

## GENDER

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## Key Features of the Category

Gender distinguishes humans into “women” and “men.” It is based on the notion of difference, arranged dyadically. This male/female dyad is often understood in terms of opposition (e.g., “the opposite sex”); the qualities or properties of the two parts of the dyad are assumed to be not only different in kind (as is an apple from an orange, or a tree from a motorbike) but different through mutual definition (e.g., concave vs. convex, a “male” plug vs. a “female” socket). Gender is also often understood hierarchically, with one part of the dyad seen as preeminent over the other. Complicating and skewing the practice of mutual definition is the ascription of greater cultural authority to one part of the dyad in naming the nature of that definition (McClung [1915] 1972: 70; de Beauvoir 1949; Ellmann 1968). While some scholars have posited the existence of a primitive matriarchy (Gage 1985 [1893]), in general “women” have not been consistently valued *over* those designated “men.” The reverse, however, has been the case. Gender is thus about power, or rather, issues of power inhere in the deployment of gender. The tension implicit in opposition is given concrete form in gender relations, the interactions between “women” and “men.”

The making of humans into women and men through gender operates both at the conceptual level and at the level of social practice. One’s gender ascription is a shaping factor in one’s life possibilities, assumed capabilities, symbolic representation, social power, cultural authority, expectations, dress, positioning in relation to physical violence and of what kind, permissibility of emotional expression and of what kind, how one’s sexual desires and practices are understood and named, one’s social value and one’s religious status. The extent and particulars of gender ascription vary from culture to culture. Some limit gender sharply to specifics like external genitalia or pregnancy (Lepowsky

1993; Sered 1998b). Others expand the meaning of gender to include the structure of the entire universe, such as in the yin-yang polarity of Asian cultures.

Though gender is ubiquitous, it has often been invisible as an analytic category, even as it was being employed. Minnich (1990: 136–146) describes it as a “mystified concept” which is both symptom of and remedy for the hierarchical arrangement of the gender dyad and its consequences. That is, gender is the product of the hierarchical distinction of humans into women and men, but it is also a concept which alerts us to the fact of that construction, and hence its possible transformation. This apparent contradiction may be better understood after considering some of the strategies or operations to which gender is subject. In no particular order these are:

- ontologizing*—ascribing to the level of Being;
- essentializing*—positing as an essential (eternal) defining characteristic;
- cosmologizing*—ascribing to a cosmic order;
- naturalizing*—making something “natural,” that is, free from (humanly constructed) conventions;
- reifying*—converting something mental to a thing, that is, materializing;
- authorizing*—sanctioning, giving authority;
- valorizing*—imputing value;
- idealizing*—exalting to perfection or excellence;
- normalizing*—establishing as a rule, setting up a standard by which to judge deviation;
- pathologizing*—naming as a disorder;
- problematizing*—making into a problem requiring or implying a solution.

These strategies combine in different ways to deploy gender in specific cultural circumstances. The great variety of combination of these strategies has contributed to much of the debate and, indeed, confusion about gender as a social practice.

A further complication is presented by “sex,” that is, specificities in anatomical form and function related to bisexual reproduction. Anthropologist Nicole-Claude Mathieu (1996) offers three main models of the relationship between sex and gender. In the first, sex and gender are *homologous*. Human identity is “sexual.” That is, “sex is experienced as an individual anatomical destiny which one follows through the gender that conforms to it. Here gender translates ‘sex’” (Adkins and Leonard 1996: 17). This has been a long-standing view of sex and gender in Western culture. Sociobiology, discussions of “brain sex,” research into possible physiological bases for homosexuality, and many popular studies of differences in male and female communication styles all reflect the assumption undergirding this model, that is, the assumption of a naturalized and essentialized difference between women and men reified at the physiological level. Here, one’s gender is an inevitable result of the body with

which one was born. The exaggeration of difference through clothing styles, range of allowable physical activity, desirability of particular body shapes (e.g., broad shoulders in men, curvaceousness in women) is read as a biological programme which human culture shapes only slightly. On this account, gender is as "natural" as sex.

