

RENATA ŠRIBAR, VALERIJA VENDRAMIN<sup>1</sup>

## The epistemological and methodological application of genders and intersecting oppressions

**Abstract:** The present discussion brings together two cognitive paradigms, positivist and conceptual, with the latter being committed to feminist epistemology. Through the research of scientific reflection on the construction of genders in the sphere of education, and with the help of the concepts that relate to the modern interpretation of gender (variety of genders, sexualities, corporeality, power) the two authors determine that gender in the frame of gender dichotomy (women, men) is not appropriately represented and co-constructed. Besides, the homogeneity of two respective gender groups does not correspond to the level of life experience. The study concludes with the feminist epistemological contribution to gender categorization in the quantitative sociological research of statistical data entry. The final discussion leads the authors to suggest an extension of gender categories that would differentially (according to the theme of the research) include transgender people and the segmentation of the researched gender groups according to the multiple relations of social power, together with the necessary preliminary epistemological reflection.

**Key words:** genders, gender dichotomy, transgender, epistemology, research, intersectionality

UDK: 305:165

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Renata Šribar is a free-lance researcher in anthropology and sociology. E-mail: renata.sribar@guest.arnes.si. Dr. Valerija Vendramin is a researcher at the Educational Research Institute in Ljubljana. E-mail: valerija.vendramin@pei.si.

**Epistemološka in metodološka raba spolov in intersekcijskih zatiranj**

**Izveček:** Pričujoča razprava sopostavlja dve spoznavni paradigmi, pozitivistično in konceptualno, pri čemer slednjo mislimo v domeni feministične epistemologije. V okviru raziskovanja konstrukcij spolov v znanstveni refleksiji sfere izobraževanja in s pomočjo konceptov, ki izvirajo iz sodobne interpretacije spola (spoli, seksualnosti, telesnost, moč), avtorici ugotavljata, da spol v okviru spolne dihotomije (ženske, moški) ni ustrezno reprezentiran in sokonstruiran. Poleg tega je homogenost dveh spolnih skupin v nasprotju z živeto izkušnjo. Študija vključuje feministični epistemološki doprinos h kategorizaciji spolov v kvantitativnem sociološkem raziskovanju s statističnim naborom podatkov. Zaključna argumentacija tako privede avtorici do predloga o širitvi spolnih kategorij, ki bi diferencirano (glede na raziskovalno temo) vključevale transspol in disagregacijo raziskovanih spolnih skupin iz perspektive večplastnih in medsebojno prepletenih družbenih razmerij moči – ob nujni predhodni epistemološki refleksiji.

**Ključne besede:** spoli, spolna dihotomija, transspol, epistemologija, intersekcionalnost

**1. Introduction to the gender research problem**

This study<sup>2</sup> is part of a feminist critical analysis of positivism in the

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<sup>2</sup> This is the elaborated and extended version of the text written in the Slovenian language, i.e. Vendramin, V., Šribar, R. (2010): "Spol v raziskovanju: od binarizma in homogenosti h kompleksnosti" [Gender in Research: from Binarism and Homogeneity to Complexity], *Družboslovne razprave*, 64, XXVI, 25-43.

social sciences, particularly sociology;<sup>3</sup> it focuses on the gender categories and consequently the constructions of gender within the framework of specific streams of quantitative research. The topic discussed in detail primarily relates to quantitative survey research, and is set out in studies of how young people are gendered in formal and non-formal education.

Sociological research, defined as either quantitative, or combining quantitative and qualitative methods, is at the same time implementationally, institutionally and/or financially linked to the use or establishment of extensive statistical data capture. It is privileged in terms of support of supranational bodies. Academic and professional interest and media attention is, like financial supporters, most often drawn to the results of analyses that include, monitor or present large datasets. Research so based, and the promotion of its results, matches the technocratic development of society. This same basis in a general technocratic strategic orientation can also be identified in the selection of themes that struggle for attention in the process of decision making and grant allocation by the relevant bodies. The political influence on science extends all the way to the scientific categories by which we define and understand gender in research. The basic categories, which in this context, we mostly experience as entirely self-evident, are 'female'/'women' and 'male'/'men'. They are linked through declared and desired social-structural relationships between the two largest gender social groups, which is strategically the starting point for the research concerned. This target relationship is captured by the syntagmas of 'social equality of genders' and 'equal opportunities'.

A particular sub-area of gender research, which in the current context interests both authors, is maturation and training for adulthood

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<sup>3</sup> Haraway, 1999, 96–98, 110; Oakley, 2005, 183–206; Ramazanoğlu, 2002, 105 ff.

through the acquisition of competences. The leading research in this sphere is linked to important statistical databases, particularly Eurostat, the OECD PISA, and to a somewhat lesser extent, Eurobarometer. It is based on the assumption that 'objective' determination of gender differences through statistical data – either already available or specially acquired – undoubtedly represents the first step towards improvement. However, when policies to carry into effect the principle of social equality of the genders lead to improvements in the position of girls/women, feminist, culturological, sociological and anthropological studies find that such success is relative, and has not resulted in shifts in the socio-cultural construction of male and female gender roles. This does not occur even in those areas where women are achieving important results; once again, the emphasis here is on education. In fact, discriminatory traditional roles persist – for instance, the under-representation of women in the 'male' educational and occupational sectors remains high, while girls 'pay' for their educational success with regard to the graduation ratio with humiliating or degrading constructions of sexuality and corporeality.<sup>4</sup>

