

Gender – a Social Fact by Nature
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The notion of gender as used by gender studies describes an objectified social difference, which is constituted by human-made historical processes, and which intersects with other differences, such as class, sex, age, etc.

Therefore, the male/female difference involves complex social processes, which are also affected by biological, i.e. hormonal or genetic factors. The notion of gender means that research in the field does not assume a determination by a primordial, monocausal 'natural' basis being-in-and-for-itself, i.e. beyond social contexts. For on the one hand, the differentiation between the genders is highly variable, depending on regional, historical and other contexts, and on the other hand, any biological fact demands interpretation, insofar it is socially relevant.

Nature and culture are not easily separable in research – this arguably almost trivial insight is essential for gender studies, because the differentiation between nature and culture, or between biology and socialization/experience is itself a cultural differentiation. Gender studies share this epistemological insight with the major fractions of the experimental natural sciences: **"Some gender differences in the mind and behavior may in part be the result of our biology (prenatal hormones and genes) interacting with our experience. The old nature vs. nurture debate is absurdly simplistic and a moderate position recognizes the interaction of both" (Baron Cohen 2012)**. This does not mean that there was no nature or facts. Actually, it is highly interesting to consider the entanglement of nature and culture with regard to gender difference. There are many studies in that spirit in gender studies, for example on the history of the science of the „small sex-difference“, in science and technology studies, and in the neuro- and bioscience.

For the most part, gender studies – be it within the German or the international context – deal with the cultural, historical, economic and social dynamics pertaining to gender difference. On the one hand, this includes processes and practices of gendering, i.e. how specific forms of gender are inscribed in institutions, organizations, structures or qualities (e.g. careers, labor markets, the appreciation of performance or competence). On the other hand, this includes contextualized processes of construction and constitution of gender itself, i.e. the question of how gender difference is "made" in a specific (social, historical, cultural) context (by interaction, scientific interpretation, somatic materialization etc.).

Gender studies employ a variety of different methods, paradigms and theories from diverse disciplines, among them social sciences, cultural studies, natural sciences, psychology, law, engineering, medicine, economics, humanities, pedagogy, philosophy...Not all disciplines are represented equally in gender studies. In German-speaking countries, research is strongly marked by social science and cultural studies. Gender studies are a multidisciplinary

context; sometimes, this leads to misunderstandings and conflicts, which ideally lead to an enhanced and refined repertoire of concepts and methods. In this context, however, it is important to emphasize that there are diverging notions of gender. It is also important that, like in other fields, there is a **continuum from basic research to applied and commissioned research ('expertise')**. Results will vary according to the position on that continuum, and it will also affect the proximity of the notion of the gender to its usage in everyday language. This span is very broad in gender studies: there are studies with a concrete, practical approach, for example on the academic performance of girls, on the improvement of career opportunities or the prevention of old-age poverty among women, on gender specific illnesses among men, etc. There are also studies on ethics from a gender perspective (philosophy), on the ontology of the present, on the symbolic position of the Phallus in "feminine writing" (literature), or on "doing gender" in youth subcultures, to name only a few examples. As with any research, there is no immediate purpose of gender studies in the sense that results do not necessarily lead to concrete, practical solutions for problems of everyday life, politics or the general advancement of humankind.

Gender studies are not just about women – there is a variety of multidisciplinary studies on masculinities – **nor about men**. Although such a 'single-sex/gender' approach may be fruitfully used, as with empirical studies on professions or on the history of concrete persons, the notion of gender represents a relational understanding. Gender Studies are about diverse forms and specific contexts of gender difference(s).

Gender studies is no ideology, nor is it a veiled political movement. Women's studies, a precursor to gender studies, developed out of second wave feminism. From the beginning (in the mid-1970's), the tension between the academic and the political poles were as conflictuous as productive. Today, many – but not all – scholars working in the field actually do consider themselves "critical", some – but certainly not all – also "feminist" or "queer". "Critical" is mainly understood as the task of unveiling forms of implicit gendering in science, organizations, everyday life etc., throwing light on stereotypes, prejudices, and misperceptions, including those which can lead to discrimination. In the early 1960s, for example, one of the first studies on the "women's question" in the social science deplored the absence of the experiences and the social location of "housewives" in research: a "problem without a name", as Betty Friedan put it. In Germany, historians like Gisela Bock, Barbara Duden, Karin Hausen showed in their studies that an analysis of bourgeois-capitalist society is not attainable without an analysis of specific ('cultural') constructions of femininity and masculinity, as well as their structure as "patriarchy". In the natural sciences, pioneers of science studies such as Anne Fausto- Sterling, Evelyn Fox-Keller, and Londa Schiebinger shed light on gendering in the seemingly objective truths of natural science. So in most cases, the critical movement of gender studies consists in the unveiling of the implicit gendered dimension of science and knowledge.

