

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol.6.Issue.1.2019 (Jan-March)

ISSN

INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

FATE OF GENDER CONFLICTS AT WORKSTATION IN JOAN WILLIAM'S
"UNBENDING GENDER"

JOSEPHINE PRINCEY

Department of English, Research Scholar, K.G.College of Health Sciences
Tamilnadu – Coimbatore-641035

doi: <https://doi.org/10.33329/ijelr.6119.170>



ABSTRACT

Literature teaches us how to live. It mirrors the society and its mannerism. Literature has helped the civilization to overcome the darkness of savagery and it is the torch bearer for the humanity. The literature path conveys emotion and psychological explanation of human behaviours. In the absence of the great Ramayana and Vedas, India would not have been called as "Golden birds" Similarly without literature Greece cannot be called as European civilization. Literature plays a vital role in bringing up the society mentally and economically.

In *Unbending Gender*, Joan Williams takes a hard look at the state of feminism in America. Concerned by what she finds--young women who flatly refuse to identify themselves as feminists and working-class and minority women who feel the movement hasn't addressed the issues that dominate their daily lives--she outlines a new vision of feminism that calls for workplaces focused on the needs of families and, in divorce cases, recognition of the value of family work and its impact on women's earning power. Williams shows that workplaces are designed around men's bodies and life patterns in ways that discriminate against women, and that the work/family system that results is terrible for men, worse for women, and worst of all for children. She proposes a set of practical policies and legal initiatives to reorganize the two realms of work in employment and households--so that men and women can lead healthier and more productive personal and work lives. Williams introduces a new 'reconstructive' feminism that places class, race, and gender conflicts among women at center stage. Her solution is an inclusive, family-friendly feminism that supports both mothers and fathers as caregivers and as workers.

KEY WORDS: literature, Feminism , gender conflicts, discriminate

INTRODUCTION

Literature allows a person to step back in time and learn about life on Earth from the ones who walked before us. We can gather a better understanding of culture and have a greater appreciation of them. We learn through the ways history is recorded, in the forms of manuscripts and through speech itself. In periods from ancient Egypt, we can gather their history through hieroglyphics and paintings. The symbols Egyptians left behind are what we now use to understand their culture. This is different to Greek and Roman

culture, which is found with greater ease, because of their innate desire for accuracy in their writing. This is the power that words have. They have the ability to spark a meaning, reform a nation and create movements while being completely eternal. Inevitably, they will outlive their speaker.

The impact of literature in modern society is undeniable. Literature acts as a form of expression for each individual author. Some books mirror society and allow us to better understand the world we live in. Authors like F.Scott Fitzgerald are prime examples of this as his novel 'The Great Gatsby' was a reflection of his experiences and opinions of America during the 1920s. We are easily connected to the psyche of authors through their stories. However, literature also reiterates the need to understand modern day issues like human conflict.

A Gulf News article says, "In an era of modern media, such as television and movies, people are misled into thinking that every question or problem has its quick corrections or solutions. However, literature confirms the real complexity of human conflict". Literature is a reflection of humanity and a way for us to understand each other. By listening to the voice of another person we can begin to figure out how that individual thinks. I believe that literature is important because of its purpose and in a society, which is becoming increasingly detached from human interaction, novels create a conversation.

The author Joan C. Williams is a prominent feminist legal scholar whose work focuses on the issues faced by women in their workstation. She was born in the year 1952 and serves currently as the founding director at the center for Work Life Law. She is also a Distinguished Professor Law at the University of California, Hastings School Law. She also contributes to Harvard Business review blog, the Huffington Post, and the Psychology Today blog. The author's works include *White Working Class*, *What Works for Women at Work*, *Reshaping the working family debate*. She also has played a central role in documenting how work-family conflict affects working-class families, through reports such as "One Sick Away From Being Fired", "Three Faces of Work Family Conflict" and more.

The concept of gender refers to the socially and culturally construed roles of women and men in a society. A focus on gender enables an analysis not only of the different role, but also of the different opportunities that women and men have in a given social setting. Inequality might well be a cause for conflict, but conflict also amplifies inequality. Yet such instability does not necessarily aggravate gender inequality. In fact, its transformative impulses can provide room for those disadvantaged by gender roles to renegotiate their identities.

DISCUSSION

In Joan C.Williams' *Unbending Gender* Mary works as a secretary, from nine to six. She has been conflicted ever since her children were born. Every day she leaves my kids at child care, she thinks to herself: What kind of a mother am I? It's like I'm not raising my own kids. Today her kids are ten and sixteen. By the time she gets home, they have been at school and the after school program for nearly ten hours. Because she is not around to drive them, her daughter cannot take ballet with her friends; her son is not in Boy Scouts. If you can afford the cut in pay for the hours, the ideal situation would be to her home when they get home from school, 3P.M.,so you can take them to ballet and Boy Scouts. She asks her boss to cut down her hours. He won't hear of it. In the book *Gendering War Talk* Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott say that "When the soldiers march through the town, the girls open their windows and their doors". It means that when men go to war women stay at home and see the war.(4)

Susan worked hard in college and law school, and got a job doing work she loved. Then she had kids and cut back to a part time forty hour week. She became increasingly dissatisfied as she saw the best assignments going elsewhere and her own work becoming more and more routine. Mean while, her husband's high pressure job kept him away from home much of the time. Ultimately they decided it would be best for everyone if she quit. While she believes she made the right decision, she feels at a loss because she has to choose between work and family in a society that defines adulthood as having both. There are so many hard questions. When there was no choice, maybe it was easier. Now there is a choice, which is good, but it is hard.

