How do feminist perspectives explain the relationship between gender inequality and victimisation?

Introduction

About the prolonged history of gender inequality in human history (see Appendix 1 Brief Hitory of Gender Inequality), this essay questions the way feminist perspectives explain the relationship between gender inequality and victimisation. In her revolutionary work *The Second Sex*, Simone De Beauvoir (1949) critically analysed the complex structural establishment that led to the oppression of women. De Beauvoir (1949) identified that the social and economic aspects like class dynamics lead to gender inequality, as women rely on men for financial and social survival. De Beauvoir's existentialist perspective emphasized the need for personal freedom and selection for choices in terms of shaping the identity of women. Further, De Beauvoir's psychoanalytic approach dismantled socio-cultural assumptions of perceiving femininity and criticised gender norms and related expectations enforced in terms of internalising the identity of women in society. It is through such critical introspection that the comprehensive analysis of societal power dynamics and gender-based biases becomes significant for this essay. This essay concentrates on understanding feminist perspectives to gain invaluable insights into the intricate relationship between gender inequality, and victimisation in modern society. In the process, this essay will highlight the urgent need for proactive measures by society and its governance to dismantle oppressive systems and thereby get involved in promoting gender equality and social justice for women.

Feminist perspectives in understanding gender-based inequality and victimisation

In the realm of public spaces, the perspectives of feminist research and initiated activism have remained static in analysing gender inequalities (Crenshaw, 1989). The core perspectives get perpetuated through the intrusive practices that prevail on women in society (Elson, 1994). These

practices are marked in terms of compromising the safety status of women and impinge on the state of freedom bestowed upon them (Fernandez and Nor, 2019). These practices are also identified in the way of constraining the ability of women to navigate and further participate in the leading positions of public life (Bovill et al., 2022). The core ideology behind the concept of "*safety work*" is to understand the ways through which women get burdened with the different responsibilities and the task of ensuring their safety. According to ARUP (2022),

> *Safety work refers to the range of modifications, adaptations, and decisions that women take often habitually to maintain a sense of safety in public spaces. It occupies time and requires energy and effort – all of which could be used for more rewarding activities. Safety work can become an autonomous reflex, especially when in a public space alone as a woman.*

As specified by ARUP (2022), the 'safety work' perceived through feminist perspectives illustrates the complicated and complex interplay of gender inequality and the activities leading to the victimisation of women in public spaces. Vera-Gray (2018, pp. 79-82) referred to the term 'safety work' by the Director of London Met's Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit, Liz Kelly as '*invisible work*' ... '*small alterations to what we do and how we are*'... '*hidden yet necessary work women do about sexual violence*'. By analyzing the power dynamics and determined societal norms, which are responsible for shaping the experiences of women, Liz Kelly referred to an instance of women travelling alone in London at night (Vera-Gray, 2018). As per Liz Kelly, the perceptions towards their safety are very unique, and these perceptions are based on the habitual strategies to react to physical and mental encounters that these women face in public settings (Vera-Gray, 2018). This is the feminist perspective that seeks to challenge and dismantle

the oppressive conditions led by gender-based violence and societal discrimination towards women in general.

Many feminist scholars as stated above, Elson (1994), Fernandez and Nor (2019) and Bovill et al. (2022); emphasized the need to identify the challenges led by social norms and the prevalent power dynamics which are responsible for the act of generating instances of victimisation of women in society. By advocating the need for establishing relevant measures to address the root causes of gender-based violence and by promoting gender equality, these scholars emphasized the creation of better positioning of women in public spaces. In this frontier, the development of feminist perspectives encompasses a set of principles, which are united by key ideologies (Vera-Gray and Kelly, 2020). At the foremost instance, there are assertions related to gender biases that lead to criminal involvement, added by the victimisation and the proceedings under criminal justice systems. Further Vera-Gray and Kelly (2020) noted that feminist perspectives highlight the systemic marginalisation of girls and women in the domain of criminology engraved in patriarchal sexism. The act of marginalisation leads to the perspectives, which deal with gender diversity as per privileges and experiences. This is marked by Vera-Gray and Kelly (2020) as the intersectionality of gender with age, class, ethnicity, race, and sexual orientation. At the final stage, Vera-Gray and Kelly (2020) referred to feminist perspectives that are involved in explaining criminal phenomena and developing praxis for the construct of an equitable criminal justice framework. However, while illustrating the different feminist perspectives, Vera-Gray and Kelly (2020) made the declarations that there are diverse points of view led by feminists in establishing perspectives under the influence of radical, liberal, Marxist or socialist, postmodern or poststructuralist, and the multiracial ideologies of understanding the position of women in open spaces. However, Bell Hooks (1984) notified at this juncture that feminist critiques

