

Article

Gender in Agency-Structure Debate

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A B S T R A C T

This study sheds light on conceptual debates on domination of agency and structure in socioeconomic stratification. Various angles of thoughts—Marxists, Functionalists, Feminists, New right, and New labor—on defining family and gender role are guiding tools to understand the association between gender and agency-structure. Various perspectives of school of thoughts are taken into account to clarify the debate in order to fulfil the purpose of this article. Criticism on structural approach and agency structure debate manifest the presence of different lines of thought- structural approach as passive objects, household as the most relevant unit of utility maximization, cooperative conflict is important in intra-family decisions, on defining agency and structure. Members of the family, division of labor, decision making roles are influenced by structure; and neither gender nor the structure lonely sufficient to explain the decisions taking in family, is crux of this study. This article concludes by deliberating guiding principle for further study.

Keywords: Agency, Structure, Z-goods, Marxists, Feminists, New Labor, New Right

Introduction

The ability to exercise choice can be thought of in terms of three interrelated dimensions: Resources/ pre-conditions, Agency/ process, and Achievements/ outcomes. The second dimension of power relates to agency- the ability to define one's goals and act upon them (Kabeer, 1999)but also future claims, to both material and human and social resources. Indeed, this agency-structure dichotomy debate is intractable as in individual-society, action-structure, actor-system, part-whole, individualism-holism, micro-macro, voluntarism-determinism, subjectivism-objectivism, and so forth (Carlsnaes, 1992). However, these views-structure and agency-are not dichotomous but co-existing because of the influential post-war innovation to bond agency and structure-the "Social Construction of Reality" theory (Lane, 2001). Agency is unconscious, involuntary, purposeful or goal directed activity (intentional action). According to the Marxist perception, agency states to the capacity of persons to perform and choose their own will based choices, where as structure comes to limit the chances of individuals

in social class like religion, gender, ethnicity, and subculture (Wilson and Shpall, 2012). Agency in organizational form-advertising, employment, governmental, international, and news agency-acts as individual, and structure regulate an agent and his or her decisions (Barker, 2005).

The relative difference in influences from structure and agency is debated-it is unclear to what extent a person's actions are constrained by social systems. Social structure is the decorated social arrangements in society developed and determined by the activities of the individuals.The system of socioeconomic stratification, social institutions, or, patterned social arrangements, and their relation comes under the social structure in macro level while social networking between individuals and organizations comes on the meso scale, Behavior of individuals within the social system is concerned on the micro scale (Wikipedia). The more recent integrative approaches (Connell 2002; Lorber 1994; Ferree, Lorber, and Hess 1999; Risman 1998) treat gender as a socially constructed stratification system (Risman, 2004). Lorber (1994) mentions that gender as an

institution that is rooted as the process of everyday lives in social structure. The family is a social unit based on kinship, marriage and parenthood, and the household is a residential unit based on co-residence for such purposes as production, reproduction, consumption and socialization, are 'naturally' and universally synonymous units (Thompson, 2014).

Checkless freedom transforms to uninhibited form should be the guideline on agency-structure debate where discipline of agency should be maintained by structure. Gender agency tries to override the norms in some cases but needs to come under the established pattern from generation to generation. Although improvement on the structure is influenced by the cultured agency behavior. Structure is our belief that constructs the roadmap in order to take any kinds of decision in the conduction of quality life. New structure on family as in America stated above is interestingly attempting in the context of Nepal too.

Methods and Materials

This article has moved on the way of the secondary information taken from the relevant various studies. This quality-driven article as descriptive academic work has presented the agency structure debate along with the gender. Various scholarly assets on agency and structure basis are used as the main knowledge for concluding the study without using any statistical tools to explain the concept. From the level of deep understanding, it presents the new knowledge-situation, not being in the gender role, directs and drives the process of knowing in the relation of agency and structure-obtained from the comparison of scholarly thoughts of agency and structure regarding the gender.

