

Gender and society



Key terms:

- ✓ **Feminism:** working for the equality of women (not one single view).
- ✓ **Gender biology:** physical characteristics enabling someone to identify as male or female.
- ✓ **Gender identification:** the way people perceive themselves; masculine, feminine or neither.
- ✓ **Gender expression:** the way people behave in response to their gender identification.
- ✓ **Socialisation:** the process by which people learn cultural norms.
- ✓ **Patriarchal society:** a society that is dominated by men and male interests.

Traditional Christianity agreed with an approach known as

Christian complementarianism: men and women were created different by God and therefore have different roles to fulfill, including in the church.

In an essay develop this with an example of a stereotypical gender roles – man = breadwinner, woman = stay at home mum.

Christians will use the quote below to show that men and women were created distinct from one another.

“Male and female he created them”. (Genesis 1:27)

In contrast, the growing feminist movement has challenged the traditional values, stating men have no natural authority over women. There is clear evidence that society is moving away from traditional values of the nuclear family, with stereotypical gender roles, rooted in faith.



- ✓ **2021 Census:** The first time on record that Christianity has dropped below 50%. Christian 46.3%. Non-religious 37.2%
- ✓ **42% of marriages end in divorce.**
- ✓ **Acceptance of same sex marriage (legalised Dec. 2014)**
- ✓ **A growing number of children being born to unmarried parents.**

Christianity is divided on such issues, some want to retain the traditional standpoint, whereas others want to move forward and be more accepting and inclusive.

Gender and gender roles

Biological sex and gender are different, but are used interchangeably by many people.



- Biological sex = chromosomes, sex organs, hormones.
- Gender = the relationship between biological sex, gender identification and gender expression

Many would argue gender identification is acquired through **socialisation**.

Western society puts a lot of emphasis on the distinction between male and female eg. Gendered colours. Gendered language in society is largely gender binary, implying there are only two distinct genders. This approach is embedded in western culture. Despite an effort being made to challenge traditional gender roles there is still a very evident gender gap in education and career choices.

Eg. The UK has the lowest percentage of female engineering professionals in Europe, at less than 10%, while Latvia, Bulgaria and Cyprus lead with nearly 30%.



Patriarchy and feminism

Globally most societies are **patriarchal**. The world is viewed and remembered through the eyes of men. A male gaze.

The accepted truth of a patriarchal society is that men are stronger and men & women have different aptitudes lending themselves to different roles in society.

- Men = rational. Politics and management.
- Women = emotional and compassionate. Caring roles.



Feminism

Three historical waves (we are arguably in a fourth wave, but this isn't something to worry about for the exam).

1. **Late 19th Century.** Primarily focused on gaining the vote for women.
2. **1960s.** Wider issues: sexual health, reproductive rights, domestic violence, rape, equality in the workplace.
 - ✓ Pill introduced by NHS in 1961 for married women.
 - ✓ Abortion legalised 1967.
 - ✓ 1970 equal pay.
3. **1990s – current day.** Aims to be inclusive to all women, was previously too focused on white heterosexual women.

Feminism is not a single ideology.

- **Liberal:** feminism that seeks equality for women by campaigning for changes in the law, for example by staging protests against rape or for equal pay.
- **Radical:** takes the view that women cannot be liberated within a capitalist patriarchal society and it advocates a total uprooting and rebuilding of society.
- **Marxist:** sees women's struggles through the lens of Marxism, women's oppression is seen as a symptom of the oppression that occurs when there is private ownership of the means of production (eg factories & farms).
- **Black feminism:** aims to give voices to and further the interests of non white women in their own cultural context.
- **Ecofeminism:** emphasise the connection between women and the natural world & places the blame for the damage to the planet on patriarchal capitalism.
- **Separatist:** seeks freedom for women from men & see heterosexual relationships and inherently disempowering.

Gender roles

Christian egalitarianism: Men and women are created equal by God. They recognise biological and psychological differences, but think they should have equal opportunities to succeed and should treat one another fairly.