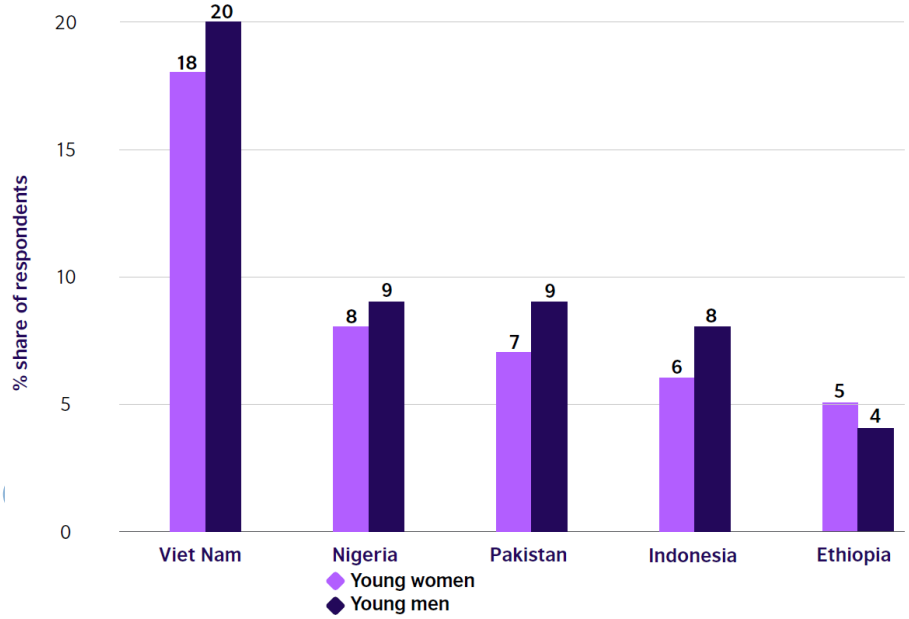
couldn’t be restricted only in terms of addressing the limitations on the experiences maintained by privileged groups, especially middle-class and upper-class white women. Bell (1984, p.51) introduced the extended feminist perspective by offering the concept of "*white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy*". Through this concept, bell (1984) testifies to the way intersecting systems of oppression, added by capitalism, racism, and patriarchy, are responsible for shaping and perpetuating gender inequality. While considering Bell’s notion of gender-based feminist perspectives towards the ‘*white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy*’, Nichols (2022) suggested that the feminist perspectives are subject to get structured as per the social forces, which are often aligned in a unified direction and are also subject to get diverged. However, Nichols (2022) proposed that perceiving varied feminist perspectives might not be accurately depicted because of the complexities in maintaining social dynamics; rather it is the simplification and the act of reduction of these perspectives that is responsible for serving a belief for considering social transformation.

Critical evaluation of intersectionality of gender in socio-cultural power dynamics

Becker et al. (2022) critically evaluated the context of intersectionality of gender, which is led by social factors, like class, race, and sexuality. According to Becker et al. (2022), the intersecting identities are liable to exacerbate experiences of Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse (IPV/A) for marginalised people, keeping women at extensive risk. The core factor for the instance of IPV/A gets recognised as power imbalances within intimate relationships, added by the socio-cultural structures that perpetuate inequality and cause abuse as a generalised practice. In this context, based on the World Values Survey of 2022, developed by Haerpfer et al. (2022); it has been established that many men and women perceive that violence against women and young

girls is a normal act and is accepted by their society. As illustrated in Figure 1, 18% of young women and 20% of young men between the age group of 16–34 years believed '*it's justifiable for a man to beat his wife*'. British Council (2024) found that this belief is considered less among the Ethiopian population but is highly maintained among the Vietnamese socio-cultural set-up.