Discussion

Structure and agency are both broadly pragmatic concepts in social science and are considered among the most tough to state (O'Neill, Balsiger, & VanDeveer, 2004). Present social structure rests upon an unequal division of labor by class and by gender which generates tension, conflict, and change (Hartmann, 1981). The core of this debate is the range of actions that are possible (agency) and the systemic limitations of that action (structure) (Fine, 1992). Representative Interactionist thought believes the strength of linkage between agency and structure has connected with pedigree (Baldwin, 1988). The meta-theoretical debate concerning the proper ontological and explanatory relationship between structure and agency-the so-called "agent-structure problem"-has been the subject of considerable scholarly attention (Imbroscio, 2016).

Thompson (2014) presents various perspectives about changing structure of family and society. The nature and structure of family has been changing over time. Divorce results, one parent family practices, and cohabitation

are prime representatives of the changing structure. In a Marxist-feminist view, the coat of patriarchy and capitalism can be experienced on the organization of production both within and outside the family. Engels argued that the nuclear family developed in capitalist society that solves the problem of inheritance of private property and gave men greater power over women. Socialist generally agree as Marxist perspectives that the economic system has some influences on family however most disagree that the family is shaped by the needs of capitalism. Functionalists believe that the nuclear family is essential for stability of society and passing on culture. Murdock from his research on 250 cultures in 1949 believed that nuclear family was universal and the family is a social group with a common residence and had these functions- sexual, reproductive, economic, educational. Talcott Parsons said, in favor of nuclear family structure, the family retains two functions: primarily socialization-teaching norms and values, and stabilization of adult personalities- family provides emotional support and release from stress of daily life. Warm bath Theory reveals that the family provides a warm loving environment which prevents stress from outside world. It seems that functionalists ignore the dark side of the family and existence of extended family structure. Liberal feminists believe that society holds false belief that women are less capable. Radical feminists see patriarchy as the main form of inequality in society and claim that wives provide emotional support for partners. Marxist feminists see patriarchy as a result of class inequality where most unpaid work is done by women but is invaluable in capitalism. Feminist theories see the economic dependency of women and male domination over female but They ignore gender equality and positive aspects of family life: women may enjoy running the home and raising children. New right perspective is in favor of strengthening marriage and the nuclear family. They do however believe the state should help improve family life. New labor perspective wants to support all the families and believe that structure is less important.

The social structure is never experienced as unfair if men and women do not see themselves correspondingly. The perspective of Risman (2004) to define gender as a social structure where the plane of analysis resembles political and economic constructions. The contrast between kinship and locality as different principles of organization also lies behind the more specific distinction between family and household which prevails in studies of peasant communities (Analysis et al., 2008). Although families and households may overlap in some societies, particularly those that are Western and urban, in others they do not. The challenge of the traditional structure is to adapt the very influential changes that has been occurring in new social stratification like increasing interest on divorce, single-parent families, teenage

pregnancy and unwed mothers, same-sex marriage, and adoption (Edwards, 1987). He further explains the coercion helps to choose gendered path and says that constraint is an important function of structure. Women and men forced into differential social roles are more likely to choose their gendered paths. Understanding how and why an actor of an agency choose one alternative over another is the subject of social structural analysts.

Structural approach is criticized because of its incomplete concentration to human actors as passive objects pushed by impersonal macro-level forces or inefficiently being manipulated by management (Simpson, 1988) and for failing to acknowledge creative struggle and creative action of workers (Murphy, 1988). Economic, technical and organizational processes have different consequences for men and women but that these processes are not themselves gendered (Acker, 1989). The idea, which is not borne out in reality, that the household functions as a single socio-economic unit, organized as an independent entity with clearly defined boundaries that separate it from other households in the socio-economic structure in which it is positioned. (Evans, 1989). The concept of the household as a unified economic entity obviously fails to recognize inter-household resource and labor exchanges and systems of reciprocity. A common form is where some women undertake such domestic work as the minding of children and cooking or fuel and water collection, in order to release others to engage in wage labor or subsistence production (Harris, 1981).

