

Gender Terminology

The RoSa-factsheets aim to familiarise you with the scope of equal opportunities in Flanders. Each factsheet probes the situation in a specific area. Broad themes as well as specific ones are put into the spotlight, depending on the relevance and/or availability of information and numerical data. We do not intend to offer exhaustive information, our primary aim is to sketch the position of women in Flanders in a surveyable and accessible way. Since its founding in 1978, RoSa is the place in Flanders to look for information and documentation about equal opportunities, emancipation policy and women's studies.

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Introduction

The set of concepts around gender, equal opportunities and women's studies has increased considerably in the past decades. A concept such as 'gender' is used more and more, in different contexts. A selection from that series of definitions is briefly explained hereafter. The concepts are not presented in alphabetical order, they are arranged according to their connection as regards content.

By means of short entries, the reader is able not only to find out the meaning of the concepts but also to get an idea of what is going on in the world of women's studies, equal opportunities e.a. Obviously, the selection is by no means complete.

Besides important terms from the establishment of theories, many frequently occurring concepts from some important social areas are included. Our choice of those fields, like our choice of concepts, is of course incomplete: gender relations act in every field of public and private life. The limited bibliography contains some titles to guide those who wish to go into the subject.

Gender and equal opportunities

GENDER

Gender is a term used to indicate the socially established differentiation between women and men and to make a distinction between the notions gender and sex. Sex indicates the biological differences between man and woman.

Social constructions are relative. They may change throughout times, they may differ according to culture and social context. The distinction between gender and sex is thus used to indicate that one does not necessarily follow the other: women are biologically determined to have children, but not to look after them.

Although the difference gender/sex is used increasingly, social standards about femininity and masculinity are still prevailing in our society. They are important when structuring society¹. Moreover, female qualities are often considered to be the opposite of masculine qualities. A notorious example is the couple emotional/rational, which is almost naturally associated with the divide women-men. That discrepancy procures not only a dividing line between women and men, there is also a hierarchy attached to it. Masculine qualities are generally rated higher than feminine ones. That hierarchy reflects power relations: men still have more authority than women.

The notion 'gender' makes it possible to escape from biological determinism. Although socially established differences can be compulsive and may seem unavoidable they really are not, as opposed to biological differences. Gender theorists oppose to the dichotomies in our society: they point at the fact that nobody is either/or. They are rather in favour of the idea of a continuum: for every quality every individual is situated somewhere on the line between two opposite qualities.

S O C I A L I Z A T I O N

The learning process in which social standards and values are assimilated. It concerns the process in which biological sex is transformed into social gender, by assimilation of gender differences. It goes from different toys or different clothing to stimulating different emotional behaviour.

R O L E P A T T E R N S

Patterns of behaviour ascribed to either women or men on the basis of their sex. Behaviour is a category covered by the notion 'gender', whereas 'gender' is used for several social levels.

B R E A K I N G S E T P A T T E R N S

The breaking of social conventions in the field of the traditional allocation of tasks between women and men. The term is not often used any more, being replaced by the broader term "equal opportunities".

E Q U A L O P P O R T U N I T I E S

The absence of gender-related impediments for taking part in economical, political and social life.

F E M I N I S M

Both a political, social movement and a philosophy in which unequal power relations between women and men are criticized. It is the source of inspiration for the academic discipline 'Women's Studies'.

E M A N C I P A T I O N

Striving for equal treatment of women and men and for abolishing inequality of power

¹ Not only in personal relationships, but also on the level of socialisation (identity), institutions, policy and culture there are views on manliness and femininity. Different theorists arrange the levels in different ways. For an overview of those arrangements and a concise history of the 'gender' notion, see: TONKENS, Evelien, Gender in welke lagen? Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies, jaargang 1 nr. 1, pg 42-49.

between both sexes.

WOMEN'S STUDIES (OR GENDER STUDIES OR FEMINIST STUDIES)²

An academic discipline in which the attention is focused on the analysis of women's situation and the relations between men and women. Gender studies often are of a multidisciplinary nature: the analysis crosses the borders of different academic domains.

EQUALITY DIFFERENCE DEBATE

Are biological differences between women and men relevant or not? Feminist theorists do not agree upon the matter. Adherents of the equality-theory see no unsurmountable differences: equivalence follows from equalness. Men and women are alike, they have equal rights and duties. Once all discriminations have been abolished, women and men will find themselves in an equal starting position and nothing will stand in the way for their equivalence.

