

GENDER STUDIES

Dr. ALLWIN

IDHAYA COLLEGE FOR WOMEN

KUMBAKONAM

ABSTRACT

The history of gender studies looks at the different perspectives of gender. This discipline examines the ways in which historical, cultural, and social events shape the role of gender in different societies. The field of gender studies, while focusing on the differences between men and women, also looks at sexual differences and less binary definitions of gender categorization. Gender studies are a field for interdisciplinary study devoted to gender identity and gendered representation as central categories of analysis. This field includes women's studies (concerning women, feminism, gender, and politics), men's studies and queer studies. Sometimes, gender studies are offered together with study of sexuality. These disciplines study gender and sexuality in the fields of literature, language, geography, history, political science, sociology, anthropology, cinema, media studies, human development, law, public health and medicine. It also analyzes how race, ethnicity, location, class, nationality, and disability intersect with the categories of gender and sexuality. This special issue reviews contemporary gender and diversity insights into management and organization studies (MOS). The purpose of this issue is to critically evaluate key threads and concepts contributing to academic debates in diversity, gender and feminist theorizing. This paper highlights key threads in current scholarship, including relationality, power, intersectionality and social constructionist epistemologies and, in so doing, uncovers new insights and contributions.

KEYWORDS: Gender Studies, Women Studies, Sexuality and Differences.

INTRODUCTION

Most of the surviving programmes in the UK are now branded as gender studies or gender and women's studies. The pragmatic reason for this is that it is seen as less feminist, more respectable and less threatening than women's studies. While the term 'gender' was initially used by feminists to establish the social (as opposed to natural) basis of hierarchy and division between men and women, this meaning has largely been lost in its incorporation into everyday language. 'Gender', therefore has come to seem a safe and neutral term. 'Gender studies' is also seen as more inclusive

than 'women's studies', taking in men and women as well as those who identify as neither. Another objection to 'women's studies' is the problem with 'women' as a category. It has been recognized, since the heyday of women's studies, that 'women' is not a unitary category (e.g. Brah 1991). This is, in my view, not a reason to abandon 'women's studies' or the idea of women centered knowledge. Such knowledge can be a focus for exploring differences and inequalities among women. This provides a means of interrogating the category, opening up issues of differences among women and who counts as a woman, which then serves as a base for considering how gender is interlinked with other social inequalities and differences.

Psychoanalytic theory

A number of theorists have influenced the field of gender studies significantly, specifically in terms of psychoanalytic theory. Among these are Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Bracha L. Ettinger, and Mark Blechner.

Gender studied under the lens of each of these theorists looks somewhat different. In a Freudian system, women are "mutilated and must learn to accept their lack of a penis" (in Freud's terms a "deformity"). Lacan, however, organizes femininity and masculinity according to different unconscious structures. Both male and female subjects participate in the "phallic" organization, and the feminine side of sexualization is "supplementary" and not opposite or complementary. The concept of sexualization (sexual situation), which posits the development of gender-roles and role-play in childhood, is useful in countering the idea that gender identity is innate or biologically determined. In other words, the sexualization of an individual has as much, if not more, to do with their development of a gender identity as being genetically sexed male or female.

Julia Kristeva has significantly developed the field of semiotics. She contends that patriarchal cultures, like individuals, have to exclude the maternal and the feminine so that they can come into being. Mark Blechner expanded psychoanalytic views of sex and gender. He has argued that there is a "gender fetish" in western society, in which the gender of sexual partners is given enormously disproportionate attention over other factors involved in sexual attraction, such as age and social class.

Bracha L. Ettinger transformed subjectivity in contemporary psychoanalysis since the early 1990s with the Matrixial feminine-maternal and prematernal Eros of border linking (bordureliance), border spacing (bordurespacement) and co-emergence. The matrixial feminine difference defines a particular gaze and it is a source for trans-subjectivity and transjectivity in both males and females. Ettinger rethinks the human subject as informed by the archaic connectivity to the maternal and proposes the idea of a Demeter-Persephone Complexity.

Cultures can have very different norms of maleness and masculinity. Blechner identifies the terror, in Western males, of penetration. Yet in many societies, being gay is defined only by being a male who lets him be penetrated. Males who penetrate other males are considered masculine and not gay and are not the targets of prejudice. In one particular culture in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea for example, receptive fellatio is the norm for early adolescence and seen as a requirement for developing normal manliness.

Feminist psychoanalytic theory

Feminist theorists such as Juliet Mitchell, Nancy Chodorow, Jessica Benjamin, Jane Gallop, Bracha L. Ettinger, Shoshana Felman, Griselda Pollock, Luce Irigaray and Jane Flax have developed a Feminist psychoanalysis and argued that psychoanalytic theory is vital to the feminist project and must, like other theoretical traditions, be criticized by women as well as transformed to free it from vestiges of sexism (i.e. being censored). Shulamith Firestone, in "The Dialectic of Sex" calls Freudianism the misguided feminism and discusses how Freudianism is *almost* completely accurate, with the exception of one crucial detail.

Critics such as Elizabeth Grosz accuse Jacques Lacan of maintaining a sexist tradition in psychoanalysis. Others, such as Judith Butler, Bracha L. Ettinger and Jane Gallop have used Lacanian work, though in a critical way, to develop gender theory.

According to J. B. Marchand, "The gender studies and queer theory are rather reluctant, hostile to see the psychoanalytic approach." For Jean-Claude Guillebaud, gender studies (and activists of sexual minorities) "besieged" and consider psychoanalysis and psychoanalysts as "the new priests, the last defenders of the genital normality, morality, moralist or even obscurantism".