Christian complementarianism: men and women were created different by God and therefore have different roles to fulfill, including in the church.

Men and women are not equal and men are superior.	
“It is only males who are created by the gods and are given souls. Those who live rightly return to the stars, but those who are cowards or lead unrighteous lives may with reason be supposed to have changed into the nature of women in the second generation”. Plato	Being a woman is a punishment for being unrighteous or cowardly when you lived as a man.
“More mischievous, less simple, more impulsive, more compassionate, more easily moved to tears...more void of shame and self-respect...” Aristotle.	Women are naturally inferior to men & therefore should submit to their rule. Aristotle's ignorance of biology led him to believe women play a passive role in reproduction.
“The relationship between the male and female is by nature such that the male is higher, the female lower, that the male rules and the female is ruled”. Aquinas.	Outlining a hierarchy in genders. Women are inferior to men in physical strength and intelligence. This inferiority is part of creation. It is natural and right that men should have authority over women in everything.
“Women should remain silent in the church...for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in church” 1 CORINTHIANS 12: 34-35	Both of these quotes emphasize the inferiority of women in the Church. There is a hierarchy in faith. God-men-women. Women should accept this and should not hold positions of authority in a church. Eg. Not be part of the clergy.
“The head of every man is Christ and the head of woman is man”. 1 CORINTHIANS 11: 3	

Notes on women in the clergy. Women are not permitted to be ordained in RC or Orthodox as Jesus only has male disciples. C of E do ordain women. Libby Lane first Bishop in Church of England in 2015.

Men and women are equal

“There is neither...male nor female...for you are one in Christ Jesus”. (Galatians 3:28)	We are viewed equally by God. God not distinguish humans by gender. Therefore this support equality for women.
“Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them”(Romans 16: 3-4)	Within the history of the faith women HAVE played a significant part in developing the faith. Their value should be recognised both historically and now.

Women are superior to men: Mary Daly



- Women should aim higher than equality with men.
- Mary Daly argued that women’s abilities and knowledge are superior to those of men.
- Women ought to govern men as this would result in a more peaceful society and would be better for the environment.

Gender is a choice

Some people challenge the view that there are masculine and feminine qualities. Designating qualities in this way is artificial and are determined by cultural norms rather than by nature. People are individuals with their own personalities and it only appears that some qualities are more prevalent in men or women because society encourages and reinforces rigid rules of gender expression. Certain behaviour (boys being adventurous and girls enjoying childcare) are cultural norms impressed on people from a young age through socialization.

Some people challenge that gender is binary- just male and female. Gender should be considered a spectrum and people have the right to decide how they identify and express themselves and can change this if they wish.

This could be extended to include the idea that that it makes no sense to talk of a woman’s experience as this is not something singular or that can be defined. Women cannot be viewed as one homogenous group when there are so many factors that create diversity in women: age, ethnicity, social class etc.

Traditional Christian teachings on the roles of men and women in the family and society.

“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27)	There is no hint in this quote that one sex is superior to the other.
Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib ^[c] he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. (Genesis 2:22)	This can be used to show that the proper role of a woman in a wife as Eve was made as companion for Adam
⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.(Genesis 3:6)	It was a woman who was first to succumb to the temptation of the forbidden fruit, so this can be used to support the view that women are weaker willed. Therefore, men should take the lead in decision making.
Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church” Ephesians.	Wives should be under the authority of their husband. There is a hierarchy in the church and in family. But this is not a one way relationship and humans have a duty to love their wives, just as Christ loves man.

What is biblical patriarchy and why do some Christians challenge this?

Biblical patriarchy is the view that man should be head of the household and chief decision maker. His wife should be obedient to him and support him.

However, some Christians feel that biblical instructions about how to run a household were written for a historical context which is different to our own. Religious ethics and practices should not develop within a vacuum, but within a social context and therefore would consider this approach outdated. Instead they would support Christian egalitarianism in which husband and wife should be mutually respected.

