# MENDING THE GENDER DIVIDE: PSYCHOLOGICAL TOOLS AND STRATEGIES

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### Introduction

Gender inequality continues to be a global issue, impacting various facets of life. Women often spend significantly more time on unpaid care work than men, impacting their economic opportunities and career development. Traditional roles and societal expectations can hinder women's participation in the workforce and their ability to pursue education. In most countries, women's participation rates are catching up with men's and the gender pay gap has narrowed (Duflo 2010). Between 1980 and 2009, the global female participation rate increased from 50.2 per cent to 51.8 per cent, while the male participation rate decreased from 82 per cent to 77.7 per cent, leading to a narrowing of the gender gap from 32 per cent to 26 percent (World Bank 2012). Significant barriers to women's participation in the labour market remain (Elborgh-Woytek et al. 2013).

Gender inequality can have negative effects on mental health, contributing to issues such as anxiety, depression, and body image concerns. Women often face higher rates of certain mental health issues, partly due to social pressures and discrimination. Psychological barriers can hinder career progression for women and limit personal development opportunities, as traditional gender roles can restrict both men's and women's life choices.

### What is Gender Inequality?

Gender inequality refers to the unequal treatment or perception of individuals based on their gender. It stems from differences in socially constructed gender roles

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and has far-reaching impacts on various aspects of life, including the workplace, education, politics, and family life. Addressing gender inequality requires a comprehensive understanding of its root causes and manifestations. Historically, gender inequality has been entrenched in societal norms and laws that favored men over women. For centuries, women had limited rights in terms of ownership, voting, and workplace participation. Although significant strides have been made in recent years with the women's suffrage movement and feminist advocacy, remnants of gender bias continue to persist. The inequality can be observed in terms of social, cultural and economic norms, as well as educational freedom and political representation. According to global estimates, women earn approximately 23% less than men on average. Girls face barriers to education, including poverty, cultural norms, and safety concerns. Women are often underrepresented in government and decision-making bodies, which can skew policy decisions and priorities. Globally, women hold only about 25 percent of parliamentary seats.

## Forms of Discrimination between Men and Women

The discrimination between men and women can be seen in terms of economic, educational, political, social and cultural forms. the description of the various forms of gender discrimination is below:

## 1. Economic Disparities

One prominent area of gender inequality is the economic sphere. Women often receive lower pay than men for the same work, a phenomenon known as the gender pay gap. According to global estimates, women earn approximately 23% less than men on average. Contributing factors include discrimination, occupational segregation, and differences in education and experience.

## 2. Educational Inequality

While progress has been made in educational access, gender disparities remain. In some regions, girls face barriers to education, including poverty, cultural norms, and safety concerns. Globally, women are underrepresented in the fields of science, technology, engineering, mathematics, which can limit career opportunities and economic mobility.

## 3. Political Representation

Political representation reflects another aspect of gender inequality. Women are often underrepresented in government and decision-making bodies, which can skew policy decisions and priorities. Globally, women hold only about 25% of parliamentary seats. Ensuring equal political participation is crucial for advocating for inclusive policies.

## 4. Social and Cultural Norms

Deeply ingrained social and cultural norms contribute significantly to gender inequality. These norms dictate gender roles that limit women's opportunities and reinforce male dominance. Challenging such norms requires a collective societal effort to promote equality and dismantle stereotypes.

**The Nature-Nurture Debate in Gender Inequality**

The interaction between nature (biological factors) and nurture (environmental factors) plays a key role in the creation of gender inequality. Understanding both dimensions is essential to fully address the complex factors that contribute to gender inequality. Here's how each aspect contributes to gender inequality:

**1. Nature (Biological Factors)**

There are inherent biological differences between men and women, such as hormonal fluctuations, that can influence behavior, preferences, and physical abilities. For example, testosterone is often associated with aggression and competition, while estrogen may be associated with parenting behavior. Although these differences exist, their effect on behavior and abilities is often exaggerated and can be influenced by social context. Some theories suggest that some gender roles may have evolved based on reproductive strategies, in which men and women have historically had different roles in survival and reproduction. This approach can sometimes be used to justify traditional gender roles, but it is important to recognize that cultural development and social structures have a significant influence on these roles.