In the second model, gender and sex are *analogous*. Human identity is "sexed." That is, "gender consciousness is seen as based on lived experience in a group (i.e., from 'socialisation; and living as a woman within the group of women'). Here gender symbolises sex (and sex symbolises gender)" (Adkins and Leonard 1996: 17). Put another way, gender is the social meaning given to sex. Sex is natural while gender is cultural, subject to human variation and construction (King 1995: 4–6). This viewpoint is common in the social sciences and is congenial to a range of disparate analyses. For example, both socialist and cultural feminist positions find this model acceptable, the former because it allows for the politicization of existing gender relations (social meanings can be contested) and the latter because it affirms cultural difference between women and men, and allows for the valorization of "women's experience and perspectives." This sex/gender model retains the notion of normative heterosexuality grounded in biological nature, although it allows for particular cultural constructions which transgress a strict linkage of sex and gender. The *berdaches* of some North American Plains and Western Indian tribes are one example: after adolescence some males become social women and some females social men, having sexual relations with persons of the same sex and opposite gender. Similarly, Albanian "vowed virgins" take on the role of *paterfamilias* and live as men, with all the rights and privileges pertaining thereto, so long as they follow the unwritten rule never to marry or have children. The view that sex and gender are analogous, and that gender expresses diverse cultural understandings of biological sex, has also had many adherents.

The third model sees sex and gender as *heterogeneous*. Human identity comes from one's "sex-class." Neither sex nor gender are natural. Rather, "a social/political logic is seen to exist between sex and gender, and identity is based on sex-class consciousness: on recognizing male domination. Here, gender is seen to construct sex (and heterosexuality is viewed as a social institution)" (Adkins and Leonard 1996: 17; also Rubin 1975). The notion that "gender precedes sex" appears counter-intuitive in a culture dominated by the notion that gender is *caused* by sex. However, there is a kind of circular reasoning which both posits and assumes one form of anatomical difference (that related to bisexual reproduction) to be foundational and definitional of all human life. Further, sexual dimorphism is not absolute: "nature" produces humans with a range of combinations of hormones, chromosomes and sexual apparatuses (Stoltenberg 1989: 25–39). The selection of the extremes of a "male/female" continuum is a human choice and conceptual construct. For this reason, some (Guillaumin 1982, 1985; Mathieu 1980; Wittig 1992) oppose

use of the term "gender" entirely, as it implies there is an actual "natural" biological basis for "sex" upon which gender is then grafted. Others argue that since the very term "sex" denotes and connotes something natural (that is, "naturalness" is part of its definition), another term (first "sex roles" and then "gender") was a necessary step in showing that "sex" is "applied to divisions and distinctions which are social" (Delphy 1996: 36). The term "gender" therefore retains some usefulness as a marker of the constructed character of the categories "male" and "female."

Postmodernist discourses shift the language from gender to the body and its practices, particularly its sexualities (Foucault 1978). Specific attention is paid to psychoanalytic categories and the symbolic order, within which there is a "masculine" (a linear, goal-driven, order imposing modality) and a "feminine" (a chaotic, infinitely open, multi-faceted, transgressive modality). The notion of gender as a male/female dyad (in which the female is defined by the male as "not-male" or Other) is seen as a product of the masculine modality, to be resisted. Gender neutrality is not an option, however. Trying to be neutral is both futile (everyone is positioned somewhere) and morally misguided, in that it obscures the positioned speaker (Irigaray 1985; Tong 1998). The extent to which postmodernist discourses participate in essentializing gender is a complex and unresolved issue. Theresa de Lauretis concludes that gender "exists," but it "is neither an unproblematic procession from biologically determined sex nor an imaginary construct that is purely arbitrary. Rather, gender is the product and process of a number of social technologies that create a matrix of differences and cross any number of languages" (de Lauretis 1987, in Tong 1998: 209).

### Historical Development

The division of humans into males and females is an ancient practice, as is theorizing about the nature and meaning of that difference (Gleason 1990, 1995; Tuana 1993). As Thomas Laqueur has shown, a shift took place in late eighteenth-/early nineteenth-century Euro-North American culture regarding the dominant understanding of human nature. Prior to that time, the prevailing gender ideology presumed a "one sex/flesh" model of humanity in which "women were essentially men in whom a lack of vital heat—of perfection—had resulted in the retention, inside of the structures that in the male are visible without ... [thus] women are but men turned outside in" (Laqueur 1990: 4). This is not to suggest that egalitarian social relations were enjoyed between men and women: maleness was still valorized, such that those designated women were understood to be lesser or damaged forms of the full human norm and ideal. However, at least one consequence of the "one sex/flesh" model was the assumption that men and women naturally experienced sexual desire, as might be expected of the same flesh, whether obverted or inverted.

