The Dilemma Involved in the Quest for Gender Parity: An Expository Analysis

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Abstract

One global social phenomenon that has always been with man ever since human started living in the society is the odious reality of gender disparity and inordinate distinction between the two genders. We live in a world where socially and culturally constructed role and behavioural expectations from the complementary sexes could be described as not having any leverage on natural differentiation, and perhaps repugnant to equity, natural justice and fairness. However, the persistency and ubiquity of this pervasive social malady has made it made apparently appear normal universally. Notwithstanding the delusive nature of the age of gender-based disparities, over the last decades, feminist from around the globe have staged a formidable crusade against the status quo. This crude which may be aptly construed as subtle but revolutionary is gaining momentum as time progresses. However, certain unresolved issues unarguably have made this heroic quest for gender parity a dilemmatic task. The researcher employs an expository analytic method and the normative method to critically engage this herculean dilemma. Employing the expository analytic method, the paper reveals that what makes the quest for gender parity a herculean task is that first, feminists have not come to term and compromise with what they mean by equality; second globally a whooping majority of women seem not only to be enjoying the status quo, but also they are apparently comfortable and therefore indifferent to the quest for equality and parity. With the normative method, the researcher prescribes that man and women should in all respect be treated with equal dignity in the family and other social structures and superstructures. Role differentiation should not be gender-based, rather it must be based on dispositions, cognate abilities and competence.

Keywords: Dilemma; Gender; Parity; Inequality

Background: An Altercation of Dilemmatic Interests

That we live in a gendered world is one empirical fact so indubitable that it is devoid of any iota of scepticism. We live in a world where socially and culturally constructed role and behavioural expectations from the complementary sexes could be described as not having any leverage on natural differentiation, and perhaps repugnant to equity, natural justice and fairness. This social and cultural construct has persisted in the human society from time immemorial. In lieu of this Okolawole et al, asserts that, ‘the issues of gender equality have been a lingering one in human society, especially due to its realm of impossibility which humanity has been exercising. The society seems to be accustomed with the discourses of gender agenda. These discourses are basically on the alterations of gender inequality, especially on the quest for political participation and education development as relate to women liberation movement.

This historical gender discrimination and dichotomy is exhibited at various spheres of social intercourse where power relations transpires: in the case of individuals, as an aspect of their own personalities; at the cultural level, in figures of speech, metaphors, categories; at the social level, as a principle for organization of work and decision-making processes. Gender discrimination is also manifest in the educational arena for instance, counselling pertaining the choice of course the male child and the female child is to choose is always based on stereotypes respectively. While the male child is emasculated to choose to be a doctor, the female child is constrained to embrace the nursing profession; also, the male student is unconsciously induced to believe that he is naturally gifted to take to the sciences while the female folks are professionally induced to be a doctor, the female child is constrained to embrace the nursing profession; also the male student is unconsciously induced to believe that he is naturally gifted to take to the sciences while the female folks are professionally induced to embrace the nursing profession. This eventually spurred a critical reflection on the issues relating to the basis of gender discriminations. In Academia, moreover, it was alleged that there exists lack of knowledge and interest that was shown in half of humanity. It was considered necessary to add knowledge about women’s lives and conditions in order to ensure that the knowledge base was not biased and that ignorance about the situation of women did not lead to injustice. It was considered necessary to study the situation and fill knowledge gaps. Moreover, it is alleged by feminist that what is today construed of history is only haphazard because it was made by men to reflect their egocistic and incomplete account that denigrates and extricates women from world history.

They challenged and changed the overall disciplinary structure and in time disciplinary criticism grew stronger. The new insights were used to scrutinize academic traditions. Studies were made of
the potential gender blindness of various disciplines, but more subtle questions were also raised about the influence of androcentric issues on all research. Established concepts and theories were reappraised. Attention was drawn to the discrimination of women researchers and women pioneers in various disciplines.

The advocacy of those who are sympathetic to the question or call for gender equality is that gender studies originated in order to discourse the gaps and imbalances in academic knowledge that resulted from an inadequate incorporation of women into academics. This is against the allegation of various feminist scholars that academic disciplines had in the past not taken women into account when developing theories and concepts, or when doing research and collecting data.