### **1.1 Statistics and the reproduction of gender inequality during maturation**

As already established, there are numerous quantitative sociological analyses based on the large-scale capture of data on girls and boys in the area of education. On this basis, many indicators have been formed of gender differences in various spheres of education: in the results of boys and girls in different educational areas, or, for instance, in the responses of school-age children to pornography and other internet risks.<sup>5</sup> Throughout these analyses and indicators,

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<sup>4</sup> Nayak and Kehily, 2008, 68; Šribar and Ule, 2008, 32–33.

<sup>5</sup> Bryant and Brown, 1989, 46–47; Gunter, 2002, 84–88, 93–101; Hasebrink, Livingstone, and Hasen, 2008, 24–46; Itzin, 2001, 65ff.

girls and boys are constructed in relation to their gender opposites, the so-called gender dichotomy, while at the same time they are mostly homogenous within their own gender group.

The strategic norm of gender equality is, as defined in the introduction, applied to the methodology of quantitative research from the outset, through the selection of gender categories. The categorisation of the researched group corresponds to the prevalent administrative assignation of gender.<sup>6</sup> This approach provides explanations which favour gender-specific characteristics, and so renders more complex analyses of masculinity and femininity impossible.<sup>7</sup> In the domain of qualitative research, with the intention of overcoming the aforementioned quandary, certain concepts are used that enable a more subtle analysis. Below, as an example, we briefly present the concept of the hidden curriculum.

Gender groups in extensive quantitative survey research are mostly not segmented on the axes of different sources of power relations. Social reality is thus concealed in two ways: at the level of gender groups or categories, the existence is denied of various, different engenderings, which are the consequence of an inborn or operationally influenced corporeality; they may also be a matter of external appearance, which is an expression of psychological states. Thus different forms of gender subjectivation, which overcome gender binarism, are neglected. The second mode of concealing life experience in the research process is the aforementioned homogeneity

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<sup>6</sup> We intentionally avoid the expression biological gender, as it implies gender dimorphism, the biological standardisation of 'sexing', which generally translates into (socio-cultural) gender binarism and hence the pathologisation of everything that deviates from this; at the same time, this syntagma, which fundamentally designates a gender category pair, does not permit doubt with regard to the very biological scientific interpretation of gender.

<sup>7</sup> Walkerdine, 1989, 13.

of the two gender groups, which prevents insight into the manifold and intertwining complex social power relations. Scientific understanding is thereby deprived of knowledge on intersecting oppressions and discriminations, in which gender divisions are combined with ethnic/‘racial’, socio-economic class, sexual and other divisions, upon which social reflection has already shed light. One consequence of such a one-dimensional view is also hindered scientific insight into the relationships that sometimes place a marginalized group in a different, non-subordinate place in the social structure.

We argue for this assertion with an example of the intersection of gender and socio-economic class discrimination. As demonstrated by interdisciplinary qualitative studies of youth, gender relationships are differentiated with regard to socio-economic class.<sup>8</sup> If at the same time we examine the quantitative survey analysis of web risks in the context of the leading European programmes for safer internet use, we find that they demonstrate gender-differentiated risks to children,<sup>9</sup> without taking account of their socio-economic status. In this way – and at this point we accentuate only one of the associated problems – the important correlation between media-stimulated sexual exposure of underprivileged girls, and the sexual and reproductive risks in the poor population segment which lead to the continuation of poverty, is overlooked.<sup>10</sup>

## **1.2 ‘Applied’ sociological understanding and the modern humanist concept of gender**

The intervention of Michel Foucault in the conceptualization of knowledge explains science as ideologically mediated and effective in the realm of power (governance); this relationship is expressed

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<sup>8</sup> Nayak and Kehily, 2008, 42, 71 ff.

<sup>9</sup> Hasebrink, Livingstone, and Hasen, 2008; Eurobarometer, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Ule and Šribar, 2008, 319.

in the structuring of scientific objects, the systematisation of utterances and the formalisation of concepts and strategies.<sup>11</sup> Statistical capture, with interpretations that are at the level of quantitative indicators of gender differences, primarily due to the homogeneity of the two gender groups, recycles various norms of gender roles, i.e. the dominant matrix of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. In the area of educational research, for instance, girls can only be constructed as more diligent and less inventive, with greater reading skills and less marked natural science talents; in contrast, boys are continually set out as more aggressive, with a more fully developed talent for mathematics, and with greater competence in more challenging computing operations.<sup>12</sup>

The reduction of gender categories in research to administratively guided female and male genders is a factor in renewing a traditional – and for modern scientific and theoretical thinking, insufficient – understanding of genders that does not conform to the experiential level. This thesis does not follow from the assumption that quantitative sociological research on the status and opportunities of men and women, girls and boys, has no weight. One can agree that quantification extends, refines and cross-checks qualitative knowledge.<sup>13</sup> It should, however, involve establishing a platform whereby it would be possible to answer the question of how to define gender as a category, and research it with the help of qualitative methods, without at the same time renewing repressive gender binaries and dichotomy, and hence traditional views of genders' social status and roles.