Since the late eighteenth century in Western culture much of the social practice and reflection upon gender has been done from a "two sex/flesh" model (Laqueur 1990: 8) in which sex and gender are presumed to be homologous. That is, male/female oppositional difference is assumed, named and naturalized; it is often cosmologized and ontologized as well. However, the vast amount of prescriptive literature on how females and males ought to behave suggests that, while normative, these distinctions are transgressed with sufficient frequency that further guidelines are required to reinforce what nature (ostensibly) intends. Hence even when gender is theorized as weak (physical male/female difference reflects and embodies the structure of the universe; human shaping of that difference is minimal or non-existent), in practice human ability to act differently is acknowledged, though not necessarily approved of. Those who deviate from the normative gender script are pathologized, and/or special categories are set up to allow for the maintenance of the dominant system while ensuring that "anomalies" do not disrupt its fundamental logic.

It is important to remember that not every member of *homo sapiens* is necessarily granted the cultural status of humanity (and hence the opportunity to be male or female). For example, when Plato is considering whether women can be Philosopher Kings, or when Aristotle is noting that man's virtue is in commanding and woman's in obeying, neither are including slaves in their analyses (Spelman 1988). Two contradictory operations are going on simultaneously in this literature. On the one hand, a norm is being established: How is the category "human" to be boundaried? What distinguishes human from non-human? At the same time an ideal is being set up, not just what humans are (an aggregate of all the qualities of those designated "human") but what humans ought to be (amongst those qualities, which are the best?). In the case of both Plato and Aristotle, slaves are not human in the same way women and men are. Humanity is thus a cultural distinction. By extension, even when writers naturalize gender, their normative understandings of humanity (often, in the West, "Man") suggest a deeper construction of the categories of male and female even, perhaps especially, when it is not acknowledged.

Just as gender difference has been maintained in theory and cultural practice, so too has it been resisted. Celibacy, for example, as a requirement of religious orders, has been one way of "transcending" the disabilities imposed by one's gender ascription. Other forms of resistance have been more overt, manifesting themselves in specific written objections to the cultural gender script, and in direct transgressions of that script in lived experience. Feminist scholarship has paid particular attention to women's resistance to gender asymmetry and androcentric misogyny, in both historical studies and contemporary feminist theory. Recent scholarship in lesbian/gay/queer studies have foundationally challenged the practices of gender ascription as well (Duberman et al. 1989; Feinberg 1996; Comstock and Henking 1997).

The history of the term "gender" *per se* is complicated by its slippage in usage with the term "sex roles," the social possibilities and expectations accorded those designated female and male. To see what women and men do as "roles" it is first necessary to disrupt the notion of biological inevitability in female and male behavior. Margaret Mead is credited with this move, arguing on the basis of her anthropological research in Samoa that most societies establish a dualistic division of human characteristics, arbitrarily assigning some to women and some to men (Mead 1935). Yet as Delphy notes (1996: 31), Mead was less concerned with "sex roles" than with masculine and feminine psychological dispositions or "temperaments." The real development of the idea of "sex roles" took place from the 1940s to the 1960s, in the work of Komarovsky (1950), Myrdal and Klein (1956) and Michel (1959, 1960). Influenced by the work of Talcott Parsons, they all "saw a *role* as the active aspect of a *status*," the position one is given in a social hierarchy (Delphy 1996: 31). Where Mead saw a fundamental division of labor between men and women as natural, these authors stressed that the position of women was both socially determined and changeable. Moreover, they challenged Parsons' assumption of harmony between the sexes, and his belief that women's "traditional" subordinated, domestic role was good for both women and society.

The specific term "gender" first began appearing in the 1970s, in works such as Ann Oakley's *Sex, Gender and Society* (1972). Oakley upheld the distinction between biological "sex" and cultural "gender," but rejected all forms of biological determinism, on the grounds that cultural variability in gender demonstrated that it was social in nature. Despite its presence in the earlier work on sex roles, Oakley's definition did not address gender asymmetry or gender hierarchy (Delphy 1996: 32).