**2. Nurture (Environmental Factors)**

From a young age, children are moulded into gender roles through family, education and the media. Parents, teachers and peers often reinforce stereotypes about appropriate behaviour for boys and girls, shaping their interests, career aspirations and self-perceptions.

Cultural beliefs and social norms strongly influence gender roles and expectations. In many societies, traditional views of masculinity and femininity persist, leading to unequal opportunities and behaviour in a variety of areas, including education, employment and leadership. Social pressures may discourage people from stepping out of traditional roles, further increasing gender inequality. Education and economic opportunity: Access to education and economic resources can vary significantly by gender and can be influenced by cultural attitudes and institutional policies. In some regions, girls may have less access to education, limiting their future opportunities and continuing the cycle of inequality. Workplace cultures that favor male leadership or do not support work-life balance can reinforce economic inequalities.

The media plays an important role in shaping perceptions of gender. Stereotypical portrayals of men and women can reinforce outdated gender norms and help maintain inequality. Positive portrayals of diverse gender roles can challenge stereotypes and promote more equitable views.

**3. Interactions between nature and nurture**

The relationships between biological and environmental factors are complex. For example, biological predispositions can be influenced by the social environment and vice versa. A nurturing environment can help individuals overcome biological

limitations or stereotypes. Research shows that there may be biological predispositions, but environmental factors such as encouragement and support can significantly alter outcomes. As social norms evolve, the influence of nurture may change, leading to shifts in gender roles. Increasing gender awareness and advocacy for equality may challenge traditional roles and lead to more equitable practices. For example, as more women enter the workforce and take on leadership roles, social assumptions about gender abilities may change, which may reduce the influence of biological stereotypes.

**Psychological Explanation of Gender Inequality**

Addressing these psychological factors requires a multifaceted approach, including education, awareness-raising, and initiatives aimed at changing organizational cultures and societal norms. Promoting gender equality involves not only structural changes but also shifts in attitudes and beliefs at the individual and collective levels. Understanding the psychological factors that contribute to gender inequality helps in addressing its root causes. These factors include cognitive biases, socialization patterns, and internalized beliefs that influence attitudes toward gender roles. Here is an overview of the psychological factors contributing to gender inequality:

1. **Stereotyping:** Gender stereotypes are oversimplified ideas about the attributes and roles of men and women. These stereotypes can affect perceptions of competence, leadership capability, and emotional characteristics.

2. **Implicit Bias:** Many people hold implicit biases or unconscious attitudes towards gender that affect decision-making and behavior. For example, associating leadership with masculinity can hinder women's advancement in leadership roles.

3. **Socialization Processes:** From a young age, individuals are often socialized into gender roles through family, media, and culture. This can limit personal aspirations and reinforce traditional gender roles.

4. **Peer Influence:** Peer groups often reinforce gender norms and behaviors, affecting individual choices in education, career, and leisure activities.

5. **Internalized Sexism:** Individuals may internalize societal gender biases, believing in traditional gender roles and limitations on their abilities based on gender. This can lead to decreased self-esteem and aspirations, particularly in women.

6. **Self-Stigma:** Women and men may experience self-stigma when they do not conform to traditional gender roles, leading to psychological stress and identity conflict.

7. **Confidence and Self-Efficacy:** Psychological factors such as self-esteem and self-efficacy can differ by gender due to societal expectations and experiences. Women, for example, may feel less confident in male-dominated fields, which can affect their career choices and advancement opportunities.

8. **Fear of Social Repercussions:** Women and gender minorities may avoid asserting themselves or pursuing leadership roles due to fears of backlash or social ostracism. This fear can stem from societal expectations that discourage women from being assertive or ambitious.

