

A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD TO GLOBAL PEACE: ON GENDER IDENTITY AND ROLE**Chinedu Ude****&****Grace Nwasogwa**

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Abstract

Equality is said to be the quality of being the same in quantity, measure, value or status. When applied to human beings, it is a situation whereby people have the same rights, advantages, opportunities and so forth. A person who subscribes to the equality of all people is called an egalitarian. Egalitarianism as a concept is an illusion. The notion takes root in the gender topic: identity, role, norm and stereotype. These gender issues, especially gender stereotypes, are antecedently foregrounded by both forms of sexism: patriarchy and matriarchy. Whereas the latter form is unobvious and seemingly permissible, male chauvinism seems glaringly oppressive. Moreover gender role and gender identity as different concepts are often open to misconstruction. Misconception of this sort may give cause for concern. Identity vis-à-vis role will be looked upon in this paper. This research seeks to bring to the fore the illusoriness of the concept, egalitarianism, which, if not jettisoned, holds great promise for harm. The paper propagates the dire need to shun sexual stereotypes and embrace not the equality but the equity cause, which promises a lasting solution to peace on a global scale.

Key words: egalitarianism, equity, gender, sexism, equality

Introduction

The issue of gender is prehistoric and as old as man. Movements such as feminism, egalitarianism and, most recently, transvestism have arisen from this gender matter, gender stereotype, in particular. A common goal is shared by these movements: equality of all, regardless of sex or change of sex even, as is the case in transgenderism. But then this mutual objective normally leaves a question hanging in the air: equality of/on what? By implication, equality is not only of many variances but is also relative, if anything, an unattainable ideal: an illusion. Egalitarians have tried so hard to divide it from relativism—the philosophical idea that all criteria of judgment are relative to the individuals and situations involved. This is only an exercise in futility because all human beings are not and cannot be equal. Mother Nature never intended it that way. Thus nurture of any sort, no matter how rigorous, cannot reverse it. This paper is not out to debate which is more important between nature and nurture; it is rather concerned with the great interconnectivity between them. The study therefore raises the alarm: the need for us to relinquish unworkable ideas such as egalitarianism and focus on furthering our understanding of the aforesaid inextricability in order to achieve equity.

Furthermore, the gender matter is a case of both nurture and nature. Humans, on the one hand, as beings of nature exist in two sexes—male and female—like most other creatures. Both male and female are required primarily for procreation. On the other, the human race has nurtured itself; it has evolved into a race of great thinking creatures. Optimal nurture ensures “The [smooth] processes of production and reproduction, consumption and distribution” (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2016). Remarkable inventions, discoveries and artistry are as a consequence of nurture. Such landmarks would not have seen the light of day had only nature been involved. To this end, humankind needs both phenomena to break the threshold of extinction, thus ensuring the maximization and longevity of its race. This also means that both male and female are required in all spheres of human life. That is, one sex is not only useful on account of one function, say, fecundation, which Mother Nature makes possible; human male and female can and should both be great at progeneration, as well as artistic creations, scientific inventions, research and so on.

Gender Is what Sex Is Not

Gender, according to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2017), refers to:

The socially constructed characteristics of women and men—such as norms, roles and relationships of/ and between groups of women and men. It varies from society to society and can be changed. While most people are born either male or female, they are taught appropriate norms and behaviours—including how they should interact with others of the same or opposite sex within households, communities and work places.

Sex is different from gender; hence both terms should not be used interchangeably. A distinction by the American Psychological Association (2017) may be of help here:

Sex is assigned at birth and refers to one’s biological status as either male or female, and is associated primarily with physical attributes such as chromosomes, hormone prevalence, and external and internal anatomy. Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for boys and men or girls and women. These influence the ways people act, interact, and feel about themselves. While aspects of biological sex are similar across different cultures, aspects of gender may differ.

This proves that gender, although dependent on sex, is not to be determined only biologically; it is rather constructed socially. Whereas sex is about the biological aspects of maleness or femaleness, gender refers to the social and cultural aspects, the expected psychological behaviour of being male or female. Gender, according to FAO (2016), is basically the relations between men and women, both perceptual and material; it is the central organizing principle of societies, and often governs the processes of production and reproduction, consumption and distribution.

