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Rethinking media's understanding of individual differences: A progressive idealist perspective

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Abstract
This paper reports on how a two-pronged approach has been predominantly used to settle the tension on differences and the parameters of determining differences. The biological essentialist and the social constructionist approaches consider differences as a function of biology and social role assignments respectively. The media in their role as culture transmitters propagate individual differences on the basis of sex and gender, encapsulating the dichotomy of what makes us different as a reflection of the dominant approaches. In today's fast-changing society however, the purview within which differences is understood has widened because changes in rhetoric, phenotypic and social differentiations have resulted in confusions about where to fit what. Existing perspectives can no longer sufficiently determine individual differences. This paper argued therefore that a third perspective for determining differences is apt. The progressive idealist perspective as a contemporary means of understanding identity as a difference marker was proposed and discussed. The paper concluded by advocating for media's renewed understanding of differences within a framework that propagates open-mindedness, continuous learning, inclusivity and tolerance which are the principles of the progressive idealist perspective on what makes us different.

Keywords: Differences, sex, gender, identity, progressive idealist, media

Introduction

Perspectives put forward on differences as frameworks for explaining the inherent dissimilarities of individuals have shaped, over the years, society's understanding of what makes us different. Differences in individuals have been the major illogical reason for discrimination and subjugation. The ideology of feminism for instance, which challenges the age-old practice of gender-based biases, emerged as a challenge against inequity on the basis of difference. Other differences such as racial, ethnic, religious, class, etc., which have been the bane in the struggle of societies for a harmonious existence that is embedded in fairness and tolerance have in modern times resulted in other global social change movements like the Movement Against Apartheid, Black Lives Matter, Girls' Right to Education, #Me Too, Marriage Equality, Amnesty International, among others (Amnesty International, 2020) [1]. In their role as the agents of social change, the media are saddled with the responsibility of updating the society on emerging issues. In addition to this, it is the duty of the media to set the agenda and the right pace in promoting notable trends by providing the platform for social engagements among relevant actors, whilst taking their place as the forerunners of development. In order to effectively carry out this duty therefore, the media must arm themselves with the knowledge of contemporary practices.

In recent times, the question of 'what makes individuals different' has been of immense interest to scholars in the fields of Humanity and Social Sciences (Fearon, 1999) [26]. In the discipline of mass communication, the individual differences theory is a popular theory that latches on the idea that people are affected by or respond to mass media messages based on their innate and varying distinctiveness, traits and needs. Every individual has unique qualities that cause us to react differently to a given message (Athira, 2011) [2]. The grasping of how individuals are different is apt in understanding why people make the choices that they do and how society can exist in discriminatorily. What then is difference and why is the understanding of the term important?

Difference

Taking definitions from dictionaries, the word 'difference' has been allotted several meanings. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2023) [18], difference (a noun and verb) refers to the quality or state of being dissimilar, unalike, or distinct in nature, form or quality or the process of being distinguished from someone else. Difference could also mean a way in which two or more elements under comparison are not the same, as a fact or in a level (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023) [5]. This means that certain obvious, latent or inexplicable factors that make one person different from another or a process where distinguishing traits put individuals at different sides of a divide is known as difference. Difference is unique as it clearly situates individuals in various positions for varying purposes. This is because sometimes and depending on the circumstances, some people may be similar in some degrees and on some occasions, but dissimilar in others. According to Mishra (2022) [27], the differences in people may vary, but everyone is naturally different in their own way. However, environmental factors could expand our understanding of differences, which could further widen the knowledge gap on how individuals are different. For instance, the uniqueness in individuals' distinct personality traits, behaviour, beliefs, opinions, values and morals, stem from specific social backgrounds, upbringing and life experiences.

Another way of digesting the principle of difference is to consider what Bateson (2014) [28] labels the concept of plasticity. Plasticity can be understood within the spectrum of genetics and stochastics. In his text, Bateson alludes to the differences in people as fluid and elastic, which affords them the leeway to effectively adapt and cope with challenges and abrupt fluctuations and respond in a particular manner to the environment they find themselves. Interestingly, there are aspects in human differences that can be summed up by nature and others that require a case-by-case observation and analysis. Thus, while differences make us who we are, they are also specifically makes us what we are made of, why we do the things that we do, and how we respond to changes around us. This also means that not all forms of differences are known and well understood, and some kinds of differences remain yet to be discovered. However, in carrying out its role as advocates of social inclusivity, the media as essential vehicle for the spread of ideas (Leandros, 2017) [12], are expected to limit conflicts that may arise from unfamiliar differences by advocating for a shared understanding of the natural and the nurtured dissimilarities in members of society whilst doing their part in learning vastly about the trends in differences vis-à-vis what is already known and applied in society.

