Gender Manifesto

A call for critical reflection on
Gender-oriented capacity building and consultancy[1]

We are pursuing a dual objective with this manifesto: On the one hand to eliminate the gendered norms and preconceptions in Gender Training and Consultancy; and on the other hand, to return to the core and the critical intrinsic meaning of the term *Gender*[2].

We have observed that in the fields of "Gender Training" and "Gender Consultancy" pervasive gender concepts tend to reproduce rather than alter the present gender order. We see the need, on the contrary, for critical reflection in this field, which questions dualising gender concepts instead of reinforcing them, analyses the stereotypes and exposes rather than reproduces them.
Also, instead of thinking of "gender" as an isolated category, it should always be viewed within the context of other social power relations. We consider a self-reflective, theoretically grounded and identity-critical practice to be necessary in education and consultancy with a gender perspective.

We have further noticed that the term "Gender Mainstreaming"[3] is increasingly interpreted as a neo-liberal reorganization strategy in order to optimize "gender-specific human resources". This narrow sense of the concept of gender equity as limited to organizational efforts to increase efficiency has failed, in our opinion, to achieve the original emancipatory objective to view equal rights, opportunities and participation of men and women as an all-encompassing human right. Where supposedly gender-specific skills have been "discovered" as virtually natural assets, gender equity has mutated into smart management of assumed differences. Consequently, social inequalities and exclusion are being hidden by a rhetoric of diversity. That is why, we plead for a systematic emancipatory perspective that is aware of the historical roots of Gender Mainstreaming in the feminist movements and the international context.

We see a danger of preserving, or even reinforcing, the mainstream gender order through Gender Mainstreaming and Gender Training. In our view, a critical reflective practice that can successfully confront this danger must fulfil certain prerequisites, which need greater recognition in this field. By indicating theoretical and methodological premises and the standards for professional practice derived from them, we offer this manifesto as a contribution to quality development in Gender Training and Consultancy.

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[1] We would like to thank Farah Alouidor and Rachel Andras for their translation of the German *Gender-Manifest*.

[2] The German *Geschlecht* does not distinguish between "sex" and "gender". However, the English term *gender* is presently used in the German language as well, causing confusion about its meaning. This translation uses the English *gender* as appropriate, with additional explanations where necessary.

[3] Gender Mainstreaming is a strategy to create gender equality in day-to-day life. Gender Mainstreaming is therefore a process-oriented cross-sectional task. "Top down" Gender Mainstreaming requires clear responsibilities and steering functions. Gender Mainstreaming is based on the production and systematic use of Gender knowledge.

Theoretical Premises: our understanding of gender

"Gender" is presently much talked about. A professional field of gender work, which was unthinkable in the mid-90s, has been established, at the latest since the international strategy of Gender Mainstreaming made its way into German institutions. Consultants, trainers and coaches make a living out of it today by training and consulting many different types of institutions in all aspects of gender. The main objective is mostly to promote the legally established gender equity through institutional action, especially in public institutions. In the course of the introduction of Gender Mainstreaming, "gender" has therefore – at least in professional circles – become a common expression. Often the word "women" or "men" has been replaced with the term "gender" or "gender" has been used as a synonym for "men, on the one hand, and women, on the other."

The use of *gender* in current scholarly discourse, however, denotes a position that does not confirm the prevailing gender duality but questions its social production processes and its ways of operating in a gender-based hierarchical structure. How is *gender* continually produced anew and yet unchanging as a bipolar norm of social attribution that relates men and women to each other as complements and conforms them to hierarchical relations? The societal norm of heterosexual duality of sexes and its inherent causal connection of biological sex with gender and desire is thus called into question: This fundamentally criticizes the prevailing gender order, which for instance associates a body defined as female with certain personal attributes and behaviour patterns classified as feminine and with a necessary focus on men as regards desire. This critique is based on the observation of numerous social genders and of different ways of desire. This has also shown that "sex" is also a by-product of socio-cultural construction.

We believe that this critical potential in the term *gender* has received too little attention in the gender-oriented education and consultancy field. Instead we have observed a problematic tendency in the use of the term *gender*: "Gender" is used as an analytical category, by which to diagnose gender differences, but those differences are often put down to differences between "men" and "women". Gender analysis tools have been used mostly to uncover differences between men and women in a specific field or subject, and then to make it a disputable issue. The aim of using different forms of gender analysis is to refute an assumed gender neutrality. However important this function is, it must be regarded with ambivalence: A critical side effect of gender analysis lies in the homogenising of men and women, respectively, and disregarding differences within the respective gender groups. In order to operationalise the gender analysis by reducing its complexity, a dual gender order is applied. The practice of gender analysis, thus, risks unwittingly "doing gender", which reinforces the differences that were supposedly only to be analysed. This, however, serves to maintain the very gender order that we feel should be overcome.

The main challenge, therefore, is to make a paradoxical approach to Gender the starting point for professional action; that is, to use Gender as an analytical category in order to overcome Gender as a classification category. That is why, it is necessary to view gender analysis, following the "three-step strategy" from construction to reconstruction to deconstruction, with regard to its own constructive aspect, thus, making gender analysis itself the subject of the analysis.

Deconstruction instead of dramatisation – An example

This three-step strategy can be clarified by means of an example of unreflected treatment of the term *gender*. The newly established concept of a "*gender team*" is being used professionally to denote a team of two trainers or consultants, which consists of a man and a woman. Clients often request the presence of such a gender team, since it is assumed that the participating men and women will feel addressed by a mixed-gender team. However, related to the above theoretical thoughts, reference to a gender team itself proves to be counterproductive, because the gender team is itself a gender duality construction and, as such, needs to be questioned.