Figure 1 Responses who believe it is justifiable for a man to beat his wife (in %)

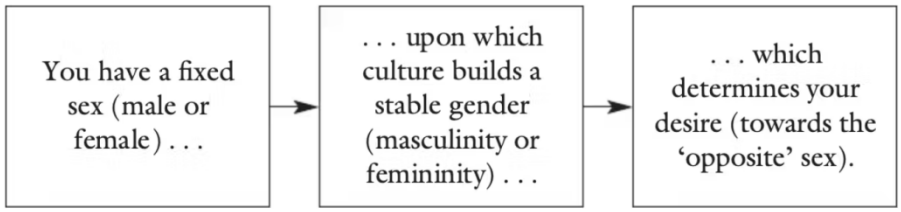


Source: British Council (2024, p. 20)

As the grassroots structure of the victimisation of women in society gets investigated Butler (1997, p.2) offers a very intriguing perspective. Butler (1997) argued that sex is "*not a simple fact or static condition of the body*" but like gender, it is *"part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs"* through performative acts. It is the Theory of Performative by Judith Butler that challenges the traditional notion of considering sex as a fixed biological fact, rather than a construct to be attained through repeated performative acts, which are governed by socio-cultural norms. Such initiative by Butler clarified the notion of perceiving the provisions through which gender roles are played in society and the way these roles are expected and imposed to remain innate upon individual's practices. On a much critical frontier, Gauntlett

(2008), summarised the ideological feministic perspective of Butler and identified that it is culture that compels people to take sex in terms of a biological given, which further is responsible for dictating the given gender and its sexual desires (see Figure 2).

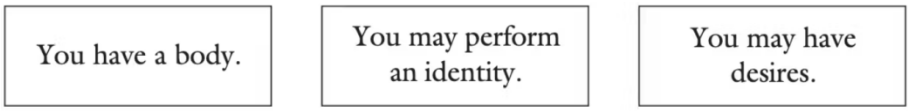
Figure 2 Identification of Sex Deferred from Gender



Source: Gauntlett (2008)

Gauntlett (2008) illustrated that Butler's Theory of Performative is very adamant in stating that people should not accept sex, gender, and desire follow each other and by shattering the interrelated connection Butler declared that sex, gender, and feeling of desire must not conform under any binary structure. On the contrary, there should be a matrix that must replace the structural construct of Figure 3 and identify Body, Identity and Desires as separate entities.

Figure 3 Separated Notions for Body, Identity and Desire



Source: Gauntlett (2008)

While investigating the feminist discourse in societal power dynamics, Gilson (2016) referred to the gendering of vulnerability along with its implications over the act of victimisation. As per Gilson (2016), it is the interrelation between the state of vulnerability with femininity and the fragile status of women's bodies that perpetuates harmful gender-based norms and further reinforces power imbalances in society. By connecting vulnerability with female sexuality,

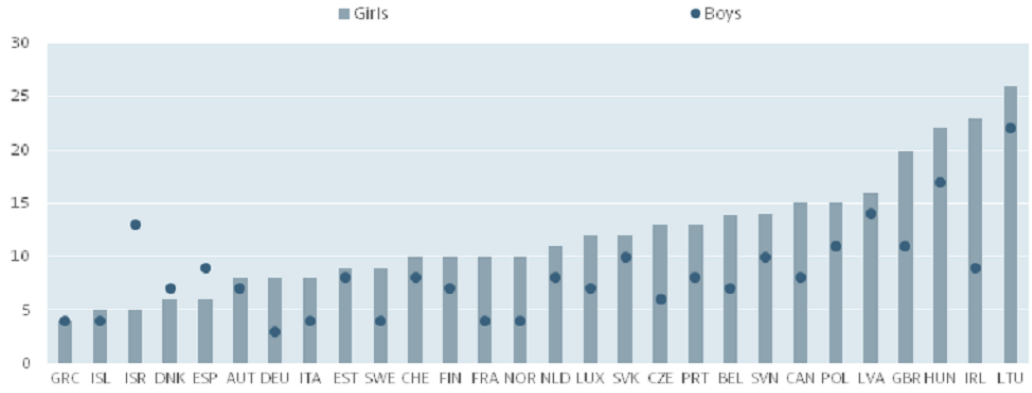
Gilson (2016) identifies violability, whereby society naturalises violence against women and refers to the reductive realisation of vulnerability. This in turn captures different experiences of vulnerability and perpetuates varied aspects of victimhood. From the perspectives held by Gilson (2016), it can be marked that vulnerability contributes to the process of exploitation of female victims, especially those without normative gender roles. As these aspects get deauthorised, gender-based victimisation becomes societal norms and perpetuates cycles of marginalisation and victimisation. In extension of this perspective, De Búrca et al. (2024, p. 25) implied the term '*pink ghetto'* for the instance of the pervasive gender gap in academia, especially legal academy; where women suffer from the underrepresented status of '*non-tenure-track positions'* with low pay, and job insecurity. On the periphery of societal inequalities, these practices obstacle the advancement of professional women and encourage discriminatory practices and systemic barriers in the professional domain. On a critical note, Búrca et al. (2024) raised the concern of consequences-based and justice-based positioning of women in society, whereby detrimental effects of the gender gap causing limited professional recognition for women and morally imperative effort to rectify gender disparities get identified respectively.

