

# Gender

Gender, is commonly used in two fields of knowledge &#8211; gender in grammatical systems, or the male or female sex of individuals, where the OED adds "typically used with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones". Indeed, in the social sciences, the word gender takes precedence over the word sex to refer to social relationships governed by the sex of individuals, or the social constructs of sexual differences. Substituting for the notions of sex and sexual differences that belong to biological sex, the concept of gender contains the notion that differences between men and women, like the attributes of masculinity and femininity, are not natural truths, but constructed historically and reproduced socially, by way of differentiated socialisation and education of individuals, as in the idea that "you are not born a woman, you become a woman" (Simone de Beauvoir, 1949, 285).

The concept of gender developed at the start of the 20th century by physicians in charges of sex-reassignment operations at birth for children presenting a sexual ambiguity, i.e. not having the sexual characteristics that enabled them to be identified as "male" or "female". John Money, an American physician and "intersex" activist, observed that "sexual behaviour or orientation towards the male or the female sex has no inborn foundation" (Money 1952). This notion was popularised by the psychiatrist Robert Stoller, who proposes a distinction between biological sex and sexual identity. Studies on intersexuality and transsexuality thus emphasised the independence of sexually determined behaviours, gender identity, sexual behaviours, anatomical structures and chromosomal characteristics. This work was resumed in 1972 by Ann Oakley in *Sex, Gender and Society*, a work in which she distinguishes sex and gender, introducing the notion into the area of feminist study. Other books followed, among which those by Judith Butler, presented as one of the theorists of the Queer movement. In *Gender Troubles, Feminism and the Politics of Subversion* (1990) she explores the instability of gender identities and their performative dimension, in particular through the figure of the drag queen. Gender is not an essence that appears in our behaviours, but conversely it is our bodily behaviours that by way of repetition establish gender. Thus gender is the result of gender norms. Nevertheless, no individual perfectly meets the norm, since there is no original masculine or feminine. For the questions "what is a man?" or "what is a woman?" Judith Butler substitutes the question: what is it that constitutes intelligible life, and how do presuppositions as to what is "normal" in the area of gender and sexuality predetermine what counts as "human" and "liveable"? [...] How do we come to see this potential for demarcation, and how do we change it? (Butler 2008, 45).

In France the term gender (*genre*) was not adopted at once in this context. This recent borrowing from English (while the English word in fact originates from old French) was the subject of a recommendation in the government's *Journal Officiel* dated July 22nd 2005, which stated that the word "sexe et ses d'riv's sexiste et sexuel" should be preferred to "genre" (which clearly shows France was late in realising that gender is fundamentally "a primary way of signifying power relationships" (Scott, 1988).) In contrast, certain materialistic feminists have claimed that the generalisation of the term gender has led to a weakening of the critical and political content of words such as "sexing" or "sex-discrimination". Today, the word is widely accepted in the social sciences.

Independently from this conceptual elaboration, the development of critical study and the vast pluridisciplinary corpus centred on gender links back to a much earlier feminist tradition dating back to the 17th century at least, which endeavoured to denounce the iniquity of differences in condition, to demonstrate the equality between men and women, to gradually obtain legal recognition of this equality, and even to overturn the patriarchal and hetero-normative order (Prearo, 2010). Criticism and opposition towards power relationships should be seen in their contexts, whether they concern wage equality, political representation, access to public spaces, sharing of domestic chores, prevention of violence towards women, recognition of sexual minorities, or the right to one's own body (Maruani, 2005; Bereni et al, 2008). Thus gender studies are at once grounded in constructivism, and politically committed, which does not preclude rifts, strong differences, intense debate and a plurality of feminist stances.

French geography recently adopted the concept of gender, mainly in the wake of British research. This has led to the widespread view that gender studies are specific to Anglo-American academics, thus neglecting the numerous contributions by French researchers who as early as the 1980s were producing interdisciplinary work on women, gender, and sexualities (Rouch 2009[2001]). While these issues have not really found a recognised place in the discipline, it is not so much because they are not relevant in the French social space as because social, disciplinary and institutional resistance is still strong (Perreau, 2008; Blidon, 2008). This resistance is motivated by several types of a priori disqualification: gender is seen by some to be a "sociological object", "a-spatial", and "non-geographical", or again "an issue of the moment", a "minor object", or "exotic", which thus is thought to mask "the true issues of society", and to "fail to further the paradigms of geography". This contrasts sharply with what has been shown by work over

recent years (Creton, 2002, 2004; Hancock & Barthe, 2005) which falls into three main approaches.

The first consists in analysing how gender produces spatial differentiation. Space here is considered as gender-related, or "gendered". Thus masculine "territories" and "places" can be distinguished (submarines, fraternities, British gentlemen's clubs, barracks), as can feminine spaces (convents, maternity wards, beauty parlours) or mixed spaces (swimming pools, schools, cafés, public parks (Bard 2004). While this third category forms the majority, Erving Goffman analyses this co-presence as "a very specific social relationship, between segregation and non-differentiation, where men and women are together and separate [...] all in the name of propriety, civilisation, the respect owing to women, and the fact that men feel a "natural" need to get together" (2002, 36). This interpretation grid has above all been applied to daily mobility patterns (commuting) (Diaz et al, 2004) or to international migrations (Catarino et al 2005), to development issues (Marius-Gnannou, Hoffmann 2006), or to the city envisaged from the point of view of the way it is used by women (DenÃfle, 2004) and more rarely as it is used by men (Proth, 2002, Raibaud, 2006).

A second approach consists in analysing how space contributes to gender differentiations, and to the construction of masculine and feminine identities. Here space is envisaged as "gendering". Thus public toilets lead to the differentiation of users according to their gender, on the basis of a biological argument, alongside a requirement for privacy. This differentiated usage is part of the very early socialisation processes in infant school. This interpretation grid has also been applied to the appropriation and allocation of domestic space (Collignon, Staszak, 2004), to the use of beaches and the exhibiting of body in seaside resorts (Barthe-Deloizy, 2003), or to the vulnerability of women in public spaces (Lieber, 2008). This last study shows how the "obvious risks" incurred by women when they move around public spaces are not the consequence of their sexual identity, but contribute to the production of that identity (Lieber, 2008, 16).

Finally, gender is not only a mode of social organisation of the sexes, it is also a system of signifiers that structures categories of thought into major symbolic opposites (sensitivity/rationality, weakness/strength, concrete/abstract). There is another, feminist approach, which consists in questioning the very foundations of knowledge and the way it is elaborated in the human sciences (Chabaud-Rychter et al, 2010), and more particularly in geography (Bondi & Domosh, 1992; Massey, 1994). This entails a particular stance that challenges the figure of the neutral, objective researcher producing universal, dominant science. Thus Claire Hancock describes geography centred on territory as a "masculinistic discipline", recalling that the Enlightenment "took on a specific turn in geography, defining the task of the exhaustive description of the world in such a way that it was rendered complicit with euro-centrism and colonialism: geography, the science of conquest and appropriation of space, was characterised from the outset by a gender bias" (2004, 168). Other work explores the construction of discourse and the use of territories, in particular the construction of masculine values associated with them, such as physical strength or endurance among physical geographers (Jegou & Chabrol, 2010).

Nevertheless, present research is upsetting this partitioning of approaches and integrating gender as a category of analysis like any other, such as age, class, or origin, in intersectional or co-formation mode (Bachetta, 2009). This approach is making the notion more "ordinary", or rather is leading to its gradual legitimisation and recognition in the discipline, and thereby to better understanding of the power relationships structuring our societies and our representations of the world.

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