Apart from neglect in the intellectual sphere, the most fundamental social injustice feminists decry is political insensitivity. It raises questions about power relations in the family, in various institutions in the state, and in political power sharing. In other worlds, it calls to question how power is differentially distributed between different genders. It asks questions about who has power over whom, in which situations, how power is exercised, and how it is, and can be, challenged. Feminist agitation vehemently challenges and calls for social consciousness of the women folks of the unjust discriminations in role differentiations and power relations leveraged on socio-cultural bias and senseless stereotypes.

The originality on the quest for the possibility is orchestrated by the liberal movement during the modern era of human development, that is, the period of industrial revolution. This kind of liberal consciousness or interest is evaluated to be associated with modern and contemporary societal movement known as feminism. This kind of social consciousness seems to speak for women emancipation from their conceived men dominating world. With this dogmatic situation or development, there have been strong, formidable and effective agitations of gender equalisation or proper sex-role generalisation, especially by female individuals, who have seen and have seeing the needs to properly define the essence of girlhood and womanhood in human society where there have being many limitations and discriminations associated with their nature as many consider them as the weaker vessels.

Hence, contemporarily, we are speaking of gender socialization, gender nominalism, biological determinism, the right of abortion, single parenting, occupational gender balancing, gender realism and ethics, and the likes. One can also observe that these agitations have been one-sided, irrespective of the calibres of persons that are involved. This is because, historically many feminists have understood ‘woman’ differently: not as a sex term, but as a gender term that depends on socio-cultural factors (like social position). In so doing, they distinguished sex (being female or male) from gender (being a woman or a man), although most ordinary language users appear to treat the two interchangeably. But, they are strongly and purposefully out to make meaningful changes in the existing institutions and structural establishments, in all considerations and representations, trying to make their impacts felt mightily, as that of the male counterpart.

It is pertinent to indicate that the terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ were coined in women’s studies at an early stage. Understanding of these to concepts is germane to understanding the question of gender. An understanding of their meaning and implications fosters an integral of connection existing amongst the various aspects of them.

Sex, refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women. It is defined as the anatomical and physiological characteristics that signify the biological maleness and femaleness of an individual. Sex, on the other hand, refers to the biological differences between female and male which are seen as uniform across time and space [1].

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. Gender emphasizes that masculinity and femininity are products of social, cultural and psychological factors and are acquired by an individual in the process of becoming a man or woman. ‘Gender’ is the term widely used to refer to those ways in which a culture reformulates what begins as a fact of nature. The biological sexes are redefined, represented, valued, and channelled into different roles in various culturally dependent ways.

A gender system exists in every society. It consists of all the notions of male and female that exist in a certain place at a certain time and all the consequences as regards who does what, who decides what, and how we perceive ourselves and one another, collectively and individually. Ideas and stories about sex/gender pervade our thinking and determine not only our sexuality and family life but also the labour market, politics, religion, law etc. Gender is a term that identifies a specific aspect of all human life [2,3].

The key differences between these two terms are: Sex as defined earlier is the concept that emerges from anatomical and physiological characteristics which differentiates males and females biologically; whereas gender can be seen as a social construct manifested by masculine and feminine roles prevalent in a culture or a society. Sex, being biological is natural, and it denotes visible differences in genitalia and related differences in procreative function. Whereas, gender is artificial, it is a socio-cultural construct and it refers to masculine and feminine qualities, behaviour patterns, related roles and responsibility, etc. It is a universal term It is variable it changes under the influence of time, geographical and socio-cultural settings. Thus gender can be seen as an artefact of social, cultural and psychological factors which are attained during the process of socialization of an individual.

The purpose of distinguishing between these two concepts was to emphasize the difference between biological and social sex. However, it has proved difficult to maintain this distinction. In France, in particular, it has often been pointed out that biological sex can only be understood with the help of our conceptions of it. According to some researchers either, sex or gender, is enough, while others use both. However, all researchers share an interest in the cultural construction, the ideas, facts and values that it involves, and its functions and effects.