Since the 1970s there has been an explosion of scholarship on gender (Kramarae and Spender 1992). The category was widely adopted both in the social sciences and in the humanities, and was particularly visible in work proceeding from feminist perspectives. Some attempts were also made to rethink maleness and masculinity (Petras 1975). Prior normative gender positions were reinscribed in response to these initiatives (Gilder 1973). Others advocated "androgyny," understood either as the integration of "masculine" and "feminine" qualities in a kind of Jungian hybrid or else as obliterating these distinctions altogether (Heilbrun 1973). The first formulation was soon rejected by radical feminists such as Mary Daly (1978: xi) as reinforcing the very gender stereotypes it was intended to overcome. Neither did obliterating gender distinctions in androgyny gain widespread currency.

This theorizing was not done in a gender neutral environment. Historically the vast preponderance of authoritative reflection on female/male difference had been done by those with male gender ascription. The result was an androcentric asymmetrical account which valorized maleness. Attempting to

redress this imbalance, some gender essentialists identified a problem of omission, with the inclusion of "women's perspective" as its remedy. For social constructivists, the real issue lay in the way the whole gender *system* had been named, constructed and programmed to maintain male interests. A wide range of analyses were produced (Tong 1989, 1998; Tuana and Tong 1995) contesting the naturalness of received gender arrangements. These were usually identified as feminist in that they explicitly contested the appropriateness of the depiction and social constraints of women, and the social mechanisms which produced and reinforced them.

The attempt to redress the imbalance of androcentric accounts by focusing on women meant that maleness was not always fully theorized, although it was problematized, and sometimes naturalized and pathologized as well (Dworkin 1981, 1987). On this account, women were seen as (inappropriately) constructed and constrained by patriarchal culture. Men, the beneficiaries of that culture, were seen to intend or sustain women's oppression due to inherent flaws in their nature which made them act unjustly and/or violently, such as the "necrophilia" attributed to them by Mary Daly (1978: 59-64), a model which reversed the formerly conventional construction of "natural" woman and more "cultural" man (Eliade 1959b, 1969; Ortner 1974). Investigations proceeded in any number of directions and from a range of assumptions. A new gender essentialism emerged, with femaleness now occupying the valorized position and, by implication, an authorized position in a new social order (Griffin 1978). Radical constructivists maintained a critique of prior social arrangements of gender, acknowledged their contemporary phenomenological reality and looked for resources to transform those arrangements to ones of greater equality.

In the 1980s the singular focus on gender to the exclusion of other cultural variables was now rejected in favor of a more complex analysis which included race and class, sexualities, age, (dis)ability and ethnic and colonial positionings. An emphasis on "difference," fueled in large measure by the increasing influence of postmodernist and poststructuralist theories on academic discourse, fractured formerly (assumed to be) coherent concepts like gender, locating them within a matrix of multiple and changing "techniques" in which power and authority were deployed. Postcolonial critiques further moved to decenter Euro-North American hegemony, offering new accounts of gender and its implication in imperialism (Mohanty 1991a, 1991b). A significant tension has developed between those who see a continued need to redress the imbalance of traditional gender accounts by a specific focus on women (with continued attention to the material conditions of those so designated) and those whose theoretical commitments make "woman" an "empty category" (Downs 1993, Scott 1993). Some contemporary scholars question the very existence of gender, arguing that the multiplicity of other variables shaping human life, such as race, social class, ethnicity, age, physical size, shape and health, make the concept at

best an artificial one, and at worst a homogenizing and totalizing obliteration of the reality of difference amongst women (and by extension, amongst men) (Butler 1990). Others argue that while at the level of theory "gender skepticism" has a certain salience, at the level of social practice gender persists to inscribe both normative heterosexuality and male dominance.

Scholarship which reflected on maleness and masculinity developed a higher profile in the 1980s and 1990s. Here, too, numerous positions were articulated. Some sought to reinscribe an essentialized masculinity through male bonding and self-discovery (Bly 1990; Keen 1991). Others took seriously the critiques of gender ideology being generated by feminist scholars and writers to consider the deployment of masculinity historically (Tosh 1991) and in contemporary culture (Kaufman 1987; Brittan 1989; Brod 1987). Masculinities were denaturalized and pluralized, with a variable degree of attention to power inequities in past and current gender systems. Still others argued the incompatibility of humanity and manhood (Stoltenberg 1993), holding with French materialist feminism the position that gender creates hierarchy and hence must be abandoned. Against these constructivist approaches in scholarship, sociobiological accounts of sex / gender and sexualities have gained popular visibility.