There are times when she would really like to be out there in the career she more or less gave up. But she couldn't stand losing the time with her children. In *Women and Men at Work* Irene Padavic and Barbara Reskin say that "there was a lot of pornography on the job, and when I would complain about take it down and they would put up more". (13)

The book *Unbending Gender* is about women like Mary and Susan, but it is not only about women. It is also about men like Doug, who works two jobs to support his family. Still, the bills mount up. He is more and more frustrated and depressed, finally he has to admit that his wife must go back to work. I know she doesn't mind working but it shouldn't have to be that way, he says morosely. A guy should be able to support his wife and kids. But that's not the way it is these days, is it?

It is also about men like Mark, an executive who regularly worked sixty or seventy hours a week while his wife stayed home with the kids. He missed his children's birthdays, their soccer games, the school play, and father daughter banquets. When he died of a heart attack at fifty seven, his widow invited no one from the company to speak at the funeral. Why should I? She asked a friend. It was the company that killed him. An anthropologist Gayle Rubin said "A taboo against the sameness of men and women divides the sexes into two mutually exclusive categories, there by creates Gender". (1975:178)

This book provides a framework for understanding their commonality, for analysing their cause and consequences, and for transforming the conditions that produce them. It links them all to our system of organizing market work and family work, which leads not only to work conflict, the time famine, working class anger, and early death among successful men; it also leads to high rates of childhood poverty.

The book *Unbending Gender* examines our system of providing for children's care by placing their caregivers at the margins of economic life. This system that stems from the way we define our work ideals, notably from our definition of the ideal worker as one who takes no time off for childbearing and who works full-time and is available for overtime. The ideal-worker norm clashes with our sense that children should be cared for by parents. The result is a system that is bad for men, worse for women and disastrous for children. Williams documents that mothers remain economically marginalized and points out that when mothers first marginalize and then divorce, their children often accompany them into poverty. Williams argues that "designing workstations around the bodies of also engages the work literature to show that flexible workstations are often better than existing practices for employers' bottom line".

The central goal of the book is to persuade women to think about their own lives in a different way, not as expressions of personal priorities that occur within their heads but as a clash between the way society tells women that children should be raised and the way it chooses to organize market work.

Ideal worker analysis points out that our work ideal is not untendered. It is framed round the traditional life patterns of men and so discriminates against women. Women who no attribute their difficulties to work conflict inside their heads need to begin identifying the problem as discrimination that exists in the outside world. Her goal is to give women a sense of entitlement to a work world restructured to eliminate labour market hostility to working mothers.

Reconstructive feminism represents a gain in another way as well. While the commitment of younger feminists to caregiving roles and feminise gender display at one level represents a disappointing return to traditionalism, at another level it represents a far healthier development. For while many older feminists knew that they had to act just like the men if they were to have any glimmer of a chance to succeed in a man's job, many younger women feel a sense of entitlement to good jobs on their own terms. People now in their twenties, men as well as women, want to put limits on work time in order to leave time for family life.

There is no reason why women should not be able both to keep on doing the work they want to do and to behave in other ways as women traditionally have. Translating these sentiments into the language of feminist theory, this generational shift means that the time is ripe to challenge the masculine norms that frame market work, framed as they are around a vision of masculinity that appeals to few women and ever fewer men. Younger women's sense of ownership fuels a rich reservoir of gender anger that can be combined

with the fury over the treatment of women upon divorce. Her goal is to channel both into the work of reconstruction, working in alliance with men. In *Site of Violence* Wenona giles and Jennifer Hyndman say that "Gender links violence at different points on a scale reaching from the personal to the international, from the home and the back street to the man oeuvres of the tank column and the sortie of the stealth bomber". (5)

In *Unbending Gender*, Joan Williams addresses the conflicts for women and men in the current structuring of market work and family work. Both structures rely, she argues, on particular norms of domesticity and the ideal worker. These are central concepts in William's carefully developed thesis that traditional families and traditional work do not serve men, women, or children well. All segments of our society are limited and ultimately harmed by our commitment to an antiquated view of who should do family work and what the ideal worker must do to be valued.

The solutions proposed by Williams are challenging and far ranging;

- 1) Increased awareness is needed of the problematic social attitudes
- 2) Courts must recognize the exclusion of mothers from particular jobs as they don't fit into the male norms as sex discrimination, including a scrutiny of jobs require significant travel and overtime , where mothers tend not to "choose" as they are rarely able to perform in the idealized worker model.
- 3) Instead of adopting a joint-property proposal, courts must abandon the view of wages as the property of earner.
- 4) Legislation is required to enact more parental support for children ie childcare,healthcare and paid leave.
- 5) Feminism need to be reconstructed to focus less on dominance and violence and more on market and family equality.
- 6) It is necessary to unbend the languages of gender to enable people to correctly choose how to negotiate their own gender roles.
- 7) Finally parents are encouraged to resist the force field of gender to settle into tidy, separated roles, but use their force to reshape parental expectations and norms for all workers.

Works Cited

Williams, Joan. *Unbending Gender*. New York: Oxford University Press,2000.

Cooke, Miriam and Woollacott, Angela. *Gendering War Talk*. New Jerser: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Pavadic, Irene and Reskin, Barbara. *Women and Men at Work*. London: Pine Forge Press,2002

Giles, Wenona and Hyndman, Jennifer. *Site of Violence*. London: University of California Press,2004.