

## **Gender**

Gender refers to the roles, behaviours, values and meanings culturally associated to women and men. Gender differences do not necessarily correspond to differences in biological sex. Gender differs from biological sex in that it refers to socially constructed expectations, practices and behaviours of what it means to be a man or a woman within a specific society. Gender is not an individual's prerogative but is historically and socially produced; what it means to be a woman in the early twenty-first century, in terms of expectations, values and behaviours, is different from what it meant in 1800s. Similarly, women's roles and behaviours in Italy are different from women's socially accepted behaviours in Saudi Arabia (e.g. women can wear short skirts, drive and sun-bathe on the beach in a bikini in Italy but cannot in Saudi Arabia). Biological aspects of sex, on the other hand, do not vary substantially between societies and men and women bodies will generally have specific characteristics and functions which remain consistent.

The distinction between sex and gender became widespread from the 1970s with the advancement of feminist theory and it is currently applied in most contexts. Within the social sciences the categories associated to gender are more commonly that of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' (rather than man and woman) which refer to identities, practices and symbols and provide a means for gender signification. The analysis of masculinity and femininity in the social sciences allows for a discussion of gender and gender identities that is not tied to the biological sexes. By avoiding a comparison between men and women as distinctive groups, the use of the constructs of masculinity and femininity permits the decoupling between femininity and women and masculinity and men and, thus, allows the possibility for considering heterogeneities among women and among men (Priola, 2009). For example, one can refer to more or less feminine women as well as more or less masculine women, equally the same will be applied to men. Gender studies recognise different ways to be feminine and masculine as well as the fluidity of these categories. However, one of the risks of distinguishing between categories is the reinforcement of stereotypes that bestow women and men according to a few essentialist, fixed, attributes such as women are nurturing, emotional, supportive and intuitive; while men are rational, competitive and analytical (Brannan and Priola, 2012).

Management and organisation studies have traditionally conceived organisations as gender-neutral. However, research in the last 40 years has shown that social inequalities in terms of gender are often reproduced in the workplace and that work organisations are the site for the production and reproduction of gender differences. Analysis of gender and work have focused on a wide range of aspects, among the more established areas are: gender vertical and horizontal segregation; gendered processes and practices in the workplace; gender identities and organisational culture; gender discrimination and equal opportunities policies; women and men in management. Whilst scholars distinguish among several theoretical approaches to gender, a basic distinction is that between liberal and radical perspectives. The liberal perspective focuses on women's ability to maintain equality through their own choices and actions, and calls for political and legal reforms that guarantee equality of opportunities. The radical approach aims to challenge the patriarchal order within society, and calls for a reorganisation of the social and economic systems in order to achieve equality of outcomes.

## **References and selected further readings**

Brannan, M.J. and Priola, V. 2012, 'Girls Who Do Boys Like They're Girls'? Exploring the role of gender in the junior management of contemporary service work, *Gender, Work and Organization*, vol. 19, n. 2, pp. 119-141.

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Parsons, E. and Priola, V. 2013, Agents for Change and Changed Agents. The Micro-Politics of Change and Feminism in the Academy, *Gender, Work and Organization*, vol. 20, n. 5, pp. 580-598.

Priola, V. 2009, 'Masculinity and Femininity'. In Mills, A., Durepos, G., Wiebe, E. (Eds), *SAGE Encyclopedia of Case Study Research*. London: SAGE.

#### **Suggested cross-references**

Diversity; Inclusion; Identity; Discrimination; Equal Opportunities.

**Vincenza Priola**