

Reflections on Gender Inequality in Selected Poems by Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman

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Abstract

The study titled "Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman's Selected Poems: A Reflection of Gender Inequality" aims to explore the factors influencing gender inequality and investigate its impact on female characters depicted in poems by Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman. The research adopts a qualitative approach, involving the examination of Gilman's poems to identify instances of gender inequality, which are then analyzed using Judith Lorber's gender inequality theory (2001). The findings reveal that gender inequality manifests in various aspects such as economic structure, material conditions, and family dynamics. Additionally, the effects of gender inequality are reflected in women's roles, sexuality, and emotional experiences. Through her poetry, Gilman addresses themes related to women's issues and challenges..

Keywords: *racism, critical race theory, struggle, oppression*

A. Introduction

Gender, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), encompasses the roles, attributes, traits, attitudes, and behaviors that evolve within societies. WHO further clarifies that gender is socially constructed and pertains to the characteristics of women, men, girls, and boys, including norms, behaviors, and roles associated with each gender, as well as their relationships with one another. Gender, being a social construct, varies across societies and may evolve over time (Kari, 2021).

From this definition, gender can be understood as the behavioral roles assigned to women and men within a community. For instance, in many societies, childcare and household chores are predominantly assigned to women, while financial provision and employment opportunities are often designated for men. Similar to race, ethnicity, and class, gender serves as a significant social category that significantly influences an individual's lifestyle and societal participation, with women often bearing the brunt of resulting inequalities.

Gender inequality, prevalent in various communities and countries, manifests in the perception that women occupy a different status and role than men. According to Lorber (2001, p. 9), "Gender inequality is built into the structure of the gendered social order because the two statuses, women and men, are treated differently and have significantly different life chances." These persistent disparities pose significant

challenges for women in various aspects of their lives, hindering their opportunities for advancement and equality.

A common manifestation of gender inequality is the phenomenon of the "double burden" experienced by women, where they are expected to juggle multiple responsibilities, including household chores and professional careers. This burden is exacerbated by societal stereotypes that portray women as emotionally fragile and incapable of undertaking physically demanding tasks. Consequently, women are often excluded from occupations requiring physical labor, resulting in limited employment opportunities and financial independence.

Furthermore, gender inequality is evident in disparities in retirement benefits and wages between men and women. Women typically receive lower retirement benefits and salaries compared to their male counterparts, leading to financial insecurity in their later years. This disparity is attributed to factors such as career interruptions for childcare and the gender pay gap, further exacerbating economic inequalities between genders (Oppenheim, 2020).

Gender inequality is not only prevalent in real-life scenarios but also depicted in literary works, such as poetry. Writers like Sylvia Plath and Maya Angelou have explored gender stereotypes and societal expectations in their poems, shedding light on the struggles faced by women in navigating societal norms and expectations. Plath's "The Applicant" and Angelou's "Still I Rise" both address themes of gender inequality and the struggle for women's empowerment, offering poignant commentary on societal injustices.

This study seeks to analyze gender inequality in women as depicted in selected poems by Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman. By examining Gilman's poetry, including works such as "The Anti-Suffragists," "To the Indifferent Women," "The Mother's Charge," "The Housewife," and "To the Young Wife," the research aims to elucidate the various aspects and effects of gender inequality on women's lives portrayed in her works.

The choice of Gilman's poems for analysis is motivated by their focus on women's issues and feminism, providing rich material for exploring gender inequality themes. Through this study, the researcher endeavors to contribute to a deeper understanding of gender inequality and its impact on women, highlighting the enduring relevance of these issues in contemporary society.

Based on the foregoing, the research questions are formulated as follows:

- What aspects of gender inequality are evident in women characters portrayed in Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman's poems?
- What are the effects of gender inequality on women characters depicted in Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman's poems?.