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<sup>11</sup> Foucault, 2002, 205.

<sup>12</sup> Schlüter, 2005, 5–8; Šribar and Ule, 2008, 37–38, 46–47.

<sup>13</sup> Howe, 1985, 10. This is a wider methodological issue which we cannot present in its entirety here.

### **1.3 Expanded categorisation and disaggregation of gender categories intertwined with the self-positioning of the researcher**

In addition to oppression and discrimination against girls and women, the phenomenon of humiliating and hateful attitudes towards those who place themselves on the other side of gender binaries, and/or who deviate from the prevalent norms in gender, can also be observed.<sup>14</sup> But how can we consciously disassemble discriminatory views and attitudes if our methodological tools at the scientific level, particularly those operating through quantitative analysis, are inadequate?

We argue that in this context we must face contemporary theories of gender, and persist in deconstructing the scientific applications of the two gender categories. This problem of category rigidity must be resolved conceptually (qualitatively) – unlike the other issue, i.e. the segmentation of gender groups with regard to different sources of unequal social relations. The latter is solvable qualitatively and also quantitatively, provided that, in selecting variables, researchers take account of the complex interrelationships of power that constitute themselves and group them according to social divisions. This is a sensitive and often painful process.<sup>15</sup>

Leaning on the feminist reconceptualisation of epistemology and methodology, we introduce the concept of ‘situated knowledges’, which, roughly speaking, postulates a critical stance towards so-called universal truths. The situatedness of the researcher in the research process entails partial, contextualized truths, as the subject of knowledge is seen as dependent on materialized historical and social conditions. Such a research paradigm emphasises the social location of the subject and the social construction of knowledge;

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<sup>14</sup> Lugg, 2003; Nayak and Kehily, 2008, 10, 68; Rands, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Ramazanoğlu, 2002, 120.



consequentially, the researcher is obliged to self-position and reference to her/his situated knowledge. 'There is no way to "be" simultaneously in all, or wholly in any, of the potentially epistemologically privileged positions structured by gender, race, nation etc. And that is a short list of critical positions'.<sup>16</sup>

The concept of situated knowledges has proven to be extremely useful in the epistemology and methodology of investigating our individual worlds as it includes self-reflexivity, i.e. a consideration of the historical and social conditions in which the knowledges came into being, and the power relations in the research process at all levels.<sup>17</sup> Finally, positioning is the key practice-grounding knowledge, and it implies epistemic responsibility (this is one of the key words of this epistemology) for our enabling practice, for making our choices, and, finally, also for constructing our representations.<sup>18</sup>

In the light of this insight, we must reconsider the concept of objectivity, which with feminist intervention can no longer mean a view from nowhere, from a transcendent position, but - in short - an engagement with partial perspectives.<sup>19</sup> The transformation of recognition systems and methods of observation requires the destabilisation of assumptions regarding the 'god-trick' (as D. Haraway terms the traditional positivist view of science), when everything is seen from nowhere, when vision is endlessly mobile and endless.<sup>20</sup> The 'god-trick' is an evasion of responsible discourse; it is a view from a position beyond living experience. Vision is always a question of the power to see, and so the assertion by a scientist/author

<sup>16</sup> Haraway, 1991, 193.

<sup>17</sup> Prins, 1995, 354; Ramazanoğlu, 2002, 118 ff.

<sup>18</sup> Haraway, 1991, 193-194.

<sup>19</sup> Haraway, 1991; Harding, 1991; Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004; Prins, 1995.

<sup>20</sup> Haraway, 1991, 188, 191.

that he watches from everywhere and sees everything, that he has no desires, needs, convictions, backgrounds, is contentious.<sup>21</sup>

This brief epistemological aside, which explains our conceptual framework, is of great importance in the field of educational research; a field that today, and in recent years, has been permeated by various assertions of the societal ‘progress’ of women, and consequently of changes in education and their impact on educational opportunities for girls. Perhaps it was inevitable that with equal opportunities policies a new postfeminist era would be celebrated, but at the same time (new?) equality myths have cropped up, among them the myth of equal opportunities in education.<sup>22</sup> Mainstream ‘equity research’ is perhaps too narrowly focussed on the question of comparative gender discrimination and achievements. At the same time, it is anchored in a narrowly defined vision of the gender categories,<sup>23</sup> which we have already problematised above in the light of their rigidity and conceptual insufficiency.

In the remaining discussion, we specifically indicate through critical analysis the context and certain additional and demonstrable deficiencies of the selected quantitative research in the sphere of education.

## **2. The application of the thesis in the area: ‘facts’ about gender and the mainstream research in education**

It is certainly the case that educational analyses that set aside or pay no attention to the question of gender in a way operate against equality for boys and girls, if we use this general (and frequently disputed) phrase. At the same time, the absence of numerous im-

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 192. Here the generic masculine form is used to indicate that traditional approaches to knowledge are androcentric.

<sup>22</sup> Coppock, Haydon, and Richter, 1995, 4, 47 ff.