The Media and Difference

The advent of the internet has changed the mediascape forever. The information society and the way the media messages are disseminated, analysed and understood has experienced a drastic shift from a one-to-many mechanistic information dissemination structure that is targeted at a passive audience, to a many-to-many humanistic structural approach that targets a global, engaging and active audience whose feedback could result in a worldwide revolution. This implies that the new means of sharing information as inscribed in Leandros (2017, p. 2) [12] does not only give the audience the power to share their thoughts on media message, but also afford them the opportunity to use the mediums for "interactive information sharing, interoperability, user-centered design and collaboration on the web". This means that modern issues that appeal to the audience's interest and wellbeing would attract more interactions, massive sharing and intersocial discussions across national frontiers. It is imperative therefore, that the media in carrying out their duties as disseminators, understand the basics of what makes individuals different, and the yardstick for speaking about and applying the differences as these facts, among others would trickle into the way that the audience respond to media texts but more importantly, it would inform their understanding of how they differ from one another on a limited scale and how their differences affect their place, attitude, behaviour, beliefs, values, morals and overall plasticity on a larger scale. As explained in O'Shaughnessy, Stadler, and Casey (2017, p. 31) [22], societies consist of complex networks of groups with different – sometimes overlapping – interests". Because the media show us what exist in the world and help us make sense of it, our notions of what makes us different is largely shaped by the media and their explanations of it.

In explaining the world to us for instance, the media mould and twist narratives in a rhetoric (O'Shaughnessy, et al., 2017) [22]. This is true when we consider the social confines from where the media operates. Every mediascape is an element of a social scape and the media's viewpoints on issues are bound by the realities of that social scape and the language with which the media describe a situation is also limited by the provisions of their social scape. This is explained in O'Shaughnessy, et al., (2017) [22] in their bid to express the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis on the suggestion that media constructions represent cogs in the machine of language. Hence in describing difference, the media hold up the mirror and report what is being reflected albeit within the confines of the language at their disposal. This is a shortfall in narration because society's understanding of difference therefore, as obtained from the media, becomes limited.

The Limitations of Language

Hyman (2017) [15] sums up the issues surrounding language and society's use of specific language as a limitation which hampers development because our ability to conceptualize is the foundation of societal growth. This means that what we create language for is the much we know about and the restraints we construct as the margin of our development. This is accurate if we think about all the changes that have been applied to our language over time. For instance, certain words have recently been added to the dictionary to represent certain emerging thoughts and practices in our society. For instance, 'cryptocurrency', (digital currency used on the internet), 'deepfake' (a recording or image that has been altered convincingly to misinterpret what someone is doing or saying), 'nomophobia' (anxiety about lack of access to a smartphone, mobile phone services or the internet) 'ghost' (to cut communication with someone usually by not answering their phone calls or responding to their text messages) (School Connect, 2023) [16] are words that emerged as a result of technological advancements. Some words are 'new' because they were crafted to suit contemporary society, for example, 'hir' (a gender neutral possessive adjective), 'cringe' (to feel embarrassed or ashamed because of what someone is doing), 'freegan' (a

person who buys as little as possible, uses discarded things and recycles everything that they can), 'stan' (to idolize or excessively love a celebrity), 'mansplain' (how some men explain things to a woman in a condescending and superior-seeming way), etc. (Kitlum, 2022) [19]. This further buttresses the position of O'Shaughnessy, *et al*. (2017) [22] that language possesses limitations because they are neither natural nor neutral, are prone to change and represent the state of growth from one era to another. The boundaries of language in a period of time is a reflection of the way of life at said era. It also represents the convictions of dominant groups in the society and the confinements within which behaviours and actions are regarded as acceptable or unacceptable practices. Suffice it to say that as society is fleeting, so is language and where constructions represent possibilities, the problem becomes a matter of why are we not advancing our philological prowess to allow recorded development?