Contemporary scholarship thus displays a bewildering array of positions on gender, from the most sociobiological and deterministic (in which "gender" hardly exists at all) to the most constructivist (where gender's component categories of "men" and "women" are seen as so unstable and fragmentary that they are meaningless). Between these extremes inquiry into the making of "women" and "men" continues, as does the social practice of distinguishing humans into those categories.

### Major Subsets within the Category "Gender"

The categories below provide four major frameworks within which the techniques and strategies of gendering (e.g., ontologizing, pathologizing, idealizing, normalizing and so forth) have been undertaken. They may be summarized as follows:

1. No (or minimal) gender. Biological sex is strong, cultural gender is weak to non-existent. Male superordination and female subordination is inevitable, a fact of nature, cosmically determined, divinely ordained. Heterosexuality is normative. A subset holds that female subordination is a distortion of the natural order which has emerged out of an imbalance caused by cultural practices such as technology. On this account, balance needs to be restored by revalorizing "woman's nature." Male/female difference, signaled by biological difference around reproductive heterosexual sex is taken as (properly) foundationally determinative of human life.

2. Sex is natural, gender is cultural. There is immense variation within this category, depending on how strongly or weakly either sex or gender is construed. A politicized understanding of gender is inherent in its logic. Because gender is variable, it is changeable. If changeable, in what direction and for whose benefit? Equally, who is benefiting now?
3. Neither sex nor gender are natural. There is no logical reason for some biological markers to determine human culture and selfhood. It would be equally reasonable to categorize people on the basis of their nostril shape (people breathe twenty-four hours a day; presumably they do not employ their sex organs so frequently). Gender is a misleading category because it suggests that there is something natural about "sex"; however, it has been a useful conceptual tool to decenter "sex" as the necessary and sufficient condition for determining human identity. Division and hierarchy have been inherent to gendering hitherto; overcoming sex/gender hierarchy would end sex/gender distinctions. Material conditions which result from sex/gender division and hierarchy need to be challenged and transformed. Sexual practices are multiple; some practices (rape, for example) are unacceptable.
4. Whatever sex is, gender is discursively constructed. Nothing is natural, inevitable, given. There is no inherent logic which impels transformation of material conditions of human life. Gender is performative, sexual practices are multiple and non-normative, and continued focus on one component of the gender dyad (i.e., "women") may actually maintain gender hierarchy by reifying its component parts.

### Critical Evaluation of Past Uses and Contributions to the Scientific Study of Religion

Academic fields emerge out of particular social and historical contexts. These contexts set the terms of debate for their practitioners, foregrounding specific concerns and problematics, and obscuring or ignoring others. Increasing attention has been paid to the role of imperial and other political interests in setting the intellectual and investigative agendas of the scientific study of religion, illustrating its implication in a variety of colonial practices and strategies (Chidester 1996; McCutcheon 1997b). What has been insufficiently considered within the scientific study of religion, however, is how the techniques of empire—and hence the theoretical paradigms generated within those contexts—are gendered (Mills 1994; Blunt and Rose 1994).

As we have seen, there is no neutral, self-evident rendering of gender. Each gender ideology is at some level a decision about how the world is to be configured and understood, establishing normative social, political and cultural practices which set the parameters and possibilities for how human life might

be lived. The context out of which the scientific study of religion emerged was marked by a specific, highly contested prescriptive gender ideology which, in the circular, mystified process outlined by Minnich (1990) became so ubiquitous as to be virtually invisible to the subsequent majority culture knowledge makers in religion.

That gender ideology emerged during the expansion of Euro-North American empire, a time marked by a series of social debates occasioned in part by changing social and economic conditions of developing industrial capitalism. Industrialization and urbanization had a number of significant social effects, amongst which was the development of a bourgeoisie, or middle class. In contrast to élites (who had no workplace as such) and the peasantry (whose work and home were coterminous), the middle class enacted a distinction between the "private" sphere of the home and the "public" sphere of the workplace. This private/public distinction was also gendered; "women's sphere" was the (ostensibly private) home while "men's sphere" was anything outside of it. At the same time waged labor and the widespread availability of manufactured goods shifted the household from a producing to a consuming economic unit. This made a distinction between the world of home and the world of work somewhat more plausible, while having the practical effect of rendering women's ongoing domestic labor invisible (since women in the home "don't work"). Moreover, the prescriptive and constructed distinction between public and private obscured and elided the widespread involvement of working women in waged labor in the (presumably male) "public" sphere.