As Evans (1989) has argued, models based on new home economics (NHE) identify the household, rather than the individual, as the most relevant unit of 'utility maximization'. The family is identified as the basic unit not only of production but also of consumption. Its utility derives not simply from the consumption of goods and services purchased in the market place, but also from the range of home-produced goods and services, the so-called 'Z-goods'. Thus, the household does not simply maximize profits but rather it maximizes the joint utility of all its members. Consumption decisions are not necessarily made jointly after all production decisions are made. Gender as well as age and status are all critical determinants in differentiating the mobilization and allocation of family labor to different activities. Not only do the divisions of labor based on gender define reproductive work as women's work but they also segregate the productive work undertaken by men and women in both agricultural and industrial sectors. The third limitation of the NHE concerns the use of the joint utility function to deal with the issue of preference aggregation in relation to both decision making and resource allocation. The male household head may not have any real understanding of the day-to-day problems associated with household welfare, since provisioning is a reproductive

task of women. Men often know little surviving strategy of their wives.

Intra-household decision-making, management and distribution arrangements vary depending on the household form and the nature of the 'conjugal contract' (Dwyer and Bruce, 1988). Men and women not only have differing access to resources, but gender-based responsibilities also result in differences in the management and distribution of resources within the household. 'Cooperative conflict' between men and women are very unlike class conflicts and perception is one important parameter in the determination of intra-family divisions and inequalities (Sen, 1990) and says the most important policy-related issue raised by this debate concerns the extent to which intra-household inequality relates to systematic differences in the economic bargaining power of different family members, and consequently the extent to which employment enhances women's domestic decision-making power in co-operative conflict. Incomes earned by women do not necessarily translate into the same kind of power as that of men. The women of the third World households have a three-layered role-reproductive, productive, and community managing works. Reproductive work, the childbearing and rearing responsibilities is required to guarantee the maintenance and reproduction of the labor force. Productive work usually receipts the form of agricultural work in rural areas, and in urban areas women frequently work in informal sector enterprises located either in the home or the neighborhood. Community managing work of women undertaken in the local community in both urban and rural contexts is effective around the provision of items of collective consumption.

In most third world societies, the stereotype of the man as a breadwinner- that is, the male as a productive worker-predominates, even when it is not borne out in reality. When men perceive themselves to have a role within the household, it is perpetually as the principal income-earner. The feeling of this kind occurs even in the situations where men being without a job is high and productive work of women essentially delivers the primary income. Generally, men do not have a clearly defined productive role does not mean empirically that they do not play with their children or help their women partners with domestic activities. Men also undertake community activities but in markedly different ways from women, reflecting a further sexual division of labor (Jain & Moser, 1995). Understanding the agency's role to recognizing people as responsible persons are central as not only, we are well or ill, but also, we act or refuse to act, and can choose to act one way rather than another (Sen, 2000).

The argument about agency-structure develops for integration despite division (Fine, 1992); the debate depends on the sociological seriousness in choices (Touraine, 1988;

Archer, 1988); and most of the recognition of the debate is contextual (Smith, 1983). As Paul Rock (1979, p, 71) notes, "Situations order and direct the process of knowing." These contexts are shaped by structural forces, and, as a consequence, structures are embedded in the meanings that contexts generate (Fine, 1992).

Conclusion

The agency-structure issue contains two interrelated aspects, the one is strictly ontological, the second is epistemological in a wider logic. The ontological aspect concentrates on the elementary properties of agents and structures, as well as on the rapport between them. The structural polarization of individualism and collectivism should be obviously illustrious from the epistemological aspect of whether agency is to be considered objectively or subjectively (Carlsnaes, 1992).

Agency is actually the performing capacity of an actor to play in a given environment. An agent, an individual embedded in agency, is engaging with the structure. As such agency is one's independent competence or capability to act on one's motivation. This ability acting towards motivation depends on the experiences and perception of individuals in the structures, and one's birth environment. Divergence on the amount of one's agency often causes conflict between parties-parents and children. Sen's cooperative conflict based on perception is one important matter to understand agency structure debate. The gender as social structure is not practiced as oppressive if men and women do not see themselves as correspondingly positioned. The family is identified as the basic unit not only of production but also of consumption. The nature and structure have been changing over time. My strong saying is in favor of Paul Rock notes, "Situations order and direct the process of knowing."

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