The need to lexically differentiate between individuals cannot be removed from the motive that is placement. If we realize that the need for placement is born out of human desire for dominance, then we would appreciate the fact that the limitations inherent in language can be weaponized to ensure stagnation, domination, and underdevelopment as is typified by the long-standing perspectives of differences in individuals. The lenses of differences are generally viewed from two dominant perspectives: sex and gender.

Sex
Historically, the earliest description of sex-based differences was in the 1950s when certain academics like John Money and his colleagues, referred to individuals' physical characteristics as the defining features (Muehlenhard & Peterson, 2011) [20]. Prior to this, the term 'sex' was rarely in dialogue. Sex, which is derived from the Latin word '*sexus*' meaning 'the two categories, male and female, is defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2023, Para. 1) [18] as "either of the two major forms of individuals that occur in many species and that are distinguished respectively as female or male especially on the basis of their reproductive organs and structures". Sex is defined by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (2023) as referring to a set of biological attributes in human and animals. It is primarily associated with physical and physiological features including chromosomes, gene expression, hormone levels and function, and reproductive/sexual anatomy (para. 2). Thus, the definition of 'boy' or 'man' is linked to biological characteristics of a 'masculine' person whereas the description of 'girl' or 'woman' is tied to the physical features of being 'feminine'. Sex (and what it means to be either 'boy' or 'girl') is determined at birth and according to O'Shaughnessy, *et al*. (2017) [22], this is perspective of the biological determinists or biological essentialists. This perspective assumes that biological and genetic differences are essentially the distinguishing factors between sexes and as stated in Kessler and McKenna (1978 cited in Sciappa, 2021, p.16), this is "the natural attitude" towards difference. The biological essentialists view sex as a binary system that is based on physical and physiological characteristics. In this perspective, sex is determined by the presence of male or female reproductive organs, hormones, and chromosomes. The biological make-up of an individual for instance, would essentially determine their outward characteristics and capabilities.

For instance, by virtue of their physiology and hormones, "women are naturally more nurturing and gentle, while men are naturally built to be more competitive, aggressive, and powerful because of testosterone and a stronger musculature" (p. 313). This view of sex is often seen as essential or immutable, meaning that it is believed to be inevitable and unchangeable. Biological essentialists also argue that the differences between sexes are phenotypic and based on gamete type, which denotes that distinguishing features can be physically observed by mere looking at the individuals and that there are only two gamete types because there are only two sexes (Elliot, 2022) [8]. The perspective of the biological essentialists reinforces the dominant ideology of a stronger/weaker sex and the view that certain individuals are by the virtue of their birth, designed to take and maintain certain positions in the society. For these thinkers, everything must be considered and understood within this binary spectrum because it is the order of nature. The media reinforces these notions in their portrayals of what a girl can or cannot do vis-à-vis what a boy should or should not do, as can be seen in films and ads, for instance.

Gender
'Gender' is a newer word in comparison to 'sex' and in the 1960s, 'gender' was an extremely uncommon word. Prior to the 1960s, the term 'gender' was not used at all in dialogue and when it formed a part of the English vocabulary (and other languages like French, Spanish and German), it was used to refer to 'grammatical gender' (an opposite of the 'natural gender'), which is a way of classifying nouns as belonging to certain gender (often masculine, feminine or neuter) without regard to the referent of the noun, for instance 'country' is classified as 'female' and the pronouns 'she/her' are used to refer to it. (Farrugia, 2018) [9]. The New Zealand academic, John Money and his colleagues also attempted to define gender from an academic perspective, mostly after their study of 'hermaphrodites', in which they note that gender is a role that bears general mannerisms, deportment and demeanor, that are not exclusive of the society in which they are imbibed and enforced, sometimes in opposing conditions from the individual's preference. (Money 1955, cited in Sciappa 2021) [29].