One of the first sociologists to employ the concept of gender was Erving Goffman, who used the notion of a system of "genderism" to describe forms of gendering as a part of the structure of modern societies. Following this insight, gender studies do not themselves perform "gender", but

rather discover hidden forms of gendering where they are not explicit. While sometimes practical recommendations or demands might follow from such research, this is by no means necessarily so. For example, when studies show the relevance of grammatical gender or gendered markers like first names when it comes to performance evaluation, researchers and experts sometimes, although not necessarily always, might articulate the demand for practical changes. They then engage in ongoing political controversies, to which gender studies contribute constructively, if the discourse is matter-of-fact, appreciative, and geared towards actual understanding. Some researchers do have a feminist or queer agenda. This, however, can mean many things, not unlike the varying shades of political engagement of scholars in other fields. "Feminist" in this context means that processes of gendering and their effects are aspects of social domination, and research can help exposing them. There are researchers in the field who are completely opposed to this, however. The degree of politicization in gender studies is much debated, and always has been.

Gender Mainstreaming is not the same thing as "gender studies": The first is a political strategy, a policy, which is implemented in the EU and its member states in particular. Gender mainstreaming means that the potential gender dimension of every stage of every financial decision should be considered: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/index_de.htm (EU); <http://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/gender/gender-mainstreaming/>. There is in fact research on gender mainstreaming in gender studies, as well as expert reports and practical research. Many researchers, however, are not concerned with gender mainstreaming at all in their focus.

Gender Identity means the individual, subjective level of self-perception or self-relation. There is a plethora of approaches to this aspect: psychology, sociology, pedagogy, historical studies, etc. Check out the US-American Psychological Association on gender identity: <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/sexual-orientation.aspx>.

Gender on the one hand, and desire/sexuality on the other, are two distinct, yet mutually related aspects of persons, societies, organizations, etc.

It is not necessary, however, to consider the sexual dimension (as queer studies do) when doing research on gender. Conversely, research on sexuality need not necessarily consider gender.

Finally: in Germany, 0,42% of all professorships are fully or partly dedicated to "gender", that is (in 2013) 150 out of ca. 35. 426, mostly in social sciences: <http://www.mvbz.fu-berlin.de/service/datensammlungen/index.html>.

On a last note, there is **language** issue. No formal, binding, let alone explicit regulations exist in gender studies. The generic masculine is not unusual even in gender studies, authors often simply use the male form for all genders. When, in German, both men and women are addressed, many authors use the "internal I" or a slash (e.g. "Wissenschaftler/innen", "WissenschaftlerInnen"). Then, there is the underscore, signifying the possibility of more options than the gender binary. For some people, it is both politically and academically significant to write outside of the unambiguous gender binary, to make these options visible, or because they locate themselves outside of it and want to addressed

and acknowledged as such. In German, the designation "Proffesx" is an example. Who uses which forms is a question worth pondering, and which also informs research. Students and teachers in the field are expected to address such concerns in a conversation first. New, divergent ways of writing are often being referred to as "gendering if language". This is a bit off the mark, as the generic masculine in German is itself already gendered.

You made it this far? Great! The following is a list of recommendations for further study.

Handbooks and course books German (print):

- Aulenbacher, Birgit/ Meuser, Michael/ Riegraf, Birgit (2010): Soziologische Geschlechterforschung. Eine Einführung. Wiesbaden: VS Springer.
- Becker, Ruth/ Kortendiek, Beate (Hg.) (2010): Handbuch Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung. Theorie, Methoden, Empirie. Wiesbaden: VS Springer.
- Bergmann, Franziska/ Schöbler, Franziska/ Schreck, Bettina (Hg.) (2012): Gender Studies. Basis-Scripte. Reader Kulturwissenschaften. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Braun, Christina von/ Stephan, Inge (Hg.) (2013): Gender@Wissen. Ein Handbuch der Gender-Theorien. Wien/ Köln/ Weimar: Böhlau.
- Degele, Nina (2008): Gender/ Queer Studies. Paderborn: Fink.
- Nieberle, Sigrid (2013): Gender Studies und Literatur. Eine Einführung. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

Handbooks and course books English (print):

- Evans, Mary / Williams, Carolyn (eds.) (2013): Gender. The Key Concepts. London et al: Routledge.
- Wade, Lisa / Marx-Ferree, Myra (2015): Gender. Ideas – Interactions – Institutions. New York: Norton.

Gender in natural sciences (print)

- Ernst, Waltraud / Horwath, Ilona (Hg.) (2014): Gender in Science and Technology. Bielefeld: transcript
- Fausto-Sterling, Anne (2012): Sex/Gender. Biology in a Social World. New York et al: Routledge
- Fox-Keller, Evelyn (2002): The Century of the Gene. Harvard University Press.
- Schiebinger, Londa (1993): Nature's Body. Gender in the Making of Modern Science. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press

Wissenschaftliche Fachgesellschaft Geschlechterstudien/Gender Studies Association (Germany)

www.fg-gender.de

- Centers and institutions in German-speaking countries: <http://www.fg-gender.de/links>

- A glossary of relevant terms: <http://www.gender-glossar.de/de/>