

## Examples of S&G Analysis in Practice: Social Sciences

### Does Gender Matter in Social Sciences?

In all disciplines of the social sciences, feminist approaches and gender analysis are, to a lesser or greater extent, neglected or marginalised. Yet gender should hold a privileged position in the social sciences as these disciplines should help us understand how gender works in society.

Feminist research is more influential in sociology and history but less in economics, international relations, political science and philosophy. For example, in economics and philosophy, the feminist approach is stigmatised by the classical branches of their respective disciplines. In these fields, the idea of a hard core of knowledge that excludes feminist perspectives exists and is protected. As a result, feminist economics and philosophy are primarily published outside the most prestigious journals, produced almost exclusively by women and considered second-class material. Likewise, political science and international relations are disciplines that seem to have barely begun to engage with gender as a fundamental aspect of all political relations.

Although today we find good examples of disciplines, such as sociology, that include at least some attention to sex and gender differences, this is not enough. In general, the idea of what constitutes innovative or excellent research in the academy often excludes or downplays feminist research. The innovations that feminist scholars have brought to mainstream academic disciplines have often been misunderstood and ignored in their implications. Yet it would seem that gender plays a fundamental and pervasive role within the social sphere. Just think of the complicated relationship between gender and power, the male dominance of the political sphere, and the divergent directions of abortion policy. Gender innovations within these disciplines can transform the understanding of the social sphere. One example might be how feminist political scientists have challenged the limitations of top-down approaches to politics and power by considering informal 'bottom-up' politics. Or, how some feminist authors realised that, in economics, women engaged in domestic work were labelled as 'non-producers' and that domestic work was invisible in economic politics.

The examples are numerous and pervade all disciplines of the social sciences. However, most fields in the social sciences continue to put up so much resistance to accepting and taking feminist knowledge seriously that the likelihood of gender innovations finding their way into research and transforming disciplines becomes minimal.

It is, therefore, fundamental to consider and highlight the extent and nature of the impact of gender innovations. Critical work is needed to challenge entrenched androcentric models and basic conceptions of essential elements of disciplinary knowledge.

## Biases in Research

Before delving into gender innovations in the social sciences, it is necessary to understand and address stereotypes and patterns of gender bias within these disciplines. But what do we mean when we talk about stereotypes and prejudices?

Stereotypes are coherent and relatively rigid beliefs that a particular group shares concerning another group or social category. As legitimising opinions, stereotypes help maintain the status quo and power differences between groups, influence the expectations of individuals regarding a given social group, and even go so far as to produce effects on the recipients (self-fulfilling prophecies).

On the other hand, prejudices are judgments formulated before experience or in the absence of empirical data.

Gender bias in research is defined as treating men and women differently (or treating them as the same, which in some case can be equally harmful), with an impact that varies from favourable to harmful or neutral. It is a systematic and erroneous approach to social conceptions that wrongly consider men and women as strictly similar or even totally different when they should be regarded as equals.

Gender stereotypes contribute to biologising gender differences, accentuating male-female differences, minimising intra-categorical differences (between women and men) and denying legitimacy to identity constructions that propose themselves as alternatives (e.g. homosexual and transgender identities).

Returning to the issue of research in academia, gender insensitivity and androcentrism (the tendency to place the male gender at the head of society) can lead to systematic errors in research design and analysis, which, in turn, can lead to study results that are systematically different from actual values. Furthermore, the lack of information due to the biased sampling of research topics can lead to inequalities in access to care, knowledge and expertise.

In the more specific case of the social sciences, stereotypes and prejudices can manifest themselves in at least two different ways: the first is in the under-representation of women and minorities, and the second is in the priorities and topics that shape research and knowledge.

As already mentioned, throughout the social sciences, we see several subfields in which feminist approaches and gender analysis are the norms, yet the degree of gender segregation that often characterises this research in terms of practice, impact and citations is cause for concern. Despite decades of activism,

politics and research women are underrepresented in the academic system as writers, reviewers and editors. In general, there is a significant inequality of academic women in all disciplines of the social sciences regarding participation on the editorial boards of influential journals and low recognition and citation of feminist research.

Another dimension is essential and brings us back to considering how gender equality in academic contexts intersects with concerns about research quality. For instance, knowledge formation and certain characteristic forms of male privilege interact in defining 'mainstream' research agendas. If in some social sciences, women are so heavily underrepresented, it would seem a reasonable assumption that this gender imbalance reflects and reproduces the effect of beliefs about what kind of research is most valid and whose research it is. The recognition of feminist contributions to the social sciences has been primarily obscured or downplayed due to androcentric biases. Biases reinforce male dominance, hinder the effectiveness of women's social movements, and promote the invisibility of women in the cognitive process as of little or no importance. When women have low status and representation in a particular field of knowledge, it seems reasonable to assume that this leads to undervaluing certain types of knowledge and underestimating the social effects of gender inequity.

In today's institutional contexts, where perceptions of research 'excellence' determine funding decisions and career paths, and in which many disciplinary fields continue to construct images of the world that are either indifferent to gender issues or perpetuate ways of thinking that are intimately linked to the maintenance of inequality, it may be appropriate to reflect on and construct accounts of why gender matters in these fields.

## Gendered Innovations in Social Sciences

As seen in the previous module, the idea of gender innovations was originally applied to the STEM disciplines. However, it can be extended to the social sciences. Gender innovations in the social sciences have emerged from forms of enquiry that pay attention to the differences, inequalities and potentialities of humans that have been systematically overlooked or ignored by the androcentric paradigms that have dominated social enquiry. Gender innovations in the social sciences engage in an extended critique of traditional social science and often clash with conflicting economic interests and the disruption of entrenched political arrangements that have long preserved the interests of a small minority.

The power such innovations wield is more controversial than the case studies presented as evidence in STEM. Gender innovations in the social sciences aim to identify and challenge entrenched androcentric societal biases. Still, they aim to transform gender relations and reformulate issues of economic and political interest, going beyond detecting sex and gender differences.