Judith Butler's worries about the psychoanalytic outlook under which sexual difference is "undeniable" and anthologizing any effort to suggest that it is not so paramount and unambiguous ...". According to Daniel Beaune and Caterina Rea, the gender-studies "often criticized psychoanalysis to perpetuate a family and social model of patriarchal, based on a rigid and timeless version of the parental order".

Literary theory

Psychoanalytically oriented French feminism focused on visual and literary theory all along. Virginia Woolf's legacy as well as "Adrienne Rich's call for women's revisions of literary texts, and history as well, has galvanized a generation of feminist authors to reply with texts of their own". Griselda Pollock and other feminists have articulated Myth and poetry and literature, from the point of view of gender.

Women's and Gender Studies

- Over the past decade, many colleges and universities have begun to reconsider the assignment of the title “women’s studies” to the field originally created in response to academia’s disregard for women’s histories, experiences and perspectives. As society’s awareness of the nuances of gender and sexual identities increases, it brings into question the accuracy of the label.
- The evolution of the name reflects the field’s increasingly common ground with other areas of study, especially gender and sexuality studies. Women’s studies are an inherently interdisciplinary field and always have been, and yet its strong focus on women as a distinct category had not been publicly disputed until recently.
- The reconsideration of the department’s traditional name reflects a growing public acceptance of non-binary differences within our society and humanity as a whole.
- No matter how well-intentioned, however, the melding of women’s studies with gender and sexuality studies deemphasizes the importance of all three areas of academics. Their differences are as undeniable as their numerous points of intersection. To combine all of them into one department ensures that fewer resources are available to each section.
- Some schools have made the argument that adding “gender” to the name “women’s studies,” or even replacing the word “women” altogether, opens the field to men. Taking the focus away from women in order to allow men to maintain their masculinity while studying non-male experiences, however, is about as necessary and productive as the unfortunate new “meninism” movement. Education has always been more readily available to males than to female or gender queer individuals, and it is an insult to all that women’s studies scholars have achieved to undermine the needs of women in order to accommodate the comfort of men.
- Women’s, gender and sexuality studies are each their own domain of intellectual challenge; they inform one another and allow for growth and development within each department, and they can certainly benefit from the sharing of resources and knowledge.
- But women are not yet in a place where they can be incorporated with equal representation into other areas of academia. The need for a department dedicated to conversations centered on people who identify as female still exists. Gender and sexuality are, of course, an integral part of women’s studies. However, so are race, class, ability and numerous other facets of identity that could not possibly all be included in the department name. The explicit inclusion of gender and sexuality minimizes the importance of other equally important aspects of women’s studies.

- Almost all academic disciplines, especially within humanities, intersect with gender and sexuality studies; history, art and psychology cannot be properly examined without taking into account gender and sexuality. They should undoubtedly be incorporated into each department's curriculum whether or not they are part of the name.
- Erasing women as a group from the department name prolongs a long tradition of the elimination of women from history and culture. Women, historically, tend to be left behind, and therefore it is imperative that they retain a strong presence in the department.
- The name "women's studies" by itself, however, is problematic. It suggests that there is something that unites all women, and limits the reach of feminist discourse. This title ignores the system of oppressions that sexism is a part of, isolating—and therefore weakening—the issue.
- It is important to retain the phrase "women's studies," regardless of any additional words: the apostrophe is an incredibly significant part of the name, in that it stands for women's reclamation of their own lost history. It denotes the right of women to their own outlooks, histories and narratives, uniting an oppressed group that society typically attempts to divide and weaken.
- By titling the department "women's and feminist studies," colleges and universities would encompass both the importance of the experiences of the group of people typically classified as women, and the wide reach of the area of study.
- The inclusion of "feminism" in the name implies an intersectional approach to the study of oppressions, acknowledging the interaction of sexism with other oppressions. "Feminist studies" inherently retains the focus on women, but allows for a broader spectrum of perspectives and histories.
- It is critical, of course, to study gender and sexuality. The full extent of their complexity cannot be sufficiently explored when they are simply combined with other departments. The creation of a separate department, or departments, for gender and sexuality studies would benefit every field, allowing for a greater extent of interdepartmental study.
- Perhaps, instead of decreasing the focus on those who identify as female in order to make room for other areas of study, academic institutions should strive to incorporate a wider range of perspectives and narratives into every department.

CONCLUSION

The Women's and Gender Studies (WST) minor integrates social science, science and humanistic approaches by using women's experience and feminist theory to analyze themes in the humanities, fine arts, social sciences, and natural sciences. The Women's Studies minor further emphasizes the interdisciplinary study of women and gender, and an inclusive study of women that acknowledges differences such as race, class, sexuality, and national belonging. Women's Studies develop students' skills of critical thinking and reading, communication and analysis, writing and research, imagination and creative expression. Women's and Gender Studies is a flexible, versatile field of study that can be used in many careers. Women's Studies provide students a strong education in writing, critical thinking, research, public presentation, and leadership skills that are valuable in many fields. In addition, many employers are increasingly aware that they need to deal with gender and diversity issues in the workplace.

WORK CITED

Beauvoir, Simon de. *The Second Sex* (1949). Translated by H.M. Parshley. New York: Bantam, 1961.

Plant, Judith, ed. *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*, Philadelphia: New Society, 1989.

Redstockings, *Feminist Revolution*. New Paltz, N.Y.:1975.

The Quest Staff, ed. *Building Feminist Theory: Essays from Quest, a Feminist Quarterly*. New York: Longman, 1981.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23251799>

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23001437>