In 2018, the World Health Organization defined gender as the roles, behaviours, activities, attributes and opportunities that any society considers appropriate for boys and girls, and men and women" (Manandhar *et al*. 2018, p. 29) [30] and the American Psychological Association (2012, p. 11) states that gender "refers to the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex. Behavior that is compatible with cultural expectations is referred to as gender-normative; behaviors that are viewed as incompatible with these expectations constitute gender non-conformity". Gender is a product of constructions. It is a perspective that is propagated by the social constructionists. This perspective according to O'Shaughnessy, *et al*. (2017) [22] regards individual differences as a product of how people are socialized, and the psychology of it. For the social constructionists therefore, gender is a socially constructed and culturally specific concept that is nurtured and interwoven into the fabric of routine, expectations and conformity. In this framework, gender is not determined solely by biological factors but is shaped by cultural and social norms and classifications.

The society in general treat a person differently based on their gender. These distinguished treatments are reinforced by their assigned roles, which are fueled by attitudes and beliefs that inform societal expectations of how the different genders should behave. Furthermore, social constructionists posit that gender roles and expectations are learned and reinforced through socialization, rather than being innate or predetermined. For example, girls may be socialized to be nurturing and emotional, while boys may be socialized to be competitive and assertive. It is typical to say 'men don't cry' and 'women should be homely' in Nigeria, for instance. Gender is seen as a continuum of identities and expressions, rather than a mere binary category. Yet, in many societies today, the predominantly promulgated gamut in the media is binarism. Additionally, the male and female genders are the most acceptable and recognized in some parts of the world. Other genders like the transgender, gender neutral, non-binary, agender, genderqueer, gender fluid, two-spirit, and gender expression are still struggling to gain acceptance into Africa, Asia and the Middle East, whereas Iran's Islamic Penal Code has severe punishments for individuals who attempt to transit through genders (Wareham, 2020) [24].

Interestingly, in O'Shaughnessy, *et al*. (2017) [22], the social constructionists opine that gender is not fixed but can be fluid and change over time. However, this is permissible within the set parameters of assigned roles that endorses society's idea of differences. For instance, gender roles are often interlaced with heterosexuality, love, marriage and family, binding constructions with performance. Hence in Nigeria, it is a 'masculine thing' for a man to marry more than one wife but 'emasculating' for a man to be a *househusband*. Moreso, gender is a function of positivist determination that validates the dominance of the patriarchy and heteronormativity (Butler, 2002 cited in Chris-Biriowu, 2020). This means that the concept of fluidity and likely changes is mostly centered on the male-female dichotomy. For instance, within set environmental parameters, a female may develop more masculine features that are visible in her behaviour and lifestyle just as a male could portray more feminine qualities as typified in their appearance and comportment. Nevertheless, these individuals are considered social deviants. (Levine & Hogg, 2017) [13].

The media in their rhetoric predominantly adopts the positivist determination approach to gender. This is epitomized in the outlook, style and language application of gender-based differences. For example, the general pronouns for labelling and differentiating people are 'he/she/they', where 'he' refers to the singular male, 'she' indicates the singular female, and 'they' is used to refer to the plurality of individuals, regardless of the gender mix. The place of the other genders in society becomes imprecise. As equal members of society, differentiating the other types of genders using assigned pronouns is still a struggle in many parts of the world, particularly in Nigeria. This is an issue that is not excluded from the fact that the perspectives of sex and gender-based differences did take into account the places of individuals who do not fit within the binarism structure.

The Future Conversation
The Fourth Industrial revolution drastically transformed the way the world works. The advent of the internet, digital technologies and the new media disruptively reshaped communication in general and society's perception of the media in particular. Media's explications of differences can be juxtaposed across international discourses. A single ideological concept that is described in a specific media space may gain the attention of audiences from all over the world, instigating social engagements that may eventually incite the interests of other media platforms across the globe, dissecting the discourse albeit within the conspectus of their beliefs, values and norms. As explained in O'Keeffe (2011) [21], media discourse is public, which means that it also falls under the scrutiny of many conversation analysts and stakeholders who are interested in it as a form of institutional talk that shapes opinion, and the fact that media discourse that debuts on the mainstream platforms of newspapers, radio stations, television programmes can spark discussions among a certain demography and then morph into online spaces, attracting a larger, more diverse discussants, makes it viable for rationalizing. This means for instance that should a couple of media personalities take up the conversation of "difference" on television, viewers may form their opinion from what is being said (or not said) and would take their opinions about what they agree or disagree with to a social media platform like Twitter, where one Tweet quickly transforms into a meta-Tweet that provokes endless threads of discussions, which would doubtlessly take the colorations of argument and disagreements, among people who differ in socio-cultural, political, religious, ethnic, racial, gender and national proclivities, on the subject matter. In these situations, the dividing lines between cultures become increasingly blurred as communities and subcultures converge on discursive reasonings and intercultural interlocutions. Since the media's role is limited to telling us what to think, the brink of conversations births a multiplicity of opinions and understandings that stems from our differences.