Issues of Gender: Identity, Role, Stereotype

Challenges and conflicts, as hinted earlier, have been engendered by the gender matter. The problem with gender, as a popular feminist and author argues, is that “it prescribes how we *should* be rather than recognizing how we are. Imagine how much happier we would be, how much freer to be our true individual selves, if we didn’t have the weight of gender expectations” (Adichie, 2014, p.14). In other words, gender expectations are gender roles. Gender role, as Vláčil (1996) remarks, is “A set of expectations associated with the perception of masculinity and femininity” (as cited in Multilingual Website about Global Education [MONDA.EU], 2017, p. 5). The roles over time become norms which, in turn, if unchanged, become stereotypes. We will return to this last phase after addressing the issue of gender identity which, as Adichie implies above, is ‘how we are.’ During postnatal development, a child gets a certain perception, which at the time may be completely indiscernible to others around it: including its mother.

The consciousness of one’s identity as it is experienced with regard to one’s individuality as male or female is what we call gender identity. This awareness normally becomes perceptible in infancy and is reinforced during adolescence. Fine (2012) has this to say:

A child’s toy preferences are no doubt influenced by a whole host of factors, with his or her gender knowledge being just one part of a complicated mix... [This] does suggest that gender identity (I am a boy) and gender stereotype knowledge (Boys don’t play with this toy) motivate gender stereotypical play. (p. 159)

Gender identity, as captured in the expressions ‘I am a boy or girl’ and ‘how we are’, indeed sways gender stereotypical issues: “Men don’t cry”, “Women do not make marriage proposals” and so on. Conversely, gender stereotypes, most times, hold gender identity to ransom. It is no wonder the stigmatization of transsexuals and the like.

Gender stereotypes before they become firmly rooted are first and foremost norms, which can be identified as the prescriptions of gender roles. Norm is a type of socio-cultural regulation (MONDA.EU, 2017, p. 5). To put the matter differently, gender norm is the drug from the store. This medicine is assigned gender, commonly known as gender role. The pill is subsequently taken by individuals to encourage socially desirable behaviour that ushers in gender stereotypical issues. MONDA.EU (2017) sums it up well:

Gender stereotype is a very stable element in consciousness, i.e. psychological and social mechanisms regulating perception and evaluation of certain phenomena, influencing opinions, judgment, attitudes and behavior. For the stereotype, undifferentiated overall attribution of certain characteristics to all members of the group is typical. It is characterized by emotionality and irrationality, as well as simplistic interpretations of events. (p. 5)

Whereas assigned gender may give room for rationalization and modification, gender stereotype is hardly tolerant. This should come as no surprise because in the search for a supposed remedy many factors are taken into account; however in a situation where the established panacea develops into the opposite of what it is intended, it more or less becomes impossible to remove. The reason is simple: people naturally find it easier to

remain in what they perceive as comfort zones. Many persons—in spite of sex— have come to cling to gender stereotypes, most of which have proven to be a harmful luxury to society. Society now has for itself potent menaces, stereotypes, which were intended cures (norms).

Gender identity, as a category of social identity, is one's deeply held sense of being male or female, some of both or neither, and does not always correspond to biological sex (American Psychiatric Association (2017). Discontentment of any sort by a child may lead to gender identity disorder or syndrome, which is now known as gender dysphoria. This is where transgenderism comes in. It is worthy to note at this point that this syndrome is not the same as homosexuality or gender nonconformity. The American Psychiatric Association further spells it out:

Gender dysphoria is not the same as gender nonconformity, which refers to behaviors not matching the gender norms or stereotypes of the gender assigned at birth. Examples of gender nonconformity (also referred to as gender expansiveness or gender creativity) include girls behaving and dressing in ways more socially expected of boys or occasional cross breeding in adult men. Gender nonconformity is not a mental disorder. Gender dysphoria is also not the same being gay/lesbian.

A child does not get to choose where or to whom it is born, let alone opt for its sex or gender identity even. Mother Nature absolutely makes that call: raging hormones comprise the determining factor. Therefore a child that has trouble with the awareness of its identity is said to have gender dysphoria.