These cultural renegotiations occasioned by industrial capitalism in the nineteenth century were aided by intellectual perspectives such as Darwin's theory of evolution, which explained this rapid social change in terms of "the differentiation and specialization of function," as the sign of evolutionary advance. This gave further weight to a dual nature view of humanity grounded in (ostensibly non-cultural) biologically determined sex in which reproductivity (a version of survival) was its central driving force.

*Religionswissenschaft*, the comparative, non-confessional scientific study of religion called for by Max Müller, embodied and valorized a number of intellectual stances which characterized these developments. Following the nineteenth-century penchant for oppositional dualisms, a sharp line was drawn between science and religion (which later shows up in distinctions between, and arguments about, religious studies and theology). Reason and emotion too were polarized, so that within the realm of science disembodied reason was seen to function independently, "objectively," from a position of epistemic acontextuality known as the "god's-eye view" or "view from nowhere." Religious commitment was and is seen, in this account, to interfere with the analytical, comparative project undertaken in the scientific study of religion. In keeping with the location of religion and morality in "women's sphere," such faith was construed as a "feminine," an interior stance rightly subject to the external,

scientific, analytical male gaze. Unacknowledged in this version of scientific objectivity is the male gender-embeddedness of the vast majority of its practitioners, and their thoroughgoing implication in the prescriptive gender ideology of androcentrism in its specific nineteenth- and twentieth-century cultural form of "separate spheres." This requires some unpacking.

The construction of any new ideology does not proceed without opposition. Central amongst the social debates which marked the nineteenth century was the contestation over "Woman's True Place," and what has been called "the Cult of True Womanhood" (Welter 1966; Smith-Rosenberg 1985). The new prescriptive gender ideology of "separate spheres" embodied Laqueur's "two sex/flesh" model: a sharp oppositional distinction was made between women and men as social and biological bodies, and those distinctions were naturalized in terms of both evolutionary theory and culturally reinforced social arrangements (for example, legal prohibitions against women undertaking lucrative and prestigious professions such as medicine or the law, enforced economic dependency by denying married women the right to own their own property, and sanctioned sexual slavery by the legal obligation of a wife to provide sexual services to her husband at his command). This configuration was vigorously resisted. Women insisted upon the right to vote, to own property, to the sanctity of their own bodies, to education, to access to professions, to marry or not, and to exercise their reproductive capacities as they chose. These vocal, public, insistent struggles made the so-called "Woman Question" one of the most lively debates of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Engels 1972 [1884]; Mill 1988 [1869]; Martineau 1840, 1985; Gilman 1966 [1898], 1911; McClung 1972 [1915]; Rossi 1988; Schreiner 1914; Spender 1983; Stanton 1974 [1895]; Wright 1913).

Yet despite this sustained, visible, and vocal problematizing of gender as an analytical and social category, the prescriptive gender ideology of separate spheres, marked by an aggressive, rational, public, culturally authoritative male and a passive, receptive, emotional, private and nurturant female was naturalized, ontologized, and authorized in the scientific study of religion from its origins. The scientific study of religion thus is implicated in a particular construction of gender, one which is enmeshed in notions of male cultural dominance and female passivity. A culturally normative "Mankind" is posed against "the Sex," as women were identified and delimited in male cultural discourses, a construction which by the twentieth century came to include both single-nature (women as deficient) and dual-nature (women as oppositionally different) versions of male/female gender difference.

The continued male domination of the field of the scientific study of religion is both symptomatic of this gender ideology and a mask of its male gender-embeddedness, facts which served and still serve to distort and render unreliable the knowledges being generated about religion. Circularity of reasoning is a key problem. The asymmetry of androcentrism assumes that

what men do is of preeminent human importance. The "self-evidence" of that importance is then naturalized and its gender-embeddedness obscured. When men then do what now is considered "objectively" important (often because it is "public," itself a construct and consequence of a particular gender ideology), men and their actions become not only a "serious" subject for intellectual investigation and analysis, but also *representative* of humanity overall (Warne forthcoming b). In similar circular fashion, what women do is less important by definition, because women do it; alternately, what women do is important only in the terms set down for them within the androcentric frame (Lerner, 1979).