"The digital media is increasingly among the most important tools for social activists and everyday citizens to spread the word about important issues and persuade others to join and share their opinions" (Maryville University, 2023) [17]. The future of social conversations rests on the shoulders of decentralized media platforms that are structured to garner multiple opinions and engender debates on issues of interest. Therefore, it is consequently not enough for the mainstream media to play the role of mere information disseminators because we live in an era of #wokeculture, fragmented societies, global communities and microblogging, and because everyone with a digital device now has a voice, the media's 'thought' on an issue no longer equates public opinion. The digital mediascape offers individuals a multiplicity of opinions on multiple platforms across multiple discussion topics and while these reflect our differences and different personalities, the combination of them forms our identity both for us and the rest of the world (O'Shaughnessy, *et al*., 2017) [22].

What is Identity?
The advent of digital media has created a new way of experiencing the world and understanding identity. The number of virtual groups and virtual communities that we belong to expose us to situations that demand a stance that is often funneled through our proclaimed identity. At its core, identity seeks to put the squabble of 'who we are' and 'what makes us different' to rest. The curiousness in human nature makes us question everything including the essence of the self in relation to the larger society and vice versa. Vignoles

(2017) [23] states that our identity rests in the "choices we make, goals we pursue, our emotional experiences, relationships with others, friendly or hostile treatment of different groups of people, and thus ultimately our own and others' well-being. The study of identity is, at heart, the study of how individuals and groups answer the 'Who are you?' question". Understanding identity is a quest to learning about our individual and collective differences. When we identify as or with a certain phenomenon for instance, we are branded by it and it forms, even if by a small bit, a component of who we are.

Identity, as observed over the years has changed in meaning, which is why a universally acceptable definition is difficult. However, Fearon (1999) [26] argues that to attempt a definition, identity ought to be regarded from the 'social' and the 'personal'. Identity he therefore describes as "a social category, a set of persons marked by a label and distinguished by rules deciding membership and (alleged) characteristic features or attributes and a personal distinguishing characteristic (or characteristics) that a person takes a special pride in or views as socially consequential but more-or-less unchangeable" (p. 2). Identity is both owned and a mechanism for surrendering to ownership. Identity can be bestowed upon a person by the social space in which they belong, in which they therefore must abide by the systemic guidelines that endorse and renew membership, differentiating them from non-members. Identity is our label (for better or worse) because of our affiliations, beliefs and practices that set us apart from the others. For example, when we identify (or not) with certain religion, we are labelled accordingly such as Christian, Muslim, Eckist, Buddhist, Atheist, Traditionalist, etc.; our decision to identify with a movement would cause us to take on labels like Feminist, Religious Activist, Isolationist, Environmentalist, Radicals/Leftist, etc.; and choosing an epistemological standpoint could result in labels like Essentialist, Historicist, Rationalist, Positivist, Interpretivist, Determinist, Progressivist, Marxist, etc. (Brown, 2016) [4]. Oftentimes we take on one than more identity at a time and function in varying capacities within these identities. Drew (2022) [7] states that identity is a 'meeting place' and the types could include national identity, social identity, gender identity, racial/ethnic identity, sexual orientation, class, etc. A simple definition can be found in Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2023) [18] that states that identity is the distinguishing character or personality of an individual. Yimaz (2021, para. 4) defines identity "as a person's sense of self, established by their unique characteristics, affiliations, and social roles". In other words, identity refers to the specific traits that cause individuals to differ from one other or that may be a linking denominator with similar others in a society. In their definitions of differences, the biological essentialist and the social constructionist perspectives did not consider the fact that some differences may neither be biological, physiological or phenotypic or that despite role assignments within a society, individuals may find their own path within other societies (or multiple societies [including online communities]) and develop an identity that drastically opposes their birth traits and those that they are nurtured into. Overt identification with specific beliefs, values and norms that may set individuals apart from others yet put them in groups with some others result in the formation of certain identities.