There exist innumerable cases of androgynism and few instances of hermaphrodites. 'A condition of having both female and male characteristics' and 'people with both male and female genitalia' define the former and the latter respectively. Gender stereotypes, in some societies, have little or no tolerance for a sexual orientation other than heterosexuality. Homosexuality is deemed gender nonconformity and frowned upon, much less a mental disorder such as gender dysphoria. Such societies turn a blind eye to a grim actuality: the fact that though gender role is required for order, another factor should be a prerequisite—gender identity. Should that be neglected, as is usually the case, then unnecessary conflicts will ensue.

In gender nonconformity and, extremely, gender identity syndrome, one severally see questions like "Do you ever wish you were a boy?" A case in point is a report by *Daily Mail Online* (2012) about an Orange County boy who has chosen to see himself as a girl and thus live as one:

When Danann Tyler was just two years old, he insisted he was a girl, and asked to wear dresses and grow his hair. His yoga instructor mother, Sarah, 39, and father Bill, 45, a police officer, struggled to explain his behaviour, and put it down to a phase. However two years later, Danann attempted to cut off his penis with a pair of scissors.

He, or rather she is about nine now. Mr Tyler at the tender age of two got the awareness of a Ms Tyler; that he is Ms Tyler. Former Mr Tyler, from California, can be considered to have an accommodating society. Issues of transgender are discouraged and are deemed

unacceptable in many traditional societies. However nature, in her way, has never been fair to us all, and with reason. This paper advocates for equity, a level playing field (LPF), not necessarily equality: in inequality equity survives.

(Gender) Equality: Why Are We Unequal?

The expression, “All animals are equal but some are more equal than others,” taken from Orwell (1946, p. 57), appears to be a decree, some truncation of the former septenary commandment in the same text, Orwell’s. This singular edict is renowned in our world of humans, far from that of the fictional animals, on account of its truism. Let it be noted forthwith that this does not in any sense mean that the heterocosm (world) of a literary text is to be compared to the human world. Let us just say that the excerpt is more than apposite to the topic at hand. This incontrovertibility notwithstanding, many, especially female sexists, contest it still.

The Women Liberation Movement, now known as feminism, at the time was formed to seek equal rights for women. Undoubtedly, women were brutally marginalized, thereby prompting justifiable agitation. Women rightly deserve the same privileges as men. A woman, as Vera Nazarian (2017) remarks, is human; she is not better, wiser, stronger, more intelligent, more creative, or more responsible than a man; likewise, she is never less; equality is a given; a woman is human (as cited, MONDA.EU, 2017). Nazarian’s sagacious comment is nothing short of truism, save that ‘equality is not a given’. Equality is not the solution sought after; it constitutes part of the gender problem, and herein lays the setback for feminism.

Most women rightists—the likes of Nazarian, Fine and Adichie—are simply misled by the concept of egalitarianism, which is nothing but an illusion. Proponents of equality explain the concept as a doctrine of the equality of humankind in all sectors, that is, the desirability of political, economic and social equality. Such phenomenon cannot see the light of day. This submission of a young female freethinker and writer is in order:

Everyone is not equal. In today’s age and especially in the liberal Western hemisphere, that’s a radical thought. I am not propagating some are better than others. I am saying we are not equal as individual humans. We are not all born equal. However, we are born with the equal *right* to happiness, the equal *right* to opportunities to succeed, and the equal *right* to use our own advantages to prosper as human beings. We have equal *rights* and I cannot stress that enough. I am not arguing that one person or groups of people should have more rights than another, I am saying that humans are inherently unequal, and that’s *okay*. (Sofia, 2014)

The above is buttressed by yet another outstanding female, a psychologist and blogger, Seifert (2013), who argues strongly that we are not born equal in the first place, even less to end up that way:

If a child is born disabled or grows up in a poor, abusive, or criminal home, they do not have the same chance at success as a child born healthy, to a high-income, loving family that lives in a nice neighborhood. The former will start school

approximately 1.5 years behind other students and by 3rd grade he will be three years behind his peers educationally. These are the facts. In this situation most children will never be able to catch up and this will subsequently affect the rest of their lives.