Feminist perspectives towards gender-based victimisation in the realm of cyberspace

On an advanced periphery, feminist perspectives have also flourished in the realm of cyberspace. In cyberspace, the feminist perspectives are involved in analysing *technology-facilitated sexual violence and harassment* (TFSV) towards women (Henry and Powell, 2015, p. 759). Irrespective of the pervasive nature of TFSV, Henry and Powell (2015) derived that TFSV reflects as well as reinforces the trend of traditional gender hierarchies and unequal gender biases, which are meant to perpetuate harm against the marginalised women, especially those from minority groups.

Henry and Powell (2015) identify TFSV as the '*embodied harms*', which stands challenging for making binary distinctions between the offline and online realms and relies on the interconnectedness of the physical and the digital experiences of the users. Extensively, Henry and Powell (2018) investigated how the identified gender-based violence is liable to manifest online violence and victimisation. The most practised provisions are through online sexual harassment, cyberstalking, gender-based harassment, sexuality-based harassment, image-based sexual exploitation, video-based sexual exploitation, and the manipulation of respective online social media platforms to coerce victims into non-consent sexual acts. While referring to the Tripartite Cybercrime Framework (TCF), Lazarus (2019) noted that gender-based cyber victimisation is due to socioeconomic status, psychosocial conditions, and the geopolitical location of the users. Lazarus et al. (2021) distinguished socio-economic from psychosocial cybercrimes and identified that the instances of digital crimes are not limited to any particular gender. Based on the empirical research for TCF, Lazarus et al. (2021) established that socio-economic cybercrime is meant through online fraudulent activities, which lay impact people from all gender and ages, whereas psychosocial cybercrime such as cyberbullying, cyberstalking, revenge porn, and online harassment is mostly targeted on younger generation irrespective of their gender. However, Lazarus et al. (2021) also noted that the acts of cyber victimisation are notably higher in young girls than in boys. The report from OECD (2019) confirmed that the female gender is more harassed in cyberspace than their counterpart (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 Global report on Gender-based Cyber harassment



Source: OECD (2019)

As marked in Figure 4, the OECD (2019) reported that women face more instances of disproportionate exposure to cyberbullying as compared to men. While referring to the correlation between cyberbullying and the issues related to mental health, the OECD (2019) specified that on average, 12% of 15-year-old girls against 8% of 15-year-old boys are reported experiencing cyberbullying. The report confirmed that the girls are targeted through different kinds of digital platforms more frequently. The report also added that cyberbullying is notably prevalent in nations from Eastern Europe, especially Ireland and the United Kingdom.

By addressing gender disparities in general and digital platforms in particular, the OECD (2019a) identified various sociocultural norms, which are responsible for hindering the participation of women in digital domains. These norms were marked for contributing biases ingrained in the very education system of the society (OECD, 2019a). In terms of gaining digital capabilities, the OECD specified that women particularly young girls are limited in developing the capacity to capitalise on digital opportunities and such restrictions cause barriers in their later lives. The report also declared that females are more prone to anxiety caused by computers and are twice as likely to anticipate careers in the sectors of engineering or science (OECD 2019a). Such a sense

of disinterest is detected as the major concern for various cases of victimisation of women in cyberspace.

A discussion on restricting gender victimisation with futuristic endeavours

In terms of generating better provisions for securing gender-based victimisation and preventing gender inequality, the European Parliament have initiated eight legislative and non-legislative policies. From the feministic perspectives upheld by Lomba et al. (2021), the effectiveness of these policies is counted by the ratification of the Istanbul Convention and by the development of legislation to restrict violence against women. Provisions for developing an EU directive for restricting gender-based violence in cyberspace, and delineating crime prevention measures are also marked as important. Further, there are recommendations for making amendments to the EU legal framework to prevent victimisation, encourage awareness-raising initiatives, support victims and safeguard them from future assaults (Lomba et al., 2021). Lomba et al. (2021) further emphasised empirical research in preventing gender inequality and asked for collaboration with various IT companies to detect and restrict any kind of victimisation. However, questions remain when it comes to the female offenders in the domain of victimisation.