Identity Formation
Forming an identity requires knowledge of who we are and who we want to be. Sometimes it is at the exclusion or composition of one and/or the other. It is a process that becomes definite with growth and self-awareness. LibraTexts (2020) defines identity formation as the development of an individual's personality by which he or she is recognized or known. "Identity formation has to do with the complex manner in which human beings establish a unique view of self and is characterized by continuity and inner unity. It is therefore highly related to terms such as the self, self-concept, values, and personality development" (Herman, 2011, p. 9) [14]. This implies that the formation of an identity requires a sustainable level of progress that overtime transforms an individual into a kind of distinct personae for which they are known and identified with.

Identity formation is a perception that begins with the individual and stretches to the larger society. Herman (2011) [14] explains that identity can be formed in three levels: the micro-level, the meso-level and the macro-level. According to the text, at the micro-level formation, the self is defined and ascertained in isolation and in relation to society; the meso-level formation refers to the process where immediate families and communities form, understand and query identity and its development, whereas the macro-level identity formation occurs as connections among individuals and issues within and across global societies.

Hence, individual formation is progressive because it develops originally at the personal level where a person gets to grow into and learn about themselves and moves on to the process of projecting one's truth by convincing and assuring oneself and members of one's family and community, a notion, which, when necessary, would then spread across national and international frontiers. The complexities of forming and withholding an identity validate individual differences. In other words, our identified differences make us who we are, and who we are is a product of the identity that we have come to learn of ourselves choose and accept over time.

The Progressive Idealist Perspective
Where the biological essentialist and the social constructivist perspectives fail to appropriately describe differences and 'what makes us who we are', it becomes fitting that the situation is assessed from a newer perspective. As we have noted above, the birth of an individual marks the start of their journey and assigning gender to them situates them in a particular classification, which may work for a period. When the individual becomes self-aware, the likelihood of choosing a different physiology or deviating from the assigned role is significant and even if that is not the case, the lines that demarcate gender differences are increasingly blurred. Even in Africa, the Middle East and Asia, women in recent times hold positions in male-dominated fields like engineering, medicine and science whereas men have injected themselves in female-dominated vocations like tailoring, grooming, nursing, etc. Still, there is a lot yet unknown. This means therefore that we must revisit the dominant classifications of differences and proffer a newer description that bridges the gap among the individuals that fit into the defined difference classifications, those who do not fit, those who choose not to fit and those we are yet to discover and understand where they fit into. Therefore, we propose a third perspective that

rather than deterministically differentiate people on the basis of sex or reductionistically distinguish genders using binarism, opts for identity as the differences marker, within the spectrum of contemporary and holistic ideals that are inclusive and open to change and growth – a progressive idealist perspective.

'Progressive' according to Merriam Webster Dictionary (2023) [18] is characterized by their making use of or interested in new ideas and findings. The progressivist advocates for finding and applying new methods to advance a cause, allowing flexibility within a system, and promoting social and political reforms in the society. Furthermore, the Merriam Webster Dictionary (2023, para.1) [18] defines ideal as "a standard of perfection… excellence, often taken as a model for imitation; the best possible". Ideals are conceptions that are cultivated and sustained to breed a better world for everyone.