9. **Attribution Bias:** The tendency to attribute men's successes to their abilities while attributing women's successes to external factors (like luck) can undermine women's achievements and reinforce gender disparities in recognition and advancement.

10. **Group Dynamics:** In mixed-gender groups, dynamics can shift in ways that disadvantage women. For example, men may dominate discussions, leading to a lack of visibility for women's contributions and ideas.

11. **Work-Life Balance Perceptions:** Psychological attitudes towards work-life balance can differ by gender, with women often facing societal pressure to prioritize family responsibilities over career ambitions. This can lead to career interruptions and unequal opportunities for advancement.

12. **Coping Mechanisms:** Gendered expectations can influence how individuals cope with stress and challenges. Women may be socialized to prioritize relationships and emotional expression, while men may be encouraged to adopt more competitive and aggressive coping strategies.

**Psychological Strategies to bring the Balance**

Psychological theories can offer valuable insights and strategies for addressing gender inequality by providing frameworks for understanding the underlying causes, promoting awareness, and guiding interventions. Here are several psychological theories and how they can be applied to tackle gender inequality:

**1. Social Learning Theory**

The social learning theory, proposed by Albert Bandura's, states that new behaviors are acquired by observing others' behavior. In his famous Bobo doll experiment (Bandura, 1961), he demonstrated that as the children observe people around them, they learn to behave accordingly. Bandura (1977) believed that people actively process the information and in order to understand the relationship of their behavior with their consequences. To address gender inequality, interventions can focus on promoting positive role models for all genders, encouraging diverse representation in media, and creating environments where non-traditional gender roles are visible and celebrated. For example, workshops in schools that highlight successful women can inspire girls to pursue similar careers. This theory emphasizes the importance of learning through observation, in which individuals acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs by observing the actions of others and their consequences, thus adopting and adopting the behaviors observed. In social learning theory, Albert Bandura (1977) agreed that social learning theory incorporates the

classical conditioning and operant conditioning also, as he thought that there are mediating processes between stimuli and responses.

## 2. Cognitive Dissonance Theory

Cognitive dissonance, proposed by Festinger, is a positive model of what would happen if people adjusted their beliefs to alleviate their pain or fear (Akerlof and Dickens 1982). In many gender-discriminatory societies, women are caught in a dilemma between standing up for their rights or conforming to discriminatory practices. Cognitive dissonance represents the conflicting desires that cause women in these societies to experience uncomfortable tensions. This theory suggests that individuals experience discomfort when their beliefs and behaviors are inconsistent. To reduce gender inequality, programs can create situations where individuals are prompted to confront their biases or stereotypes, leading to behavioral changes. For example, training sessions that reveal implicit biases can encourage participants to reconsider their attitudes and actions regarding gender.

## 3. Attribution Theory

This theory examines how individuals explain their successes and failures. By educating people about attribution biases (e.g., attributing women's successes to luck rather than ability), organizations can promote fairer evaluations and support systems that recognize and reward women's achievements. For example, implementing structured performance reviews that focus on objective criteria rather than subjective impressions can help mitigate biases. According to McElroy and Morrow (1983), gender discrimination in organizations occurs at two different levels. The existence of these differences is used to justify the claim that women are not successful in certain jobs. The second form of stereotypes - gender role stereotypes - refers to widely held beliefs about the appropriateness of behavior. This form of stereotyping implies that women can enter certain jobs because they have the appropriate skills, but they should not.

## 4. Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory explains how group membership affects self-image and behavior. Social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, 1986) provides a general framework for describing the dynamics of group membership and behavior. Interventions can promote inclusion and reduce prejudice toward one's own group and other groups by creating an environment in which different identities are valued and celebrated. For example, diversity training that emphasizes shared goals and cooperation among different groups can reduce intergroup bias and promote equality. However, several recent studies have shown that the theory can be significantly used in relation to gender dicrimination (Abrams et al., 1990; Amancio, 1989; Hogg and Turner, 1987; Jackson et al., 1996; Lindeman and Sundvik, 1995). Many applications do not capture both the affective and conceptual framework of gender category membership..

