courage, perseverance, and determined energy. With social animals, the young males have to pass through many a contest before they win a female, and the older males have to retain their females by renewed battles. They have, also, in the case of mankind, to defend their females, as well as their young, from enemies of all kinds, and to hunt for their joint subsistence. But to avoid enemies or to attack them with success, to capture wild animals, and to fashion weapons, requires the aid of the highest mental faculties, namely observation, reason, invention, or imagination. (Darwin, 1890,p.576)