<sup>23</sup> See also Dillabough, 2001, 13.

portant considerations in gender disaggregated research lessens the weight of the analysis. Most authors today work with notions of multiplicity and diversity, exploring the perspective of multi-positioned and multi-vocal subjects in the complexity of social formations. However, gender in the feminist theoretical framework applied here remains the analytical starting point, and the point which allows us to think through the procedures which sustain social differences (i.e. divisions). Indeed the research tools needed for understanding oppressions, discrimination and differences along various social axes were developed first in relation to gender.<sup>24</sup>

## **2.1 Research, achievement and success**

Sociological discussions of gender in recent times have substantially focused on producing statistical indicators. Such interest in gender differences emerges in the context of achievements and success in school, which usually means success in international research (e.g. PISA, TIMSS). Achievement is the central concept in these debates. It is extremely narrowly conceived, and positioned as almost exclusively reflected by the credentials of performance in examinations. Broader educational aims and ‘achievements’, such as increased understanding, social competence, diversification of abilities, etc. are marginalized and invalidated by focusing on the (quantifiable) results of tests.<sup>25</sup>

International research, particularly PISA, has also led to a transformation in the understanding of the position of boys and girls in education. The debate has been framed by concerns about boys, their schooling, and their deteriorating results.<sup>26</sup> The so-called ‘gender gap’ increasingly indicates differences in favour of girls and

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<sup>24</sup> Arnot and Mac an Ghail, 2006, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Francis and Skelton, 2005, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

shows worse results for boys, for instance, in the area of reading literacy and partially in the area of scientific literacy,<sup>27</sup> which is certainly a problem that needs to be taken both seriously and critically. B. Francis and C. Skelton warn, considering the PISA results for 2003,<sup>28</sup> that over-concern with boys' achievement might mask the continuing problems of girls in schools, justify greater expenditure on meeting boys' needs (at the expense of girls), and, last but not least, redirect attention from other achievement gaps (marked by, for example, 'race', ethnicity and class). With regard to the latter, the differentiated experiences of gender identities produced in the intersections of different sources of social oppression are confronted by the persistent homogenisation of groups of boys and girls, and a failure to respect variation within the gender category, which reveals a crucial lack in understanding of educational outcomes. To substantiate the argument, we would point out that, in the United Kingdom, gaps in achievements are much more significant in terms of 'race', and particularly class, than in terms of gender.

The conclusion that other variables are more significant than gender also has consequences for the debate on gender and achievements, as some groups of boys and girls are doing better than others. This is not taken into account in the general discussion, which suggests that (all) girls are doing better than (all) boys. 'To suggest that all girls are now achieving, or all boys underachieving, and proceeding on that basis, clearly risks ignoring (and hence potentially exacerbating) the continuing underachievement of particular groups of girls.'<sup>29</sup>

This is the origin of the justified feminist reservations regarding the (global) moral panic emerging from the results of boys, from

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<sup>27</sup> Vendramin, 2009, 77-78.

<sup>28</sup> Francis and Skelton, 2005, 4.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

results presented as a ‘threat’ to the values and interests of society, which is incomparable to the measures taken during the previous wave of poor results for girls. These were – and often still are – given little attention in public and were often reasonably viewed as ‘something normal’. In addition, the focus on this gap in certain education policies in the so-called West probably also indicates that, for governments, gender is an ‘easy variant’, since dealing with the gender gap (unlike, for instance, the gap associated with class) does (seemingly) not require the raising questions of social justice, distribution of wealth and so on.<sup>30</sup> However, the question remains: are boys doing worse, or are perhaps (many) girls doing better?

In such debates, and while considering differences in the achievements of girls and boys, it is essential in the first instance to establish a critical consideration of the framework of the debate, which in the end involves both methodological and epistemological assumptions that are not immune to current social values and interests. We cannot go into detail here about the conditions of the emergence and formation of scientific values, but we repeat that science is a socially embedded activity, and this embeddedness influences what and how we see, how we filter data, and how in the end we are aware of different constructions in what at first sight appear to be neutral scientific practices. Even the most rigorous research procedures can contain problematic items that are not easy to identify, let alone eliminate.

When we consider how and why gender differences occur, we must also ask how and why such a construction of the problem of these differences in gender dichotomy arises (if we momentarily put aside failure to respect differences in engendering). We must recognise and study discourses that create such arguments, at least in as much as we should, for instance, be interested in ‘truth’ and the ‘gen-

<sup>30</sup> As pointed out by Francis and Skelton, 2005, 5; Francis, 2006, 197.

der gap' in achievements.<sup>31</sup> An explanation of the differences in achievements between genders (or between any other groups of pupils) is exceptionally complex; as previously stated, it appears that it is impossible to say that all male or female pupils are doing worse. In this sense it would be necessary to extend quantification and add epistemological insight or qualitative methods to avoid a progression into an insufficiently reflected 'positivism of hard evidence' (in contrast to 'soft data' of the more interpretative tradition).