Motherhood and parenthood



Women have a special dignity because of their capacity for motherhood and unique ability to bring the next generation into the world. Without the existence of motherhood none of us would exist so women should not be degraded.

Pope John Paul II wrote a letter called Mulieris Dignitatem to clarify the Catholic Church’s position on feminism in response to claims the church was sexist.

He says the turning point for humanity was when Jesus came to earth and that only possible because Mary freely chose to take on the role of mother to the Son of God. Through the miraculous Grace of God Mary was able to be both a virgin and mother.

He believes motherhood allows a woman to be self giving and she has a special “openness” to the new person that will be her child. He believes women are naturally predisposed to motherhood both physically and psychologically.

However, women will suffer in childbirth due to original sin, but also to allow women an insight into the suffering of Christ.

Family

Christianity teaches that marriage is the best context for raising a family- the majority would take this to mean a heterosexual marriage. Marriage is ordained by God, meaning it is something God designed and intended for humans. In the Catholic Church marriage is a sacrament – an outward sign of the inward grace of God. Marriage is a gift from God, in which God joins a couple together for life.

Secular society presents several challenges to Christian beliefs.

- Divorce: It is accepted in some denominations but not all eg. Catholic Church (marriage is a sacrament that cannot be undone).



- Reproductive rights: contraception and abortions. Artificial contraception is frowned upon in some denominations eg Catholic Church. Abortions are seen as wrong by many Christians as it is a destruction of sacred human life (sanctity of life “ **Before I formed you in the womb I knew you**” .)



- Same sex marriage: is considered by some to be unnatural and marriage is ordained by God to be between man and woman only. Can link to teachings on having children “Be fruitful and increased in number”. Others Christians will support same sex couples as all love comes from God and should be allowed to publically commit to one another if they wish.



Gender and society

Should Christians defend the traditional view of gender from the Bible (key source of authority)- two distinct genders- "Male and female He created them".

Christians could cite research which shows children raised in a stable family with parents of each gender are happier and do better at school.

OR

Should Christians embrace change? It can be argued that Christianity perpetuates injustice by encouraging women to be in a subservient role. Not in line with teachings of Agape or the Golden Rule. Perhaps Christianity should be challenging patriarchy and insisting on more freedoms for women.

There is also a divide in the approach to same sex marriage. If Christianity is to appeal it needs to take into account modern views. Moving towards an egalitarian approach. Patriarchal guidelines belong in a different era. Yet others will maintain progression should not undermine high standards of moral behavior or the sanctity of marriage

Is motherhood liberating or restricting?

As we saw in the Mulieris Dignitatem motherhood offers women the chance to fulfill their potential in creation.

However, many argue that motherhood forces a women to suspend her own interests and personality. Once her children are grown and gone they are left without a purpose. (Simone de Beauvoir)

Ann Oakley: there is no such thing as a maternal instinct, but the feeling of needing to be a mother is a result of socialization

Motherhood cannot be labelled. Too many other influential factors:

- Relationship with the father
- Mental health
- Physical health

Is the concept of family culturally determined?

In the social sciences family is studied as a social institution. The family is a social unit in which each member has a role.

In the social sciences family is studied as a social institution. The family is a social unit in which each member has a role. But is this unit entirely culturally determined? Are its structures created by the wider society in which it operates?

Eg. In the UK parents and children live together, normally no other generations living with them. Once the child is old enough and earning enough money they will leave.

Socialisation creates social norms so we know what is expected. So with the example above 15 would be too young and 40 too old to leave.

Christianity, however, teaches that family is created and shaped by God.

Male and female were created as lifelong partners, God sets rules for family members and the role they should take. Family can be seen as a gift or a sacrament

Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.
(Genesis 2:22)

Implications of these attitudes:

- ✓ If family is a social institution then as cultural norms change and develop so can families. Eg Same sex parents.
- ✓ However, if family is shaped by God and the rules and expectations have already been laid down then they shouldn't change and traditional values should be defended.