A teenage handicap, example, one with Down's syndrome, cannot be said to be on equal footing at taking chances in athletics or academia even with another who is medically fit. It matters least if both adolescents are of the same social standing or parents. What counts is the finished product Mother Nature gives: the sex, fitness, etc. Put differently, one's sex and level of fitness (psychological, physical) count in the pursuit of dreams. This is not to say that the disabled are completely disadvantaged, far from it. Like their fellow humans in the 'fit' category, the physically or/and mentally challenged 'are born with the rights to happiness, opportunities to succeed, and to use their own advantages—strengths and weakness, when necessary—to prosper as human beings' (Sofia, 2014). To ensure the protection and implementation of these rights, equity, not equality, is enforced.

Another writer, a male named Clairmont (2016), rightly remarks that "The idea that we are all equal is not life-affirming. It's inhuman and anti-human. Our inequalities, differences, quirks, and dissimilarities are what is interesting about us, and they are the life-force of any society". Indeed all fingers are not equal, that is, they are never of the same size or length. Nonetheless, the hand, which is the whole, needs all five fingers, for each has its individual significance as part of that very whole. Like the fingers, individuals of diversity converge into a whole called society, which through equity should recognize the importance of everyone who constitutes its parts. There is no such thing as equals. If anything, equality is relative: it is never absolute.

Incidentally, there is a burning issue that needs to be brought to the fore, the fact that feminism has gone downhill. This view may sound antifeminist; the paper nonetheless disparages not feminists but feminism. It is quite disturbing, though unsurprising, that many women rightists have become sexists—the very people against whom they claim to fight. Many a case has proven that feminist extremists have become diehard female sexists. The chant of 'what a man can do, a woman can do it *much better*' is just one of such instances. A delineation of the term, sexism or chauvinism, becomes quite pertinent:

The disparagement of one sex or rejecting anything other than stereotypical perceptions of masculinity and feminity is called sexism. Just like racism, sexism is also the manifestation of intolerance. However, while racism means the disparaging of people because of their race or ethnicity, sexism means the disparaging of people because of their sex. (MONDA.EU, 2017, p. 6)

Feminism has developed into (female) chauvinism. Fury has engulfed many feminists. Adichie emphasises the matter": "I am angry. We should all be angry. Anger has a long history of bringing about positive change" (2014, p. 14). Needless to say, rage also has a long history of doing just the opposite. Deep resentment often goes hand in hand with fear. If left unbridled, emotionality then embraces unreasonableness and perhaps morbidity even. States of this sort culminate in phobia, which in this case is

misandry. Feminism of today no longer seeks 'fantastic' equality. It now advocates the superiority of the womenfolk.

Furthermore Fine (2012) advances the notion she calls neurosexism. She remarks that "Sexism disguised in neuroscientific finery is changing the way children are taught. Neurosexism reflects and reinforces cultural beliefs about gender—and it may do so in a particularly powerful way" (pp. 18-19). Fine further argues that neuroscience should be held responsible for the stereotypical gender issues: "Our minds, society and neurosexism create difference. Together, they wire gender. But the wiring is soft, not hard. It is flexible, malleable and changeable. And, if we only believe this, it will continue to unravel" (p. 162). No doubt Fine is a fine example of a feminist with the best of intentions. Some of the points she raises in her text are valid: (neuro) sexism affirms gender stereotypes; there is room for flexibility in our minds and society, and so forth. However inequality, as well as diversity, in human beings is by no means brought about by neurosexism. We are different as we are similar: this is a fact. Ever imposing Mother Nature is largely to blame, not nurture.

That inequality has nothing to do with sex or gender is the thrust of Fine's argument. This paper is of a different view. Granted, gender and class are different, as Adichie (2016) would have us believe. Nonetheless, gender, by way of sex, affects the individual just as class does, albeit at varied degrees. But the influence is there and undeniable. Not surprisingly, Adichie admits that "Poor men still have the privileges of being men, even if they do not have the privileges of being wealthy" (p. 16). The indigent cannot enjoy the luxury of the affluent; the same way the latter craves the peace of the former. Similarly, men can make better infantry but cannot conceive offspring. Women, in comparison, may not make better soldiers or footballers even, because of the intrinsic nature of either activity. They, however, possess an exclusive ability—of having another being grow within them. Doubtless, both sexes have the privilege of being human.