B. Method

The research method for this study employs a qualitative approach to analyze gender inequality as depicted in selected poems by Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth exploration of complex social phenomena, such as gender inequality, by examining the meanings and interpretations embedded within texts (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In this study, qualitative analysis facilitates a nuanced understanding of the various aspects and effects of gender inequality portrayed in Gilman's poems. Data collection for this study involves reading and analyzing Gilman's poems, including "The Anti-Suffragists," "To the Indifferent Women," "The Mother's Charge," "The Housewife," and "To the Young Wife." These poems serve as primary sources of data, offering insights into the experiences and perspectives of women characters as depicted by the author. Through close reading and thematic analysis, the researcher identifies patterns, themes, and representations related to gender inequality within the selected poems. The analysis is guided by the theoretical framework of gender inequality, drawing on scholarly literature and theoretical perspectives on gender studies. Specifically, the researcher utilizes Judith Lorber's theory of gender as a social construct to interpret and contextualize the portrayals of gender roles, norms, and inequalities within Gilman's poems (Lorber, 2001). By applying this theoretical lens, the study aims to uncover the underlying social constructions and power dynamics that shape the gendered experiences of the characters in Gilman's poetry.

C. Findings and Discussion

This chapter delves into the analysis of the aspects and effects on women characters revealed through stanzas in selected poems by Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman. Through an examination of these poems, the writer aims to analyze gender inequality and its various impacts on women in their familial and domestic spheres. The aspects and effects depicted in these selected poems shed light on the challenges faced by women, ultimately contributing to the perpetuation of gender inequality.

1. Aspects of Gender Inequality in Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman's Poems

Several aspects of gender inequality depicted in Gilman's poems portray one gender, particularly women, as weaker and in a subordinate position. Women often find themselves excluded or disadvantaged in decision-making processes and access to economic and social resources. Lorber (2001, p. 40) contends that Marxist and socialist feminist theories identify economic structures and material aspects of life as primary sources of gender inequality. Additionally, shifts in production modes throughout history, from hunting and gathering to industrialization, have altered the social organization of work and family, perpetuating gender disparities (Lorber, 2001, p. 40).

These inequalities are vividly portrayed in Gilman's poems, where women are predominantly assigned domestic roles and responsibilities within the family. Mothers, in particular, play a crucial role in imparting essential skills and values to their daughters, perpetuating traditional gender roles. The family unit serves as a primary site for maintaining gender differences, with women shouldering the bulk of household duties and childcare responsibilities (Lorber, 2001, p. 185).

In Gilman's poems, women characters are depicted as responsible for maintaining household order and nurturing their families, often at the expense of their own aspirations and autonomy. Despite the laborious nature of their roles, women's contributions are undervalued and overshadowed by societal expectations and gender norms. This unequal distribution of labor reinforces gender inequalities, limiting women's opportunities for personal and professional fulfillment.

2. Effects of Gender Inequality in Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman's Poems

Gender inequalities depicted in Gilman's poems have profound effects on women's lives, shaping their experiences and opportunities. Failure to address these inequalities perpetuates exploitation of women's labor, sexuality, and emotions, hindering their autonomy and agency (Lorber, 2001, p. 258). Women are expected to fulfill their duties diligently while suppressing their emotions and desires, further reinforcing their subordinate status.

In Gilman's poems, the effects of gender inequality are evident in women's labor and emotional experiences. Women characters are depicted as overworked and burdened by household responsibilities, with little time for personal pursuits or self-care. Despite their contributions to the family unit, women's labor is often undervalued and taken for granted, exacerbating their economic dependence and social marginalization.

Emotionally, women in Gilman's poems are portrayed as suppressing their feelings and desires to maintain familial harmony and stability. They are expected to prioritize the needs and happiness of their families above their own, perpetuating societal expectations of self-sacrifice and emotional labor. This emotional repression can have detrimental effects on women's mental health and well-being, further perpetuating their vulnerability and subordination.

Gilman's poems serve as poignant reflections of the multifaceted nature of gender inequality and its pervasive effects on women's lives. By analyzing these aspects and effects, we gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by women and the urgent need to address gender disparities in society.

D. Conclusion

Based on the analysis, the writer finds the aspects and effects of gender inequality in women according to Lorber (2001), the aspects come from economical structure, material, and family. Women have absolute housework jobs such as cleaning and taking care of the family, as well as different views that where women are the gender that has a lower position than men and women are on the wrong side while men are in the truth. As stated in the Lorber theory which has been described in the analysis women should not get such a difference in status from the kind of work they do. As for the effects of gender inequality on women, which has been analyzed from several selected poems by Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman, it can be concluded that from the aspect of sexuality in women's gender status and emotions possessed by women and shown from the work they have, women inevitably have to work taking care of the household. and put aside their ego. From the effects in causing things that are not good their emotions.

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