Adherents of the difference-theory emphasize the fundamental differences between women and men. Since those differences are unalterable, government policies have to take into account the different needs of women and men. So women and men are not equal but equivalent.

DIVERSITY

A concept indicating existing differences between individuals in our society. Those differences are of all kinds: sex, ethnic background, sexual orientation, cultural perspective, etc. Even the social group of women consists of individuals differing from each other.

PRIVATE PUBLIC DEBATE

Actual imparities between women and men are maintained through the historical differentiation between private and public life in our society. In our Western civilian society that contrast exists since the nineteenth century. Politics, economics and culture belong to the public domain. The private sphere concerns care, education, housework. For a long period that distinction was strictly gender-linked : the breadwinner (man) versus the housekeeper (woman).

That so-called breadwinner's model declined in the second half of the twentieth century, when many women started working outside the home and consequently took part in public life. Yet that separation has not completely disappeared, still causing actual inequalities. In other words, women still perform most of the housekeeping tasks and therefore have less spare time to show their true worth in the labour market, in politics and in every domain of public life.

² Not all European universities use the name 'Women's Studies' for their department. Some prefer one term to the other, because their programmes have different accents. Yet, it was decided on the Women's Studies in Europe conference in Coimbra in 1995 to work together on a European level under the name "Women's Studies", since the different names refer to a similar content, viz.: "the definition of this field of study as a process of making explicit the lives of women and the gendering of social relations in the widest sense among individuals and collectivities." Braidotti Rosi, Vonk Esther, *The Making of European Women's Studies*, Utrecht, 2000, p. 169.

Labour

DIVISION OF LABOUR BY GENDER

The division of paid and unpaid labour between men and women in public and private life.

COMBINING PROFESSION WITH FAMILY

Care work (looking after children, elderly) still is primarily pursued by women. In most cases, combining occupation and family is different for women and men. Government arrangements allowing parental leave are mainly used by women.

GLASS CEILING

The invisible barrier arising from a complex set of structures in male-dominated organisations, which prevents women from obtaining leadership positions.

PAY DIFFERENTIAL

The difference between the average earnings of men and women.

OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION

Women are not equally represented in all occupations and in all function levels. On the one hand women find themselves concentrated in a more limited number of occupations than men (horizontal segregation), and on the other hand they are present in larger numbers in lower function levels (vertical segregation).

An example of horizontal segregation is the limited number of women in technological jobs such as computer scientist. Vertical segregation refers to the low percentage of women in leading positions. For example, only one tenth of university professors in Flanders is a woman.

Policy

EQUAL TREATMENT

To guarantee that there will be no gender discrimination, neither directly nor indirectly.

GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Direct discrimination: when someone is treated less favourably on the basis of his/her sex. Qualities which are considered to be typically masculine, are not only rated higher than so-called feminine qualities, they are also laid down as standard.

That is why an apparent neutral fact, a government measure for instance, may have a discriminating effect because the respective situations of men and women are not taken into account. That is called indirect discrimination. Now that statutory equality is a fact, actual equality does not come off. Women and men are equal before the law, but in practice women still get behindhand in some areas. For instance, there are still few women with executive functions and women still earn a great deal less than men. (cfr. Glass ceiling, Pay gap). That imparity has a lot to do with the prevailing (masculine) culture in those areas (cfr. Private/public-debate).

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY

The authorities try to further equality between women and men by means of equal opportunities policies. There are several kinds of equal opportunity policies, which succeed each other more or less historically. The first steps chiefly dealt with establishing statutory equality. Once the formal equality was arranged, the actual equality continued to exist. Equal opportunities went in for positive discrimination in order to catch up.

Positive discrimination/ positive action indeed means: special measures directed at a specific group (women in this case) with the aim to expel and prevent discrimination or to overcome drawbacks resulting from certain attitudes, behaviour and structures. Special measures were meant to allow women to faster make up for the underrepresentation. That policy still exists and it is called vertical policy.

The third phase is the now accepted mainstreaming, also called inclusive or horizontal policy. Policies have to take into account gender differences in all areas. All politicians have to further equal opportunities in their policy. They have to detect and oppose to direct as well as indirect discrimination. In Flanders they work both vertically and horizontally.

Politics

PARITY DEMOCRACY

The evenly composition of all political decision-making bodies. Since the population consists of half women and half men, representation of that population necessarily has the same ratio.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Taking part in the decision-making process.

Reading list

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