Here we consider the so-called hidden curriculum as an example to indicate the themes and achievements of the qualitative approach. It enables us to capture numerous aspects of everyday life in schools and kindergartens that would otherwise be overlooked, so it is more than suitable for studying the constructions of gender in the sphere of education. For instance, with the concept of the hidden curriculum it is possible to investigate not only social relationships and everyday practices, but also relationships towards what is being taught, i.e. towards academic knowledge (e.g. mathematics, history).

In this sense, we link the issue of the hidden curriculum to the methodology of research: the study of the curriculum and various situations in everyday life in educational institutions reveals the advantages of qualitative methods and a policy of situated knowledge. This can reveal an understanding that breaks through the existing dominant models, such as the model of repeated prejudices, and establishes common-sense understanding in relation to gender (in school, and of course more generally). When we break through the entrenched mindset, we can put ourselves in a certain position and attempt to reconstruct the reality of someone else, thereby 'bringing to light' that which is concealed under the surface of an ideological common sense.<sup>32</sup> At the same time this enables under-

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<sup>31</sup> Francis and Skelton, 2005, 31.

<sup>32</sup> Henwood and Pidgeon, 1995, 19.

standing of the specificity of the context, and protects against the elimination of individual specifics of those participating through an externally imposed 'objective' system of meaning (and at the same time also renders problematic the possibility of adequate quantitative research of such situations). There is no 'natural' attitude, but rather (self-)reflection on how we reached an understanding, the nature of tacit cultural assumptions, and the nature of power relations that jointly form our view.

Something acquired culturally, socially and historically appears natural and eternal; something individual is shown as general; something problematic is seen as non-problematic;<sup>33</sup> this is the hidden curriculum. Thus it is generally accepted (but of course not empirically proven) that boys are good at something while girls are not. For instance – returning once more to computer competences – it follows that computing is more suited to boys, which even those involved often assume to be true. Furthermore, despite the similar grades that girls achieve, they feel less competent in their technical skills than boys, as demonstrated by F. Henwood in a university case study of computing,<sup>34</sup> which shows how the forms of knowledge are implicit in the construction of gender identities.

Many forms of educational experience of girls and women remain negatively marked by masculine values and expectations reflected by educational institutions. To list just a few indicators: values promoted by curricula, the representation of both genders in the educational hierarchy, the dominance of boys in controlling space and the attention of teachers, forms of sexual harassment, and so on.<sup>35</sup> Not all of these aspects of the hidden curriculum can be captured through large-scale data collection, but they are nevertheless

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<sup>33</sup> Bregar Golobič, 2004, 5.

<sup>34</sup> Henwood, 2000.

<sup>35</sup> Francis and Skelton, 2001, 3.

clearly an important factor contributing to school (non-)success. To achieve an adequate view of the situation in education requires the most complex view of the construction of gender identities and the consequences of such construction for the individuals involved. Educational research derived from rigid and unreflected categories and concepts does not take account of the power of production of knowledge, which among other things also entails actively constituting ‘a social relationship privileging the “same” who has the power to name, subordinate, exclude or silence the “other”’.<sup>36</sup>

### **3. Concepts in deconstructing gender binarism and homogeneity of gender groups**

Critical reflection of the production of knowledge in educational research, and determining the role of the creation of meaning in science, led us to a definition of four concepts that we can use to deconstruct gender dichotomy and the homogeneity of the two prevailing gender groups. The explanation of the concept of power/authority that we develop below also relates to other categories by which, in the social sciences and humanities, we index the dominant sources of social division and discrimination: ‘race’ and ethnicity, class, sexuality, physical capability, citizenship status or the lack of it, religious affiliation and the like. The conceptual framework we are forming here is also the basis for understanding the sociological theory of *intersectionality*; this involves the study of the coincidence of socio-cultural categories – sources of social division and discrimination in the constitutive process, through which manifold and complex social hierarchies are established, thereby renewing, renovating and establishing systemic inequalities. From the feminist theoretical perspective set out here, gender remains the initial category for reflection. In the analysis gender

<sup>36</sup> Ramazanoğlu, 2002, 107 ff.



crosses over and merges with other categories in terms of the applied method in different ways.<sup>37</sup> We argue for the present primacy of gender in analysis by recognising certain divisions as historic and of greatest importance in certain socio-cultural environments.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, our decision to take gender as the initial reflective perspective is strategic, as it is only in this way that we can engage with research policies that position gender as a research category at the heart of the problematisation of the educational sphere.

### 3.1 Null concept: gender(s)

The distinction between cultural gender and biological sex<sup>39</sup> was followed by the deconstruction of the biological understanding of corporeality; the latter was used to encode the body as a fated source of female or male characteristics. This deconstruction was conditioned by a new understanding of biology as ‘interested’ science, and as one among the others invested with power relations. Today the dominant argument is that corporealities are variable in terms of the cultural and social environment, and hence can be understood solely in the intertwining of the ‘biological/natural and social/cultural’.<sup>40</sup> At the same time there is a wider acceptance, at least theoretically, of the fact of different physical characteristics at birth<sup>41</sup> (intersex) or in a process of medical interventions in gender (*passing* between genders).

In modern theory and social movements for new gender practices (e.g. queer), the term gender(s) relates to the whole register of gender

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<sup>37</sup> McCall, 2005, 1771, 1782, 1787–1788.

<sup>38</sup> Yuval-Davies, 2006, 199, 202.

