GENDER IN SOCIOLOGY TEXTBOOKS

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The material in my Ph.D work consisted of sociology textbooks in the syllabi of the Departments of Sociology at the Universities of Helsinki and Tampere in 1946-2000. The focus was on the basic and intermediate level on one hand and on the so called gender research sections on the other. All in all 749 textbooks were analysed.

The analysis method was critical gender specific analysis with a special focus on parts of the books which were dealing with gender (cf. Mills 1995; Fairclough 1992). I was particularly interested in how gender was conceptualised, if it was, and, what were the contexts of in these conceptualisations, for example nature, culture, society to name a few.

Before showing examples of the different types of conceptualisations I will shortly present the dominant features of the data: the absence and the unquestioned presence of gender. The issues dealt in a nutshell here come from two chapters in my book (Sosiologian sukupuoli; "Gender in Sociology").

My quest here is to find out what does sociology of gender consists of.

The Absent and Self-evident Gender

What I found interesting is the so called classics in sociology and how they may use and write about gender - although I might disagree with them totally. In classical sociology books ideas on gender seemed to somehow vanish in the commentaries. For instance Ferdinand Tönnies who wrote his theory of Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft (1887; in English Community and Society 1957) basing it on gender differences is often quoted but gender is rarely discussed. So gender is regarded as less important information than the things presented. This phenomenon can be traced to the newest commentaries also outside the data (see for example Nobel 2000). Jo Eadie calls this boy talk in sociological theory (Eadie 2001).

The vanishing of gender happens without any specific explanations. Gender is put aside also with visible means, e.g. it may be stated in the texts that "it would be important to study gender from this perspective but it is done elsewhere" or then it is just blankly said that gender is not included. Sometimes women and gender are linked together and the author may actually write that "the study is more conveniently done when restricted to men only".

In many parts of the texts where gender is only present - as a reminder of life, or as a picture to amuse the reader and lighten up the text - persons, individuals, human beings are the subjects in the texts. There is a society of persons created in sociology. It reminds me of the dwellings Kirsi Saarikangas (2003) has described in the photographs taken by architects in
which there are no residents - and they are not even expected to come into the spot. When gender is only immanent and presented in examples of everyday life instead of being inside the theoretical, introducing or concluding parts, gender is made referential. In most books in which gender is discussed it is a referential matter.

The token innocence of the presence of gender also appears in the sexism which travels from book to book without any expressed reservations. This sexism where women are put aside together with children and made less important and less visible to obey the Subject man, is common in the sociology textbooks, especially the older ones. After reading a couple of hundred books I even started not paying any special attention to the phenomenon. Sexism is one of the features of sociology texts.

**Conceptualising Gender**

I separated five different types of conceptualisations in the material: socio-biological, functionalist, materialist, cultural and social conceptualisation of gender. The latter one is only emerging in the exam books and is typical in gender research or Women's Studies books. Besides these five types one could speak about embodied orders in understanding gender and sexual difference but this was marginal to other classifications I have constructed. Next I will shortly describe their main features.

**A) Socio-biological analysis**

Especially in the early Finnish sociology texts the influence of Edvard Westermarck is clearly seen and thus socio-biological argumentation of gender is put forward. There are many anthropological books in the data and in this subject area gender is also dealt with. In the Finnish texts there are not many clear cases of Darwinism, although Westermarck also makes comments on him. The biological essentialist division is done none the less. Examples of the animal world are used, and hens and cocks, male monkeys and female monkeys represent gendered positions in texts. In spite of this, the understanding of gender is rarely based solely on biology, and thus I call it socio-biological conceptualisation. The community if not society is brought in when discussing gender.

EXAMPLES 1. (overhead)

**B) Functionalist analysis**

The functional conceptualisation of gender can be traced to Talcott Parsons's analysis of society. In the most read and used Finnish sociology textbook *Sosiologia* ("Sociology") the society is metaphorically described as "a battleship steered by men aboard" (Allardt & Littunen 1979). There are masculine agents in the sea of society but perhaps in the haven females and other gendered subjects are waiting although they are not always named.

EXAMPLES 2.

**C) Materialist analysis**
With materialist analysis I refer mainly to Marxist understanding of gender. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote about the equality of men and women and the biased gender order of feudal and capitalist societies but, again, in the commentary literature the followers seem to forget gender from their topics. A lot of Marxist literature could be labelled as "gender free", especially the most political texts like V. I. Lenin's books. Not all materialist gender divisions are Marxist, and instead they could be labelled structuralist (as in studying class and the social order of society).

EXAMPLES 3.