Just as imperialist agendas have been made visible when Euro-North American normativity is queried, so too the extent of androcentric distortion becomes evident once women are placed at the center of the study. The issue of secularization pointedly illustrates both these concerns. As the nineteenth century progressed, religion was increasingly theorized in evolutionary terms. Renunciation of religion was seen to be a natural process as "mankind" moved from its "childhood" into "adulthood." This process was both personal (in that rational adults—epitomized by males—would relinquish their childish dependency on religion), and global and pan-historical (in that scientific Euro-North American culture represented the highest evolutionary state of "mankind" while the "primitives" of the "Dark Continent" of Africa and elsewhere represented "Man's infancy"). Secularization theory builds on these presumptions, positing an originally sacralized cosmos which (in its dystopic form) falls victim to, or (in its utopic form) is released from superstition by, an enlightenment of reason, particularly that marked by technological, scientific advance. And indeed, public social power in Euro-North America did shift from the ranks of the (male) clergy to a "new priesthood" of (male) scientists and government officials. But did the ongoing religious life of humanity actually demonstrate the process of renouncing religion which secularization theory asserts?

The secularization narrative presumes at least three things: first, that the so-called public sphere is preeminent (Ammerman 1994: 291). Religious leadership and received institutional forms are taken as the proper barometers for assessing the vitality of religions. Second, by implication in an androcentric frame, male religious behavior (as culturally authoritative speakers in religion's public forms) is assumed to be the significant marker of human cultural development. Thirdly, it conflates "religion" with Euro-North American Christianity, a highly problematic and underinvestigated formulation. All these assumptions are plausible within an ideological framework which assumes Euro-North American superiority and masculine dominance. Yet as Ann Braude has shown regarding the American context, there has been no falling away from religion if women are taken into account. Instead, "per capita church membership in the United States increased steadily throughout the nineteenth century, beginning at less than 10 percent and reaching stunningly



high rates (67–76 percent) that have persisted throughout the twentieth century" (Braude 1997: 95). Indeed, the narrative construction of Christianity's "declension, feminization, and secularization" in North America only makes sense if men's religious lives are assumed to be more important than women's: percentage-wise, women have always been in the majority (Braude 1997: 93–94). Moreover, women are increasingly taking public and institutional positions within Christianity, effecting considerable liturgical and theological change (Braude 1997: 101–103). As Braude lays out in detail, once the presumption of male preeminence is dislodged—and with it, the ideological construct of gendered public/private spheres in which women are "contained" in the private, non-normative, and culturally less evolved—"secularization," in North America at least, is either reconfigured or disappears altogether (Warne forthcoming a). The decentering of colonialist assumptions of European cultural normativity yields similar results.

As the example of secularization suggests, it is high time that the scientific study of religion scrutinized the cultural assumptions of its own theory base. Yet (to take the category explored here), rather than seeing gendering as a central element in world-building—one of religion's main projects—the scientific study of religion has proceeded within an obscured and unacknowledged gender ideology marked by androcentrism. The human cultural project of gendering (Ortner 1996), and the asymmetries of power and authority which are established via that process, have not received the kind of critical scrutiny that could reasonably be expected from an intellectually rigorous scientific study of cultural forms and processes. Instead, engagement with the question of gender in religion has been marginalized, placed in "women's sphere" of connection, commitment and "advocacy." The strong version of objectivity that has characterized the scientific study of religion from its inception, with its notion of human understanding unmeshed in human selves, has stood as a barrier and functioned as the ideological justification for marginalizing or ignoring gender and leaving androcentrism intact.

Nevertheless, despite these obstacles, gender-critical work on religion has been widely undertaken. It first emerged in Christian theological contexts, as women (and some few men) challenged traditional renditions of women's deficiency and/or unfitness for religious leadership (Saiving 1960; Tavard 1973). Feminist theology (Warne forthcoming a) has continued the project of gender critique with great vigor, and is now being undertaken in traditions other than Christianity and Judaism, such as Rita Gross' (1993) feminist reconstructions of Buddhist traditions. Gender-critical scientific studies of religion have proceeded since the early 1970s (Plaskow and Romero 1974; Gross 1977, 1996), although the specter of "advocacy" has served to inhibit their acceptance and application in the mainstream, with a few welcome exceptions (MacQueen 1988). "Women in" and "women and" studies examined the characterization and theorization of women within religious tradition and moved beyond those boundaries to

suggest other religious possibilities for them (Clark and Richardson [1977] 1996; Cooley et al. 1992; Flinn and Bowker 1997). Goddess worship, both historical and contemporary, also became a growing focus of scholarship (Olson 1987; Christ 1987; Eisler 1987). As Carol Christ (1992) and others (Warne 1998) have shown, although gender-critical studies of religion have been increasingly available (Bendroth 1993; Hawley 1994; King 1987, 1990, 1995; Joy and Neumaier-Dargyay 1995; A. Sharma 1987, 1994a, 1994b; S. Young 1993), they retain the status of a kind of "expertise of the margins," produced and read by those who do not fit the received cultural gender script of male pre-eminence and normativity. A partial exception is the interesting new work being produced on masculinities by Jewish scholars such as Daniel Boyarin (1993, 1997) and Lawrence Hoffman (1996), which complements feminist analyses of the construction of gender in Judaism (Sered 1999). Gendered studies of Islam are also available (Haddad and Esposito 1998), although there is still a tendency, with religion as in other areas, to treat gender as something which has to do more with women than with men. However, these explorations of located knowing and cultural gender construction have yet to transform dominant discourses in method and theory in the scientific study of religion.

### Prospects for Future Usefulness

As long as we distinguish humans as "women" and "men," and as long as these distinctions carry symbolic meaning and cultural authority which shape human life possibilities, the concept of gender will be essential to any adequate analysis of religion. Gender as an analytical category, and gendering as a social practice, are central to religion, and the naturalization of these phenomena and their subsequent under-investigation have had a deleterious effect on the adequacy of the scholarship that the scientific study of religion has produced. Until the scientific study of religion becomes intentionally gender-critical in all of its operations, it will unwittingly reproduce, reify and valorize the nineteenth-century gender ideology which marks its origins, rendering suspect any claims to the scientific generation of reliable knowledge it seeks to make.

Suggested Readings

- Blunt, Alison and Gillian Rose (Eds.)  
1994 *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies*. New York: Guilford.
- Comstock, Gary David and Susan E. Henking (Eds.)  
1997 *Que(e)rying Religion: A Critical Anthology*. New York: Continuum.
- Gleason, Maud W.  
1995 *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- King, Ursula  
1995 "Introduction: Gender and the Study of Religion," pp. 1-38 in Ursula King (ed.), *Religion and Gender*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Kramarae, Cheris and Dale Spender (Eds.)  
1992 *The Knowledge Explosion: Generations of Feminist Scholarship*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Laqueur, Thomas  
1990 *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- MacQueen, Graeme  
1988 "Whose Sacred History? Reflections on Myth and Dominance." *Studies in Religion/Sciences religieuses* 17:142-158.
- Minnich, Elizabeth Kamarck  
1990 *Transforming Knowledge*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Tuana, Nancy  
1993 *The Less Noble Sex: Scientific, Religious, and Philosophical Conceptions of Woman's Nature*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Warne, Randi R.  
1998 "(En)Gendering Religious Studies." *Studies in Religion/Sciences religieuses* 27: 427-436.
- Forth-coming "Making the Gender-Critical Turn." In Tim Jensen and Mikael Rothstein (eds.), *Secular Theories on Religions: A Selection of Recent Academic Perspectives*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum.

INTELLECT

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Intellectualism stands for a perspective in the comparative study of religion traceable to the theories of the Victorian English ethnologist Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917) and his disciple James George Frazer (1854-1941), author of the widely read *Golden Bough* (1924 [3 editions: 1890, 1900, 1915]). Predicated on the common-sense notion that religious behavior is activity governed by religious beliefs, intellectualist theory holds that ideas about the gods have arisen mainly from human efforts to explain events that occur in the natural world. It contends that in non-literate cultures especially, people attribute the causes of certain events, both routine and exceptional, to the agency of supernatural beings, with the result that in such communities religion plays a role quite similar to that of science in the secular societies of the modern West. The purpose of religious belief and practice is therefore to provide an understanding of nature, to communicate with the spiritual beings that govern its course, and thereby to predict and control its processes. At first widely accepted, especially in Anglo-American discussion at the close of the Victorian era, intellectualism came in the early and middle decades of the twentieth century to be just as widely rejected, due largely to: the influence of reductionist thinkers such as Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx and Émile Durkheim on the study of religion; the work of myth-and-ritual theorists, who argued that religious practice is logically and historically prior to belief; and the findings of a new generation of professional field-working anthropologists, who were severely critical of the methods employed by Tylor and Frazer. In the later decades of the twentieth century, intellectualism has undergone a limited but vigorous revival, chiefly in the work of Robin Horton, the British anthropologist of Africa.