<sup>39</sup> Oakley, 1972.

<sup>40</sup> Moi, as cited in Beasley, 2005, 14.

<sup>41</sup> Professor Alice Dreger of Northwestern University, Illinois, cites data to indicate that 1 in 2000 children in the USA is born intersex. See the paper “Intersex” on the Fathermag website.

identities/subjectivations. The concept is linked – albeit not fundamentally – to *corporeality*, i.e. the biochemical structure,<sup>42</sup> anatomy and physiology (a person of male or female gender, intersex people), *gender roles* (masculine, feminine, androgynous) and *sexuality*, or the selection of sexual objects. In addition to male and female, gender identities (better: subjectivations) include *transgender* people: there is a continuum of gender identities/subjectivations, with the following system of *gender* categorisation proposed for administrative records: ‘men, women, transmen, transwomen and “other”’.<sup>43</sup>

The trajectory of understanding the concept *gender(s)* is a tool through which the individual can democratically process as a gendered being of the contemporary society and culture. Democratically gender (self-)identified individuals are not outside the process of subjectification with reflected gender perspectives.<sup>44</sup> Self-reflection of the process of engendering also includes other perspectives, for instance the aforementioned ‘race’, ethnicity, class identity, citizenship, physical abilities, religiousness, citizen or refugee status and so on.

### **3.1.2 Corporeality**

Discourses on gender potentially have an effect through revealed or concealed norms of women/girls’ and men/boys’ appearances, abilities, and physiological and other characteristics at the level of the substantive body. Due to the pervasiveness particularly of media and popular culture constructions of male and female embodied roles, these are heavily prescriptively loaded. Failure to attain the elusive norms can cause negative mental attitudes towards

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<sup>42</sup> Even this level of assignation of traditional sex, i.e. ‘to be female’, ‘to be male’, is not entirely unambiguous (Butler, 1990, 116; 2004, 63–6).

<sup>43</sup> Nordentoft, 2009.

<sup>44</sup> Braidotti, 2001, 396.

our own bodies;<sup>45</sup> the phenomenon and mechanism of somatisation is unpredictable, being dependent on many socio-cultural factors of subjectivisation.

Through the dominant anatomical and physiological norms tied to gender categories of women and men, all corporealities that are *intersex* from birth are excluded from the visible field, pathologised and stigmatised; on the other hand the phases and the finalisation of transformative surgical interventions (transsexual/transgender people) are often a media curiosity. Likewise, other corporeal characteristics that are important in understanding and defining genders are a source of similar exclusion from the register of 'normal', 'proper', and hence also from the visible. This is the reason why in gender research, quantitative discussion from a corporeal perspective remains the exception. The ideological source of the scientific perspective that pathologises and excludes is androcentric normativity, which implies that the physical norm is a virile white male, while a healthy 'white' female body is 'natural' and therefore a normal deviation from the norm, while other (marginalised) corporeal dimensions are most often suppressed. We can cite an example from research into sexuality during maturation: normally the problem of sexuality for people with disabilities is entirely ignored. Just as frequently overlooked is the engendered body that is sexually constituted with regard to ethnic environment and membership of a socio-economic class.

In confronting the dominant norms of gender that have a destructive effect, either through specific practices of bodily interven-

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<sup>45</sup> As shown by the study on the social opportunities for the girl-child in the EU, Slovenia is very repressive in relation to girls' body image; in early adolescence, at the age of 11, girls in Slovenia have the worst opinion of their appearance in terms of body weight of any of their contemporaries from the other EU countries; consideration must be given to the fact that girls' experience of their own body image is not connected to actual weight (Šribar and Ule, 2008, 28, 62).

tions or through the somatic effects of discourses, feminist ethics and queer theory thematise the problem of, and concern for, corporeal sustainability. The ‘somatic body’ as a concept and object of intervention in the name of norms and essential gender identity is unethical to the extent that it prevents individual and social creativity and democratization.<sup>46</sup>

### 3.1.3 Sexuality

Feminist, sociological, and anthropological debates on sexuality/sexualities are generally linked to the concept of power. In the 1970s and 1980s, with the second wave of the feminist movement, discussion focused on the roughest and most apparent syndrome of unequal power relations between two dominant social gender groups – sexual violence. In Slovenia, theoretical debates and social trends from the mid-1980s gradually introduced, initially in the area of sexuality, the theme of homosexuality and lesbianism, and somewhat later, the problem of violence in this framework. To a certain extent, discussion of heterosexual sexual violence and same-sex sexuality pushed to the margins the *problem of unequal power relations* in normative, ‘consensual’ heterosexual intimacy. This follows from the traditional understanding of men as active and women as passive in sexuality, whereas the forms of the new female sexual self-confidence do not transcend the paradigm of passive aggression, i.e. a defence mechanism against the expected compliance with gender roles. The Norwegian author Harriet Bjerrum Nielsen, for instance, writes about tender internal expectation (girls are described as being ‘fluffy’ inside) in contrast to active sexual behaviour, as demonstrated in research into Scandinavian girls.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Heyes, 2007, 11.

<sup>47</sup> Nielsen, 2004, 19.