Reading the radical materialist argumentation carefully one cannot be sure whether gender in the end is something that will be entirely erased when the society is changed, or, whether in the new world there will still be female and male agents. With the amount of "materialist" literature which bypasses gender, I would think the former.

D) Cultural analysis

In the context of culture, qualities seem to be slightly more important than the epistemic subjects women and men. Cultural conceptualisation writes itself as masculine or feminine. From the feminist perspective this might be a problem because the questions of power, subjectivity and agency are easily put aside. This feature is typical to metaphorisations in which different "things" are feminised, or masculinised. Despite this, it was a pleasure to read books in which femininity and masculinity were discussed, whether I agreed with the ideas or not. All in all one could conclude that sociologists are not particularly interested in talking about the qualities or essences of gender, and if they are the debate is based on anthropology, cultural studies or feminist studies.

EXAMPLES 4.

E) Social analysis

The early gender studies focus on family and the position of women. Family research has been meaningful from a feminist point of view because through it radical feminist literature is presented in the syllabus of sociology. These books emerge in the beginning of 1980s. The family studies books are a mixture of materialist and functionalist reasoning but there are already some hints of what I call social analysis of gender. When reading gender specific literature the missing part seems to be psychoanalytic theory and the sexual difference based on that. Perhaps sexual difference is considered to be conservative which is a read rag to sociology which often presents itself as implicitly critical.

The social conceptualisation of gender refers mainly to feminist sociological knowledge and the theoretical developments done within it. The gender system and gender contract seem to be the hegemonic concepts. Both of these concepts are sociological an sich because they combine the happening of gender and the happening of society into one set of meanings. Although there are both differences and relations dealt within these theoretical axes I claim
that gender as a relation is more widely accepted than gender as a difference (or sexual
difference if sexuality were a serious issue in the books). When the epistemic gender in the
texts creates a continuum between female subjects and male subjects, gender is thought of as
segments, not as differing positions. Of course there are also differing positions, like female
care through motherhood but not many others.

In the parts of syllabi that are named as "Women and Society" or "The Gender System" etc.
which I have called gender research the interests vary in time in the following manner: 1) sex
roles and equality; 2) except that there are men, there are women – a woman's point of view;
3) gender and gender system; 4) except that there are women, there are men - a man's point of
view.

EXAMPLES 5.

Conclusions

Questions of gender have arrived along three different roads into sociology: anthropology,
role studies and family research. The five different types of conceptualisations are often
mixed in the books. There are variations in time and space but I also noticed stability in them.
Although the context of gender knowledge changed from nature to culture or from universal
to specific, the socio-biological conceptualisation of gender can be read in the newest exam
books. In fact the rebirth of Darwinism in the beginning of the new millennium may indicate
that the biological understanding of gender can become more meaningful. The concept of
roles also held their status in the general and gender specific sociology. The functionalist
structural theory has without a doubt been the most influential theory in the sociology of
gender.

The fact that the conceptualisations of gender were often connected to each other reveals that
discussing gender is not very important in sociology. For instance in the Marxist debate it
may be important to differ from the Parsonian paradigm but in conceptualising gender this
differing is not as clear. From another point of view one could argue that if paradigmatic
gender divisions are not very clear then there could be quite a strong consensus on
problematising gender in sociology. I am inclined to state that not until the emergence of
social analysis of gender which means specific concepts and theorisation can one only start
to speak of sociology of gender.

Next I will present the five conceptualisations of gender in a table which shows the meaning
of gender and subjectivity in each one of them:

Picture 1. The conceptualisations of gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>socio-biological</th>
<th>functional</th>
<th>materialist</th>
<th>cultural</th>
<th>social</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gender</td>
<td>essence</td>
<td>role</td>
<td>cause</td>
<td>quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subject</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>husband</td>
<td>workforce</td>
<td>masculine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the materialist order the workforce usually means men and the reproducers women. In other positions of sociological discourse gender is more visible but masculine and feminine could also be called effects and rather than subjects as such.

These problematisations of gender rarely appear at the beginnings or the ends of the books which I find the most important and also interesting parts to read. In spite of all the roles, qualities, essences and causes in different divisions, gender does not get the place of actual knowledge if we agree that examples, footnotes and metaphorical expressions are not core knowledge. Of course they might carry the knowledge that the students will still remember after their exam and perhaps use or abuse later on. The particularity of gender and its referential position in sociology is forming space for the universal non-gendered knowledge of sociology. This line of argumentation brings me to my own task in my study. It has been emancipatory in a sense that I have wanted to give the knowledge on gender a central place in the exam books although it might not have been the case in them. The battle for knowledge must go on.

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REFERENCES:


