

Foreword: Illuminating How Identities Stereotypes and Inequalities Matter through Gender Studies

Gender studies as an academic pursuit has made tremendous strides since the 1970s when women's studies first shoved its way into college curricula, transforming itself and the university as it did so. Gender Studies programs are now common on college campuses, even as they are on the front lines of attacks seeking to cut programs perceived as unmarketable and hence disposable by budget cutting administrators. These political battles inside the university mirror battles happening outside the institution where women, gender and sexual minorities, and people of color are forced to bear the brunt of the shrinking social safety net that puts all of us at risk. Gender studies is fertile terrain for cultivating new ways of framing problems and solutions both inside and outside institutions. This volume highlights current work at the intersection of gender studies and sociology that both demonstrates the current reach of this work and opens new avenues for young scholars in gender studies, sociology, and related disciplines such as history, anthropology and psychology.

The volume's editors have drawn together work from a wide range of methodologies that offers a global coverage of issues in gender studies today. This aspect makes this a particularly useful volume for professors and students looking for an introduction to contemporary issues in the field and the breadth of approaches scholars are taking in their work in this new millennium. The volume's authors use quantitative as well as qualitative methods to ask questions in such disparate subfields as literature, media and cultural studies, demography, political science, and more. Readers are taken from New Orleans' 9th Ward to Taiwan, from 19th Century Kansas to contemporary online worlds. Writings are grouped loosely under three main sections: Identities and Perceptions; Culture, Stereotypes, and Stigma; and Social Problems and Applications. Readers are encouraged to move freely in a nonlinear fashion through the book, exploring the varied routes through gender studies according to interest, classroom need, or simply for examples of how to apply different methodologies to different questions. The volume is meant to be flexibly read and used, just as gender studies must be in the increasingly austere world of the academy.

The first section of the book, "Identities and Perceptions," foregrounds questions about the content and making of identities in various "worlds," both on and off line. Jenny Davis and Nathalie Delise both examine how identities form in online

communities. Using an autobiographical approach, Davis explores the effects of blogging on the production of academic identities in gender and women's studies while Delise telescopes out to examine the role of Facebook in making gender both on and offline. Brandi Woodell's work takes readers to church to ask how people negotiate the intersection of LGBT and Christian identities in a world that often assumes one must choose one or the other. Departing from these more conventionally sociological inquiries, Emily Knox brings sociological insights to bear on her reading of tomboy identities in the work of Carson McCullers. The divergent issues brought up in this section are indicative of the range of the volume more generally.

The second section, "Culture, Stereotypes, and Stigma," is similarly broad, using quantitative and qualitative methods to bear on a variety of historical and contemporary problems. Lisa Bunkowski and Amanda Hedstrom take readers to nineteenth century Kansas to explore the experiences of women on the frontier. Ashly Patterson and Nicole Farris both use content analysis to explore, respectively, gender stereotypes and social construction of gendered identities in the feminine hygiene industry and advertising more generally. Echoing the literary approach of Knox's earlier essay, Manuel Medrano explores the groundbreaking writing of Carmen Tafolla and the ways in which she challenged stereotypes of Chicana/o identity to offer a more complex picture of those identities as well as American identity more generally.

The third section of the book, "Social Problems and Applications," is most explicitly concerned with the question of "now what?" Diane Mitrano's essay closely reads the Ms. Magazine blog to see how feminists are theorizing issues in child custody in order to explore what solutions are imaginable in this time and place. Using the limited data set provided by the National Survey of Family Growth, Mary Ann Davis looks at the use of foster families to expand the possibilities of LGBT family more generally. Davis also helpfully addresses the methodological problem of doing research with limited data, a persistent problem for gender studies scholars asking new kinds of questions. Yu Ting Chang's essay takes up a similar data set, but this time from Taiwan in addition to the United States, to ask how gender differences affect life chances in both places. This is a useful comparative study that addresses the methodological problem of working across global difference. Jenny Savely's piece shifts to the qualitative to explore how gendered expectations shape behaviors and attachments to place in New Orleans' 9th Ward. Savely's piece, like the others in this section, not only frames a problematic, but demonstrates how a gender studies lens can illuminate new possible answers and interventions. Taken in sum, the articles in this volume provide readers insights into current problems and questions in gender studies as an interdiscipline while encouraging readers to blaze their own trails that we can travel into the future.

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