Yet other forms of sexuality in addition to homosexuality, lesbianism and bisexuality – for instance ambiguous sexualities related to transgender, pansexuality (all people are objects, regardless of sexual identity) and polysexuality (all objects and all forms of sexuality are desired) – remain at the level of sporadic articulation on the margins of dominant discourses and practices, although the theory sees right here the possibility of fragmentation and subversion of normative power in sexuality.<sup>48</sup> Positioning in sexuality, regardless of the dominant, heterosexual, or widely recognised objects of desire (homosexual, lesbian, bisexual), is linked to prescribed hierarchical gender roles within the framework of gender binarism. This means that the dominant understanding of homosexuality and lesbianism is formed with regard to heterosexual norms: this is the origin of the ‘characteristic’ feminine gay man or ‘masculine’ or ‘butch’ woman. The phenomenon of violence (men against women, homophobic men against homosexual men and lesbians, inter-gay and inter-lesbian violence), linked to sexuality, can also be understood primarily in terms of heteronormativity.

### **3.1.4 Power/governmentality**

Power/governmentality is dispersed and operates also at the level of microlocation, even in bodies themselves.<sup>49</sup> However, this theoretically broadly argued and applied thesis does not disoblige researchers from recognising instances of authority established in hierarchical societal relationships. Unequal power relations in constructions of gender, sexuality and corporeality are characteristic of social structure, and hence also of every individual relationship and situation. Even attempts to form alternative or parallel structuring of gender, sexuality and corporeality, i.e. queer movement and theory,

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<sup>48</sup> Beasley, 2005, 126.

<sup>49</sup> Foucault, 1986, 56.

appear with reference to the dominant hierarchical paradigm, although in resistance. The most marked opposition is directed against physically violent forms of establishing the dominant norm of gender and sexuality, especially in the field of the engendered and sexualised queer body.

Concealed and open violence originating from dominant norms is also characteristic of other areas of structural inequality through which gender is segmented. The most common sources of intersectional discrimination are gender, ethnicity/'race' and class, which is considered not just in relation to economic or financial status, but also to non-material cultural resources. In a hierarchical world, which implies relations of violence, albeit sometimes at the most subtle, symbolic level (for instance in language) invisible, there nevertheless exists the possibility of equity. The concept of intersectionality transcends traditional discourse on discrimination and attempts to conceptualize a theoretical platform for such relations.<sup>50</sup> It implies an ethical agenda in querying existent systems of classification. As indicated in a slightly different context, each standard and each category valorizes one perspective and silences another. This is not inherently a bad thing, it is inescapable, but it is an ethical choice and as such it is dangerous.<sup>51</sup> The possible solution to this trap in research endeavors is in considering the differentiated levels of intersectional social divisions and discriminations: experiential, structural, systemic. As stated by Nira Yuval-Davies: '... there are some social divisions that are more important than others in constructing specific positionings. At the same time, there are some social divisions, such as gender, stage in the life cycle, ethnicity and class, that tend to shape most people's lives in most social locations ...'.<sup>52</sup> This multilayered character

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<sup>50</sup> Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006, 188.

<sup>51</sup> Bowker and Leigh Star, 2000, 5-6.

<sup>52</sup> Yuval-Davis, 2006, 203.

of the intersectionality approach obliges us to think about situationality, institutionalization and global matrices at the same time, and make responsible decisions grounded in the rethinking of the various possible determinants of the research plan – including the positioning, personal situation and situatedness of the researcher her/himself.

#### **4. A starting point for a methodological recategorisation of gender**

It can be seen that we, with our arguments here, are included in what sociology, within the framework of a comparison between qualitative/interpretative and quantitative methods, called the ‘paradigm war’.<sup>53</sup> We reject this role, but not because we have overcome dilemmas (although, among other things, methods in the framework of study of intersectionality offer this possibility). We see our role primarily as mediating epistemological doubts and criticisms of the positivist part of the ‘paradigm war’, which we nonetheless link to a certain affinity for feminist research and qualitative methods, an affinity that in spite of everything is not without its dilemmas. Here are the already mentioned disputed *a priori* dualism or qualitative-quantitative distinction,<sup>54</sup> and the above mentioned ethical dilemmas, together with the danger of presupposing that qualitative methods are free of the problems of unequal power relations, and the problems of writing in the first person (as the practice of self-reflexivity will not automatically strengthen the credibility of the account, not to mention differently positioned limits to self-critical capacity or thematisations of the unknown, of the lack of knowledge and ignorance).<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Oakley, 2005, 187.

<sup>54</sup> Howe, 1985.

<sup>55</sup> Henwood and Pidgeon, 1995, 11, 12.