The Progressive Idealist Notions
In advocating for a newer perspective for explaining difference, we begin by sifting through the biological essentialist and the social constructionist perspectives, merging certain dominant, yet relevant ideas, strengthening weak points, and formulating newer approaches to explaining outliers and emerging trends. For instance, we agree with the essentialist position that difference is a function of sex determination on the basis of gamete/phenotypical differences. It is rational to tell people apart as babies by the differences in their genitalia, for example. However, challenging the notions of binary divisions of individuals, we argue that the essentialists are basic and simplistic in their approach because they do not consider the individuals who do not physiologically and phenotypically fall within the male or female sex but rather either possess both genitalia (the intersex) or a non-deterministic genitalia (ambiguous genitalia). In such instances, creating a 'sex box' that these individuals must adequately fit into (as with the boy or girl) would prove impossible. Similarly, we agree with the social constructionist reasoning that biology does not adequately determine difference, instead difference is crystallized by environmental factors that are championed by social norms and practices, which would play a significant role in shaping an individual into a specific gender. However, we challenge the social constructionist school's explanation of socially assigned roles as a prerequisite for understanding gender-based difference, arguing that certain individuals may not affirmatively be labelled 'male or female' because some individuals may develop traits and behaviours that may not fit into assigned categories. If a gender is not pronounced at birth, for instance, the question of how to groom a person is left unascertained. Moreso, gender roles today are not clear-cut, and societies are continuously blurring the lines between how a male or female is raised. Furthermore, we argue that the social constructionist perspective regarding difference within the spectrum of a male-female dichotomy is reductionist because this description does not account for other contemporary genders such as non-binary gender, transgender, gender neutral, agender, pangender, two-spirit, genderqueer, etc., and appropriate social role assignments that they would be nurtured into or within what parameters this would work. Also in modern day, conversations about 'who we are' exists on a global scale. On the internet are networks and online communities that discuss extensively on issues that border on difference and the possibilities within a social context. This further blurs the lines on what is termed 'deviant behaviour' and individuals are increasingly learning about the plethora of options from which they can choose on their journey to self-discovery.

Overall, we advocate for a refined and modern lens to panoramically view difference in ways that bridge the gaps of the essentialists and constructionists frameworks, proffering an even-playing field to accommodate the plethora of identities that adequate define (with specifics) 'who we are' and 'what makes us different'.

The progressive idealist perspective sets the pace for inclusivity and an extended understanding of difference that is propelled by growth and typified by the individual's decision to be known, addressed and rightfully placed. In this perspective, the difference between individuals is their identity, which is neither determined by physiological makeup nor imposed by society. Rather than categorical differentiations based on sex or gender, the progressive idealist perspective argue that people's identity is what makes them different. A person first learns of themselves and then shares knowledge of their specific traits such as their individual beliefs, practices and preferences (who they are) to their immediate community and then to the world. When two people meet for the first time for instance, they introduce themselves by telling one another who they are (not who they have been told to be or who they are expected to be) and relationships are forged on that shared knowledge at the introduction, relating with one another on the platform of their identities. Thus, the way a person who identifies as a cis heterosexual male would relate with a transgender bisexual female may differ from how he would relate with a cis heterosexual female, for instance. Also, a cis African heterosexual Muslim female doctor may feel more comfortable talking to an intersex Indian female Buddhist lecturer about feminism, than she would a cis White heterosexual female about doctor. The identity makes all the difference. The differences in people are not always a function of nature or nurture, but a composition of both, and the uniqueness of the individuals.

The value
Societies and people are ephemeral and in a constant state of development. Age-long cultural practices change, and some get completely erased. Every day scientific discoveries about the human anatomy emerge. This is why a person could decide that they would rather have a different physiology than that in which they were born (i.e., transit from boy to girl and vice-versa or take on any other form) or take up certain roles that do not conform to the gender they are assigned (i.e., a female mechanic, a male hairdresser or a transgender actor/singer). Rather than statutorily distinguishing individuals based on their biology/physiological make-up or via a plan than increasingly exhibits its systemic flaws at role assignments and groupings, difference can be understood from the perspective of development, growth consistency and society's (and the media's) openness to learn, unlearn and relearn how identity efficiently differentiates people. From the progressive idealist perspective, one's identity is the way of understanding how they are different. This is not usually fixed because, development is continuous, but is a means of knowing who the individual is at that point in time and the acceptable way to relate with them. The media's role is to stay abreast with people's identities, tell stories of diverse identities, and provide an even playing field for everyone to find their voice within a world of plurality of identities.

Conclusion

The discussion of differences has transcended the sex and gender dichotomy and identity, a third perspective is proposed to fill the gaps that the biological essentialist and the social constructivist perspective did not address. In observing what makes us different from a third perspective, the lapses in the dominant perspectives highlighted and revised, providing a modern synthesis that brings to the fore, the overlooked in determining difference. It is important to note that media's role in propagating difference in our society today cannot be overemphasized. The media is expected to flourish in their knowledge of the varying differences between sex, gender and identity so as to avoid unwarranted discriminations, and be armed with accurate knowledge of what distinguishes a person from another, and the emerging trends in the discussions of differences, especially as they reflect in their style and choice of reportage.

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