Inequality is a natural phenomenon, which cannot be stopped but can only be rightly checked, using equity. Only in inequality can fairness, or equity, thrive. With equity, we are able to understand and accept our inherent differences as well as similarities. We will agree, as mentioned above, that a man, biologically, cannot conceive. This is a phenomenal experience that a human male will *never* have. The feeling that another being grows within you is inexplicable, as it were, you give life. Women nevertheless should also understand that they are not really suited for some things men may do with little stress, warfare, majorly, because of the cramps dealt them by nature. Menses hardly does any woman a service; it has become great (anaemic) discomfort for many. This does not imply that some women cannot be tougher, in terms of physical strength, than some men. There are a lot of feeble men, as well as women. This is not necessarily a matter of effeminacy; it may be just another blow from nature, or perhaps a blessing even, as transgenderism will have us believe.

Consequently no matter how one may nurture oneself, nature, in the form of sex, class or fitness (mental/physical) may thwart efforts or ease the burden. It puts one in a tragic circle from which one cannot get out, try as one might. Sex, therefore, as a force of Mother Nature, is both a blessing and a curse that holds sway in nurture and shapes the

course of life. The sooner an individual realizes this, the better for the person. This paper presupposes that some women can be much better than some men in a particular task, and vice versa. So, one's sex can be one's strength and also one's weakness. Nevertheless, one needs to strive for greatness despite impossible odds, but must never lose sight of the fact that humans must work in harmony with nature (sex).

Gender does not constitute the limitation. Sex does. Sex, as mentioned earlier, is not only the culpable one: there exist class and mental or/and physical disabilities. These can really limit individuals, or/and perhaps the reverse. Well, with the provision of a level playing field, all can always have a shot at their ambitions. Our 'inalienable rights' and protection can be only guaranteed by equity/justice, not equality. This nonetheless does not gainsay the fact that some will still have to experience unfairness and injustice. Is that not the idea of inequality after all? An illustration by Sofia (2014) is apt:

Take a place of business for example. There is a manager and there are employees. Clearly the manager has more skills and more experience than the employees or else s/he wouldn't be in a higher position than others. Not everyone is fit to be a manager, because we are not all equal in abilities and skills and education. The lowest performing employee is fired when reviews come in, because he/she is not equal to his/her peers. It's logically impossible for us all to be at the same level of competency. Nor should we be. If we were all on the same mental wavelength, there'd be no differentiating thought. We can't all have equal abilities. I will naturally excel at something over someone else and vice versa.

This example emphasizes ability, which can be a product of nature or nurture, or both combined. The manager may be higher in rank and pay. Moreover he may not even have more finesse than his subordinates. He, however, is not higher than the principles of equity, which should be contained somewhere in the constitution of the organization. The illusory idea of equality would not do any better. The manager is not equal to any of his subordinates. He cannot have the same privileges as his staff; he nevertheless must have to answer to a certain authority, regulatory body of some sort. That is where equity vis-à-vis justice may come in and thrive thereon.

Conclusion

Any right-thinking human employs dreams in preference to fantasies: both psychological phenomena comprise equity and equality respectively. The fanciful fight for equality is endless and cannot come to fruition, thereby becoming a fantastically senseless scheme. Equity, by contrast, is a realizable cause, hence sensible. In actuality, anyone can seek and get equity. Justice ought to be fought by male and female grownups alike for not only the girl child but also the boy child. The fire is in our bellies; that humanity is in us all, regardless of descent or social standing. It is this humanness—the quality of compassion or consideration for others—that drives us to the fairness cause. The fight should be equity for all: male, female, race of any kind, albinos, the disabled, etc. It is a dream worth fighting and dying for. This worthiness makes the fight timeless. With this cause in mind, gender identity and gender role will be less misunderstood;

harmful gender stereotypes jettisoned; and mutuality between the sexes properly kick-started. Thus the greater cause, which is global peace, will be further encouraged. Equity, not equality, is the panacea. Lasting peace can be attained only if we shun the equality illusion and embrace an LPF (level playing ground) mentality instead. A level playing field mindset is that grim reality, the vehicle that will take us out of the wildness of gender bias to global peace.

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