Criticism of positivism has, in a way, led to research into the potential of qualitative research as a more flexible and less structured method of data collection (interviews, focus groups, participant observation and the like) that offers greater sensitivity towards those included. Furthermore, at the same time such ethnographic and sociological research enables the preservation of the perspective of ‘outsiders’ or ‘strangers’, and thus the avoidance of an insider (natural, rational) perspective that makes it difficult to recognise tacit/hidden cultural and other assumptions. This is a *sine qua non* of the majority of qualitative research.<sup>56</sup> As already discussed, this also influences the selection of variables and the diversification of datasets that, in the quantitative research considered in the reference field of education, are so narrowly constrained that the formation of a more targeted and socially sensitive approach is inhibited within the framework of the very institutional indicators of (non-)success of education.<sup>57</sup>

It is important to emphasise that critical reflection of the positivist method in the dominant, quantitative survey research into gender, and the expression of the need for segmentation of gender groups and disaggregation of categories, are linked to the dismissal of homogeneity of gender groups in feminist theory itself. As Judith Butler writes, it is detrimental to feminism if it fails to recognise the various political dimensions of gender that relate to a specific series of social and personal physical risks.<sup>58</sup> The author continues to recognise the social group of women as the leading object of feminism(s), but also understands that the latter can no longer be adequately researched outside the political dimensions linked to social power, particularly in the registers of socio-economic class and

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<sup>56</sup> Henwood and Pidgeon, 1995, 10.

<sup>57</sup> GHM, 2005, 41.

<sup>58</sup> Butler, 2004, 8–9, 174.



'race'. Methodological engagement with this theoretical thought, as already stated, extends all the way to the possibilities that arise in statistical sets and the uses of such data; it involves forming initial categories and methods for modulating them.<sup>59</sup>

Gender categories themselves should, in line with our reflection, be extended to the inclusion of groups of women, men and others, with the last group or category established via self-identification.<sup>60</sup> In quantitative research, groups/categories are then segmented with regard to the research theme and/or area, for instance through categories of class, education, citizenship status or lack thereof (citizens, refugees and migrant groups without status), physical characteristics, and ethnic identity. In the research procedure, subcategories are formed at the intersections of categories through modulation which transcends the linear additive model.<sup>61</sup> In the words of intersectionality researcher Leslie McCall, disaggregation is the aim and not the starting point of research. Due to the comprehensibility of scientific capture of social complexity, the number of categories that create intersections – as already stated – needs to be limited.<sup>62</sup> In this way we can, for instance, determine – citing the theme of the study that is close to our area – how complex and internally contradictory the correlation is between the realisation of the principle of gender equality, the socio-economic order (socialist, capitalist, late capitalist) and education (higher, secondary, primary).<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> For the latter, see McCall, 2005, 1787.

<sup>60</sup> If the theme includes the problem of transgender, all five categories previously cited in the text come into consideration.

<sup>61</sup> McCall, 2005, 1787.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. also *ibid.*, 1781, 1785.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 1790.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper, we wanted to thematise and problematise the categorisation of gender in quantitative survey research in terms of feminist theoretical understanding of gender and other associated unequal social relationships. While researching the problem, we encountered an epistemological need to re-examine gender categories in both the humanities and social sciences. We also found that in neither of the reference fields can progress be achieved without reflection on the complexity and interconnection of sources of social division and discrimination and of the possibilities of determining equity relations.

We attempted to deconstruct the range of an approach that does not include the policies of situated knowledges. On the other hand, the case of the hidden curriculum is an exceptionally important concept in educational research, which requires methodological flexibility and researchers' self-reflexivity. The power of researchers to interpret datasets through their values is often insufficiently explicit, as are restrictions imposed by the limits of knowledge, culture and experience, personal skills and political openness to silencing and exclusion.<sup>64</sup> Generally speaking, the struggle with taken-for-grantedness, where feminist epistemology and curriculum studies as part of the wider field of education meet, paves the way towards the development of sensitivity or towards a view 'from the other side' – towards picturing different ways of life and developing responsibility for the people outside our immediate circle – in short, towards the reconceptualisation of possible worlds.

In conclusion, we state the main findings with reference to the basic problem set: in quantitative survey research relating to large reference statistical capture, the social group of women is categorically an appropriate object of research and indirectly a scientific

<sup>64</sup> Ramazanoğlu, 2002, 119.

creation of the meanings of gender(s); the same also applies to any comparison of various gender groups/categories. However, here we must take three reservations into account: the first relates to the definition of the subject (what exactly do we mean by female gender, women, male gender, men, and what we will do with other, overlooked, excluded gender groups?). The second reservation concerns the homogeneity of individual groups and is overcome by the analytical concept of intersectionality; this relates to complex and intersecting social relationships operating at the level of both the individual and the social group. Neither is generally whole and uniform in relation to any category for the designation of sources of social inequality. Experience, structural and systemic relations can be approximated through the intersection of groups/categories, and through the comparison of various subgroups with modulation that transcends the method of “addition”; one of the reference authors among intersectionality researchers, to whom we refer continually in this paper, indexes it with ‘multi-level, hierarchical and contextual modelling’.<sup>65</sup>

The third reservation relates to the justification of the assumption of the dominant unequal gender power relation, which is supposed to cover all spheres of life. The intention of this doubt is not to deny the systemic subordination of women, but to reveal research sensitivity to individual microspheres in a social structure dominated by hierarchies, which indicate the benefit of women (a characteristic example is parenthood), or that involves potentially equal division of power. This consideration must be taken into account particularly in the selection of initial categories in statistical research, when the possibility of dividing categories into subcategories is formed in the modelling process.

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<sup>65</sup> McCall, 2005, 1786, 1788.

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