Gender is manifested at many levels: in the case of individuals, as an aspect of their own personalities; at the cultural level, in figures of speech, metaphors, categories; at the social level, as a principle for organization of work and decision-making processes. Gender is a classification principle that often, but not always, results in two classes. The notion that there are two, and only two, sexes that are distinct from one another-without any overlapping or surplus – and can be defined as opposites, is a Western way of thinking rather than a biological fact.

The word “dilemma” means “being in state of condition of confusion”. In relation to the contemporary conceptualization and contextualization of gender equality, the theoretical usage of “dilemmatic positioning” of gender equality expresses the altered possibility and impossibility of gender equality, associated with the level and demand of intelligence and enlightenment of contemporary humanity. It indicates that the agitation for gender equality will remain problematic and epistemologically confusing. Although
The Meaningfulness of Gender Equality and Its Contemporary Placement

The quests for Gender equality do not imply that women and men should be the same, but that they should have equal value and should be accorded equal treatment in human society. With the universal declaration of fundamental human rights by the United Nations Organization on December 10, 1948, the issues and clauses of equality were stated and agreed upon as a right by the members’ states. This was brought about by the consideration and recognition of the natural law that maintain the dignity and the rights of every individual, to be fundamental to his/her nature as a human person.

Put simply, gender equality which is also known as "gender equity", "gender egalitarianism" or "sexual equality", is about the achievement of social justice for everyone, irrespective sexual nature of the individual. According to UNICEF, gender equality means that women and, and girls and boys, enjoy the same right, resources, opportunities and protection. It does not require that girls and boys or women and men, be the same, or that they treated exactly alike. The United Nations Organization regards gender equality as a human right, they point out that: empowering women is also an indispensable tool for advancing development and reducing poverty. As a right, this should not be violated or displaced by any individual, even in the names of cultures and religion, because it is embedded in the dictate of the natural law.

In order to realise this global aim, a broad coalition of national governments, civil society groups, development agencies such as UNESCO and the World Bank were committed to six specific education goals (MDGs). Most of these goals centred on or they about the elimination of gender disparities and enforcement of gender equity, especially through the instrumentality of education development. It is understood that education is a right, universally, and every state should endeavour to provide it for every her citizen, irrespective of gender classification.

In a nutshell, the natural rights are inextricably bound up with as many duties, all applying to one and the same person. These rights and duties derive their origin, their sustenance, and their indestructibility from the natural law. For example, the right to live involves the duty to preserve one’s life; the right to a decent standard of living, the duty to live in a becoming fashion; the right to be free to seek out the truth, the duty to devote oneself to an ever deeper and wider search for it [10]. Hence, from the conception of the natural order of the universe by God, in whom the eternal law rests or resides, the development of the doctrine of natural law emerged. Natural law is a product of the eternal law of God as the creator of the universe and everything therein. This is made known to man by its rationality, because, whatever a man desire he calls good, and whatever he is averse to he calls evil: so that good and evil are not qualities inherent in things but are only signs revealing how the person who use the signs feel about the thing they apply them to. The sense of good and bad is a product of human reasoning, on the reflecting of natural law, and human reason is naturally inferred.

On Socio-Philosophical Analysis of Equality of Human Rights

The justification of human rights is on the equality of human interests. A person is constituted by his body and his mind. They are parts or aspects of him. For that very reason, it is fitting that he have primary say over what may be done to them not because such an arrangement best promotes overall human welfare, but because any arrangement that denied him that say would be a grave indignity.
In giving him this authority, morality recognizes his existence as an individual with ends of his own—an independent being. Since that is what he is, he deserves this recognition. The philosophical tradition has the deontological and consequentialist approaches as the major and identifiable means to strengthen the justification of human rights. For Griffins [11] and Nickel [12] not every question of social justice or wise governance is a human rights issue. For example, a country could have too much income inequality, inadequate provision for higher education, or no national parks without violating any human rights. Deciding which norms should be counted as human rights is a matter of some difficulty. And there is continuing pressure to expand lists of human rights to include new areas. Many political movements would like to see their main concerns categorized as matters of human rights, since this would publicize, promote, and legitimize their concerns at the international level.