## 5. Empowerment Theory

The empowerment theory stresses the importance of individual's control over his life as well as the social structures. According to the International Encyclopedia (1999), power refers to the ability of directing one's life toward a desired goal in terms of social, political and economic status. According to Sayulu et al. (2005), women empowerment can be defined as a process of assisting women with greater autonomy by the method of sharing relevant information and giving them control over the factors that affect their performance. Programs aimed at empowering women through education, skills training, and leadership development can help reduce gender gaps. For example, community programs that provide resources and support networks for women entrepreneurs can improve their economic empowerment.

## 6. Gender Schema Theory

Gender schema theory was proposed by Sandra Bem in 1981. This theory explains how individuals internalize gender norms and expectations. Interventions can challenge and reshape these schemas by confronting individuals with different gender presentations and encouraging critical thinking about gender roles. For example, curriculum that includes discussions about gender roles and stereotypes can help students develop a more nuanced understanding of gender.

## 7. Intersectionality Framework

The term 'intersectionality' has its roots in Black feminist activism and was originally coined in 1989 by American critical race rights scholar Kimberly Williams Crenshaw. This framework posits that individuals experience multiple, intersecting identities that influence their experiences of privilege and oppression. Understanding intersectionality can lead to tailored interventions that address the unique challenges faced by individuals at the intersection of different identities (e.g., race, class, gender). For example, programs that focus on the specific experiences of marginalized women can develop more effective strategies to promote equality.

## 8. Behavioral Change Theories

Theories such as the theory of planned behavior or transtheoretical models can guide the design of interventions aimed at changing attitudes and behaviors related to gender equality. Prochaska and DiClemente (1982) suggested that in the transtheoretical model, cognitive restructuring is viewed as the result of the individual's effective application of appropriate change processes during each of the corresponding stages of change. These theories emphasize the role of intentions, perceived control, and stages of change in influencing behavior. For example, campaigns to promote gender equality in the workplace can use these principles to encourage organizations to adopt equitable policies and practices. By applying these psychological principles, organizations, educators, and policy makers can develop targeted interventions to address the psychological underpinnings of gender inequality, raise awareness, and create an environment conducive to equality.

**Conclusion**

By addressing gender disparities, communities can unlock potential, foster economic growth, and create a balanced world where everyone has the opportunity to succeed. Achieving gender equality necessitates concerted efforts from individuals, organizations, and governments. The strategies, which are practiced as the part of feminism movement, include working on implementing policies that mandate equal pay, parental leave, and anti-discrimination measures, promoting equal access to education for all genders, raising awareness about gender issues and advocating for societal changes, and supporting women through mentorship, professional development, and leadership opportunities. The aim of this article was to look into the issue of gender inequality through psychological perspective.

Psychological factors play a significant role in perpetuating gender inequalities. These factors often stem from societal norms, cultural beliefs, and individual attitudes that shape perceptions and behaviors regarding gender. In summary, both nature and nurture contribute to gender inequality, but the influence of environmental factors is often more significant in shaping behaviors, opportunities, and societal roles. Addressing gender inequality requires a multifaceted approach that considers both biological differences and the social constructs that perpetuate inequality. Successful women can be model for girls and other women, who can subsequently and gradually take the entire women community equal to men, even ahead of men, and this is what social learning theory of Bandura claims to do. In situation of a dilemma between standing up for their rights or conforming to discriminatory practices, Cognitive dissonance theory is what will help women to adjust their beliefs to alleviate their pain or fear. Educating people about attribution biases, an equality can be posed in terms of evaluation, achievements and opportunities. Reframing the social identity, self-image (social identity theory), norms, expectation (gender schema theory) the status of women can be changed in society. By challenging stereotypes, promoting equitable practices, and fostering inclusive environments, society can work toward reducing gender disparities. Despite the challenges, the pursuit of gender equality holds promise for a more equitable and just society.

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