The social mechanisms of construction and exclusion in this man-woman dichotomy can be worked out through critical reconstruction. If *Gender* is taken seriously as a critical category it can never exclusively refer to a man-woman team, the composition of which is based only on the biological category "sex". *Gender* as an idea specifically emphasizes detachment from the biological duality and the schematic man-woman distinction. This reduction of *Gender* to the biological existence as a man or woman is indeed an example of "doing gender", which reduces gender politics to a simplistic head count of females and males (that is, mere "sex counting") regardless of what these counted heads are thinking or what these people embody. Such a biological foundation of *Gender* thus contradicts the basic idea of the concept of *Gender*.

In contrast, deconstruction of the term "*gender team*" makes it possible to shift the meaning. Who- or whatever constitutes a gender team is articulated in a new way. A gender team can be composed of two or more people of any gender identity and therefore any "sex" if they have gender and training competence. *Gender*, in this understanding, does not set any limits.

Impetus for greater gender diversity

Common theoretical assumptions as well as fundamentalist religious or socio-biological determinist approaches often support the thesis of gender characteristics being generated by prediscursive factors, for example as God's will or genetic determination. This form of allocating predetermined gender roles goes against an understanding of gender equity, which always consists of an individual and collective freedom of decision and autonomy to act, whether in one's choice of career or ways of developing partnerships, lifestyles or companionship models. In our view, the task of a critical, reflective *Gender* practice is to point out complex *Gender* structures and at the same time to oppose the reproduction and trivialisation of differences. Therefore all statements which ascribe to men or women specific attributes, skills and/or limitations solely on the basis of their sex should be identified as part of a normative "gender corset", which in its static characteristics has to ignore and fail to recognise individual interests, competence and possibilities.

From our point of view it is not of issue to manage identified gender differences, but to identify the gender distinctions that are inherent in our perception.
This means recognizing the construction of supposed inequalities to be a process of normalisation that objectifies socially constructed differences as "natural" and then presents them to us as supposedly innately physical or mental. This process of

normalisation should be exposed and rejected as a social assignment of one's role and position in society, which is viewed as "normal".

Dealing responsibly with the category *Gender* requires an awareness of the "gender paradox", that is, treating the simultaneous constructing and overcoming of gender as a productive starting point for action.
Therefore, the important aspect is how *Gender* can be used in a way that contributes to overcoming the unequal social gender order. Hence, in line with Judith Lorber, we support a practice of "using gender to undo gender". A closer look at the meaning of the English verb *to undo* demonstrates that *undoing* refers, on the one hand, to the processes of loosening that which is tied and opening up what is closed and, on the other hand, it involves eliminating existing effects. *Undoing Gender* in this way loosens the ties, relations and attachments of the bipolar hierarchical gender order, unfastening the laces of the aforementioned gender corset and abolishing in the long term the still-existing effects of the gender hierarchy. This all promotes a gender diversity that is individually, equally and fairly moulded and a new way of renegotiating gender relations based on companionship and solidarity.

Methodical premises for a reflecting *Gender* – practice

Applying systematically the three-step: Construction-reconstruction-deconstruction
- *Identifying dual constructions of gender as such*
- reconstructing gender distinctions instead of assuming gender differences
- tracing down the historical, cultural, and political conditions that lead to *Gender*
- highlighting the multiple contexts and interplays of *Gender* with other social categories
- opening the „gender corset"
- deconstructing gender, therewith creating open space for diverse models of gender existence and multiple ways of living

„Undoing gender"
- unlearning gender stereotypes as an opportunity instead of as a threat
- (gradually) upsetting the gender order rather than speaking of „female" and „male" respectively, "gender specific" habits and behaviour.
- encouraging a conception of a person's identity as open and never terminated

Raising awareness of the „ paradoxes of gender"
- reflecting upon the double-edge of „doing gender", e.g. in the practice of "gender analysis" (generating gender based data)

Putting Gender concepts into the respective context
- Broaching *Gender* as a complete prerequisite concept based on feministic theory and practice, and locating it historically in the political movement context.

Posing questions on power relations
- concentrating on predominance and privileged structures in gender relations, and developing concrete steps for change

Facilitating participatory-methodology trainings
- focussing on the process and the participants
- communicating *Gender* in an interactive instead of an instructive way (for instance, through analyzing stereotypes with the aim to point out diversity and discussing standardisation processes and ways in which gender ambiguity is socially sanctioned).

Developing precisely-tailored concepts instead of offering standard recipes
- putting into context "*gender* analysis" and Gender Training and adjusting the content accordingly, as well as highlighting possibilities of linking *Gender* with other social categories

In conclusion: Standards for a reflective *Gender* practice

Thus, we propose the following professional standards based on these theoretical and methodical premises:

1. A reflective „*Gender* practice" opposes the reproduction of gender duality and offers instead an analysis of its foundation, its ways of functioning and its effects, in order to find long term solutions to overcome it.

2. A reflective gender practice opposes the trivialisation and dramatisation of gender. It promotes the specific perception of individual interests and capabilities beyond gender-based preconceptions, without losing sight of the influence of the hierarchical social gender order.

3. A reflective gender practice offers gender as an open concept and creates space for ideas for the elimination of previous restrictions on gender identities.

4. A reflective gender practice is aware that the origins of gender work are based in the feminist movements and relates to those roots. It respects the work of colleagues in the field and explicitly cites and credits the sources and resources used.

5. A reflective gender practice highlights the potential tension in the relationship between efficiency and equality and is committed to gender equality.

Where gender duality was, there shall diversity of genders be

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