In respect for the dictates of the natural law and the order of creation, everybody is equal before the law of nature. This means that, both men and women are equal and have the same capacity and requirement to demand for their rights. Everybody may not have the extension, content, and opportunity of exercise of the rights, which may be as a result of variety of circumstances and biological deformities of the individual. But, the fact remains that every individual has the sacredness of life and capacity of livelihood in the expression of his/her dignity. This understanding is based on the fact that justice does not demand that all have exactly the same things but that each is secure in what he or she does have. The quest for gender equality has resulted from the boiling point of human injustice as against the melting point of human freedom. The balancing scale of justice amongst men and women has been dilemmatic and problematic, as Langdon Gilkey:

No level of political achievement, no “freeing of freedom”, could prevent the reappearance of the injustice, the domination and the oppression which follow from it, because the latter follow precisely from freedom albeit a freedom misused. In the long run, warped social structures are consequences not causes of human greed, pride, insecurity and self-concern which in turn flow from the exercise of freedom, not its oppression [13].

Gender refers to the different roles that men and women play in the society, and the relative power that wield. Gender role vary from one country to another, but almost everywhere, women face disadvantages relative to men in the social, economic, and political spheres of life [14]. For instance, man and woman are equal before the conditions of the natural law that proffers rights on humanity. “Male” and “female” differentiate two individuals of equal dignity, which does not however reflect a static equality, because the specificity of the female is different from the specificity of the male, and this difference in equality is enriching and indispensable for the harmony of life in society [15]. The concern for the equal rights of disadvantaged groups is a longstanding concern of the human rights movement. Human rights documents emphasize that all people, including women and members of minority ethnic and religious groups, have the same basic rights and should be able to enjoy them without discrimination. The right to freedom from discrimination figures prominently in the Universal Declaration and subsequent treaties [16]. What everybody has in common is life, which should be respected and protected irrespective of the gender, race, colour and nationality.

The Limitations of Gender Equality

When the discourses of the limitations of gender equality are made, they are mainly and directly the affirmations of the factuality of gender inequality. It is all about the challenges of epistemic coloration and social inclusiveness of gender inequality in human developmental process. The causes of gender inequality are not far-fetched, because they are all associated with masculine dominating society, where the women and girls are regarded, most of the time, as inferior beings, that need the power of the men and boys to have full existing essences. The factors are as follow:

- Sex discrimination and selection;
- The doctrines of patriarchy: For instance, most African societies, if not all, practice patriarchy. This practice sees man as the superior sex and lord. This so because, women and men biological differences are reflected in the organization of the society. Boys and girls right from infancy have been conditioned to act, think and behave differently [17];
- The dominance of man’s rights, and cultural and religious bias;
- Occupational exercise of freedom by the men over women, even in sexual demands;
- The faulty logic of widowhood [18];
- Domestic and environmental hostility to women, including sexual violence [19]. Here, we also talk about early betrothal which deprives girls of freedom of association, education as an individual’s rights; economic hardship and poverty, which compels some parents to withdraw girls from school in favour of male children, the family structure and administration that discourage the choice of career, number of children and economic matters; gender phobia on the part of men for power potentials in women and so suppress verbal expression from them; penalty for contravening moral laws more grievous on the part of women, the bride price syndrome, and the issues of gender appendages [20].
- Social imbalance in turns of duties, responsibilities, especially in decision-making processes and policies formulation; and political subjugation and moral abnegation.

The reign of these causes, if linger, have been projected or examined, that they will endanger the natural ordering of things, because the nature of every individual is always to seek for liberation especially when they are educated to know their rights, privileges and benefits. But the negations of gender equality if fully monitored will/may result to the following societal consequences: single parenthood as a result of exercise of freedom, which deprives girls of freedom of association, education in decision-making processes and policies formulation; and political subjugation and moral abnegation.

The Benefits of Gender Equality

It has been observed that many men and organisations are in support of gender equality, because of the huge benefits that are accrued to it, and they are as follows:

1. The promotion of economic and social prosperity and engendering global leadership in commerce, leaving and culture.
2. Credence to the values of Human rights and the promotion of social justice.
3. Women empowerment towards poverty reduction and
improvement of domestic affairs, especially in the education of children and provision of food, clothing and shelter.

4. Reduction of female mortality: this is one of the indications associated with Millennium Development Goals, which seek most importantly the achievement of gender equality.