On a wider scale, Cruz et al. (2023) referred to Europe for specifying that here the percentage of women imprisoned has been marked as stable as against any other region of the world. Cruz et al. (2023) acknowledged that though variations exist among different nations, and crimes are marked differently, the importance of interpreting crime, contexts on victimisation and implementation of penal policies vary even within Europe. However, Cruz et al. (2023) forwarded the major debate about the treatment of female offenders and asked for reformations

as per situation-based crime type, and the reassessing concerns of judgements based on ethnicity, race, criminal history, and the state of caregiving responsibilities. Cruz et al. (2023) appeal to the criminal justice system to address the concerns of overrepresentation and various discriminatory treatment of trans inmates during the sentencing of female offenders.

In terms of managing such instances, Dixon (2024) refers to the initiatives led by the United States to prevent cases of cyberbullying, develop digital security and protect young internet users, especially the female gender in particular. Dixon (2024) noted that in 2018, out of 50 states of the US, 48 states enacted cyberbullying laws, with adequate penalties for different kinds of electronic harassment. Moreover, 26 states enacted over-sexting laws, and 42 states vehemently restricted revenge porn (Dixon, 2024). Further, the US government has regulated social media platforms to maintain accountability caused of the prevalence of online attacks. Under such pressure from the US government, in the year 2019, Facebook scrutinised its user accounts and removed 11 million bullying-related content (Dixon, 2024). However, irrespective of all these initiatives Dixon (2024) emphasised that users should report cyberbullying, especially gender-based issues because the unreported cases lead to the ongoing trends of incomprehensive efforts towards digital safety.

Consequently, it can be established that in an age driven by the growing socio-economic conscience that emphasises the pursuit of equality in every possible domain, the relevance of feminist perspectives stands effective in understanding the concerns of gender inequality. These perspectives offered a determined mode of framework for gaining insight into gender interplay and the concerns leading to inequality, added by the consequences of victimisation in different corners of the world. It is through this essay that the wide-ranged feminist discourse gets

investigated to unravel multifaceted power dynamics and the instances of vulnerability led by sociocultural belief systems.

Considering the critical evaluation of different feminist perspectives, this essay acknowledges that gender-based inequality persists deeply in modern societal structures and is spanning realms from economics to culture. Moreover, it has been marked that the instances of gender inequality are much illustrated through the provisions of intersectionality, whereby feminist scholars could detect the compounding effects of diverse axes of identity, like class, race, and sexuality. Based on the examination of gender-based victimisation, this essay also established that the disparities are much more active even in the digital realm. Thus, based on the feministic way of investigating gender inequality and victimisation in cyberspace, this essay leads the thread for innovative strategies and fosters relevantly justified equitable societies, which is asked to commit towards the act of amplifying marginalised voices and thereby dismantling oppressive structures.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Brief Hitory of Gender Inequality

Period	Description
Prehistoric	Early hunter-gatherer societies often exhibited relatively egalitarian gender roles, with men and women sharing tasks and responsibilities. However, gender divisions of labor began to emerge with the advent of agriculture.
Ancient Civilizations	Many ancient civilizations, such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome, were characterized by patriarchal social structures where men held primary authority and power. Women were often relegated to domestic roles and had limited legal and political rights.
Middle Ages	Feudalism and the rise of Christianity reinforced traditional gender roles, with women's status further restricted. The feudal system emphasized male inheritance and control over property, while the church promoted the subordination of women within marriage and religious institutions.
Renaissance	The Renaissance period saw some advancements in women's education and participation in the arts and literature, but gender inequality persisted, with women largely excluded from public life and intellectual pursuits.
Industrial Revolution	The Industrial Revolution brought significant changes to gender dynamics, as women increasingly entered the workforce in factories and mills. However, they faced harsh working conditions, low wages, and limited opportunities for advancement.
19th Century	The 19th century saw the emergence of feminist movements advocating for women's suffrage, legal rights, and access to education. Despite progress in some areas, gender inequality remained entrenched in social, economic, and political spheres.
20th Century	The 20th century witnessed landmark achievements in women's rights, including suffrage, reproductive rights, and increased workforce participation. Second-wave feminism emerged, focusing on issues such as gender discrimination, sexual liberation, and equal pay. However, disparities persisted, particularly for women of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, and marginalized communities.
21st Century	The 21st century has seen continued efforts to address gender inequality through legislative reforms, social activism, and cultural shifts. Third-wave feminism has expanded the discourse to include intersectionality, transgender rights, and global perspectives on gender justice. Challenges remain, including the gender pay gap, gender-based violence, and systemic discrimination.

Sources: Reynolds (2014), OECD (2015), Giuliano (2017), Lewis (2019) & Vartija and Bermejo (2023)