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## GENDER

The word derives from the Latin *gener-*, as in *generare*, to beget, and is related to *genus* (birth, race, kind) and *genre*. In grammar, gender denotes the classification by which words are grouped as masculine, feminine or neuter. In imagology, gender concerns someone's (self-)perception as

being male or female and the images of masculinity and femininity that go with it. These self-images are always related to how someone perceives the opposite sex but also to how others perceive one's own sexual identity.

In feminist debates, gender functions as a category of social relations among men and women, and the meanings of femininity and masculinity as they apply to the category of women and men. Gender, then, is concerned with the questions: What does it mean to be, or behave like, a man or a woman; what does it have to do with masculinity, femininity, sexuality; and how are these aspects of our identity not only organized through images, discourses, social institutions, but also interiorized through education, cultural consumption, and bodily behavior. Stereotypical gender arrangements and the binary images of men and women that they sustain – men are supposed to be strong, rational, and to operate in the public sphere while women are seen as weak, emotional and ideally suited for the private sphere – enable subjects to order their many complex interrelations along recognizable terms, often to the advantage of men.

While the ultimate goal of a gendered analysis of texts, images and social practices, lies in a critique and change of the system, and ultimately in emancipation, there is no general agreement among feminists on what the exact conditions of emancipation should be. Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s many American feminists (mostly Marxist sociologists) tended to defend the equality of the sexes within a given social order, French feminists (mostly philosophers and literary critics) at around the same time focused on the radical difference between the sexes in order to subvert not only the prevalent gender system but also the notion of woman *tout court*.

How academics define gender depends, among other things, on how they perceive the relation between gender and sexual difference, i.e. between social and natural division. Thus, Firestone (1970) acknowledges biological (sexual) differences between men and women in order to account for the social dependence of women on men, while Rubin (1997) rejects this biological determinism and launches the idea of a sex/gender-system, in which gender stands for the social and cultural transformation of “the biological raw material of human sex and procreation”: women may be procreative beings but men have organized this natural condition for the sake of a male-dominated family system. In the French feminist context, this duality of sex and gender – which has come to be known as the nature-nurture dichotomy – has been taken up in a radically subversive way by such theorists as Kristeva (1982) and Irigaray (1985). Both argue along Freudian-Lacanian lines that the patriarchal social order of signification is built on the repression of natural drives and sexual desires and on the repudiation of woman associated with those drives and desires. To undo this asymmetrical gendered system, Irigaray and Kristeva release what man's discourse has relegated to the unconscious. They let the female