5. Elimination of cultural and religious bias in order to have effective cultural and religious integrations among humans.

More importantly, some efforts have been made for the achievement of gender equality in recent times [21]. The following are regarded as the central references for other gender concern; especially feminist issues are the focal point of discourse:


2. Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979

3. Beijing Declaration: Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995. This is to enlighten the universal human society the roles of women in social engineering, as agents of conflict resolution. About the fact that women are the first custodians of socio-cultural and national value. Women are the first teachers we ever had. They are the house-makers, and there is no continuation of human species without them, that is, giving birth and training/upbringing of the child. At community levels, they serve as agents of peace and symbols of justice [22].

4. United Kingdom Equality Act 2006 and 2010

Aside these, there have been pockets of organized national and international conferences, worships and seminars in the contemporary times, on women liberations, empowerment, education and emancipation. Also, there have been institutional universities' departments for gender studies in most states. All are targeted towards the enlightenment of the societies on the respect of human rights and dignity, especially those ones that concern the womenfolk.

The Possibility of Gender Equality

Looking at the demands, the possibility of gender equality is visible of the following factors are considered by every individual:

1. The respect for the value and dignity of the human person irrespective of the gender.

2. Upholding the dictates of human right by every individual in exercise of freedom

3. Respect of national and international litigations on Property Rights

4. The education of every individual in the exercise of civilization of love.

The Impossibility of Gender Equality

From all indications in ontological and socio-developmental tracings of humanity, the quests for gender equality will always hit the hinged of some impossibility. This will come as result of the following factors:

Naturally, both genders can never be said to be equal due to their differential physiological make-ups, and which define their essence greatly.

Culturally, there are role-differentiations which can never be easily uttered by any movement of thought or interest, not by any convention. For examples, child bearing and breast feeling. Although medical engineering have made it possible for men to get pregnant via transsexual technology and to have inducement of breastfeeding. These are natural aberrations. In the case of procreation, some feminist writers have also raised the concern that any putative right to procreate threatens to give men power over women. In addition to empowering the mostly male scientific establishment, a right to procreate could empower a man to prevent his erstwhile partner from aborting her pregnancy [23]. Also, throughout the world, prevailing views about masculinity encourage men to undertake risky sexual behaviours of having multiple sex partners, alcohol consumption prior to intercourse and sexual violence that make women more vulnerable to HIV and other STIs. Young girls are at even greater risk of sexual coercion because of their vulnerability [24].

Religiously, according to some theological regulations and principles, some clerical duties are male-dominant, and which have remained so dogmatic. This nature of religious gender disparity is especially domesticated in Roman Catholicism, Islam, and Eastern Orthodox Church, and it has remain futuristic blinded for a possible change or for balanced accommodation of both gender in role allotment.

With these and many more factors, the effects for the actualization of gender equality remain holistically shrink. Obligation and sacrifice override the idea of equality. When women feel excluded from direct participation in the society, they see themselves as subject to a consensus or judgment made and enforced by men on whose protection and support they depend and by whose names they are known [25]. This will constantly be a lingering venture of interest that may not be realized. This conviction is the thrust of the impossibility of gender equality.

The Hinged Consideration: On Human Right to Education

It must be noted that on the recognition of fundamental human rights based on their universal declaration by the members' states of the United Nations Organisation, on the 10th December, 1948, the organisation encouraged and mandated the governments of all members' states to create the awareness of these rights amongst their citizens and orient them about the needs and importance for the respect, protection and promotion of these rights, by enforcing the values of individuals’ and groups duties and responsibilities towards human and societal growth and development, and on the respect of the workability of love, peace, freedom, justice, equity and the rule of law. Curiosity is all about education of humanity. It suggests that humanity should be curious about will promote its life intellectually and culturally.

More importantly, the movement of “Education for All” as initiated and promotes by UNESCO is to foster the upholding of the fundamental human right to education, as recognised, specified and situated by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Fundamental Human Rights on the 10th December, 1948 [26]. It recognises the importance of education for living individual. For the respect for human rights to education, the UNO commission reaffirming the following fundamental principles, that:

1. Education is a fundamental human right and contributes significantly to the realization of other rights.

2. Education is a public good. The state is the custodian of
education as a public good. At the same time, the role of civil society, communities, parents and other stakeholders is crucial in the provision of quality education.

3. Education is a foundation for human fulfilment, peace, sustainable development, economic growth, decent work, gender equality and responsible global citizenship.

4. Education is a key contributor to the reduction of inequalities and poverty by bequeathing the conditions and generating the opportunities for better, sustainable societies.

Since education is a means of helping human beings to become what they can and should become, the educator needs to understand human nature. He needs to understand people in their actualities, in their possibilities, and in their ideologies. He must also know how to foster desirable changes in them [27]. One of the natural possibilities is the biological reproduction of human species in order to keep creation in place. This brings the aspect of population in human attempt to maintain its biological ability and remain relevance in creation. This calls for the educator of humanity to understand the nature of human population [28], for instance, as a right. The achievement of the culture of peace is based on the education of the rights which the society will be able to give to the people and the ones man can lay claim to, the sense of morality which he has places on the value of his life and his activities of the living. Widespread illiteracy and other forms of educational limitation need to be eradicated [29]. As Okunsebor asserted that:

Equity for girls means equity for everyone. By following gender equity guideline to improve education, it is improved for boys as well as girls. The goal of improving female education does not entail neglecting or suppressing boys. If girls and boys are placed on an equal pedestal, relatively increase appreciation of girls will also benefit boys by informing them the strength, capabilities and contribution of girls and women. This, in turn, may help to reduce the pressure being faced by many boys (males) to conform to the traditional roles, behaviours and responsibility of family, so education may begin to bring about gender balance [30].

Hence, the issues of gender equity in favour or interest of women and girls towards their educational development, in most educational discourses, seminars, conferences, workshops held so far in recent times, have been centred on: refocusing educational benefits for women empowerment; considering the constraints of girl education towards national development national policy on education and the quest for gender balancing; educational socialization of women for family development empowerment of women in politics and women emancipation and liberation through educational development and political empowerment. It suggests to posit that the education of human rights is about the awareness and enlightenment of every individual to know the values of his or her rights and on the corresponding duties and responsibilities to promote; protect and respect them, for the attainment and maintenance of common humanity.

Conclusion

From the foregoing; the indications show that the quest for gender equality will be within the pavilion of societal continuous demands. The effort will remain philosophically endless, because the demands are started and the women have been to be the folk that will not give-up in their quests for total liberation. It is factually obvious that the factors of its impossibility press heavily against such ventures.

That there is inequality in terms of role differentiation between male and female is an undeniable fact. Also that this role differentiation and discrimination against women has always lingered right from even from the state of nature, to this present day is equally impeccable. This role discrimination in terms of role differentiation and power play is unjust, artificial and it is a social construct that is not rooted on nature. The enormity of this oppression and disadvantage position of women can be compared to the oppressing of the blacks by whites. It is a crime against humanity and should be treated with the same expediency.

Men and women should in all respect treated with equal dignity in the family, in the market places, in the cooperate world, in the social institutions and even in religious organizations and institutions. Role differentiation should not be gender-based, rather it should be ultimately based on disposition and competence.

Women subjugation has been successfully perpetuated right from the beginning of history because men has dominated the mechanisms and agents of socialization, education stands as the fulcrum of women’s woes, hence the dire need to adequately educate women. In 1868 Eleanor Kirk, a novelist turned activist, linked the need for women’s rights with the need to protect the unborn. When a woman told her that suffrage was unnecessary because she and her husband were “one,” Kirk asked what would become of her babies if her husband ceased to provide for them: “What will become of the babies did you ask and you? Can you not see that the idea is to educate women that they may be self-reliant, self-sustaining, self-respected? The wheel is a big one, and needs a strong push and a push all together, giving to it an impulse that will keep it constantly revolving, and the first revolution must be Female Suffrage”.

In conclusion therefore, both men and women should be equally empowered to play virtually the same roles which by their biological and physical and anatomical differentiation are not prohibited. Participation in politics should not be reserve for any gender; it should be based on individual’s track record, competence and integrity. Hence, equality in the final analysis means treating men and women with the same standard in every sphere of their interchange in the human society.

References


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