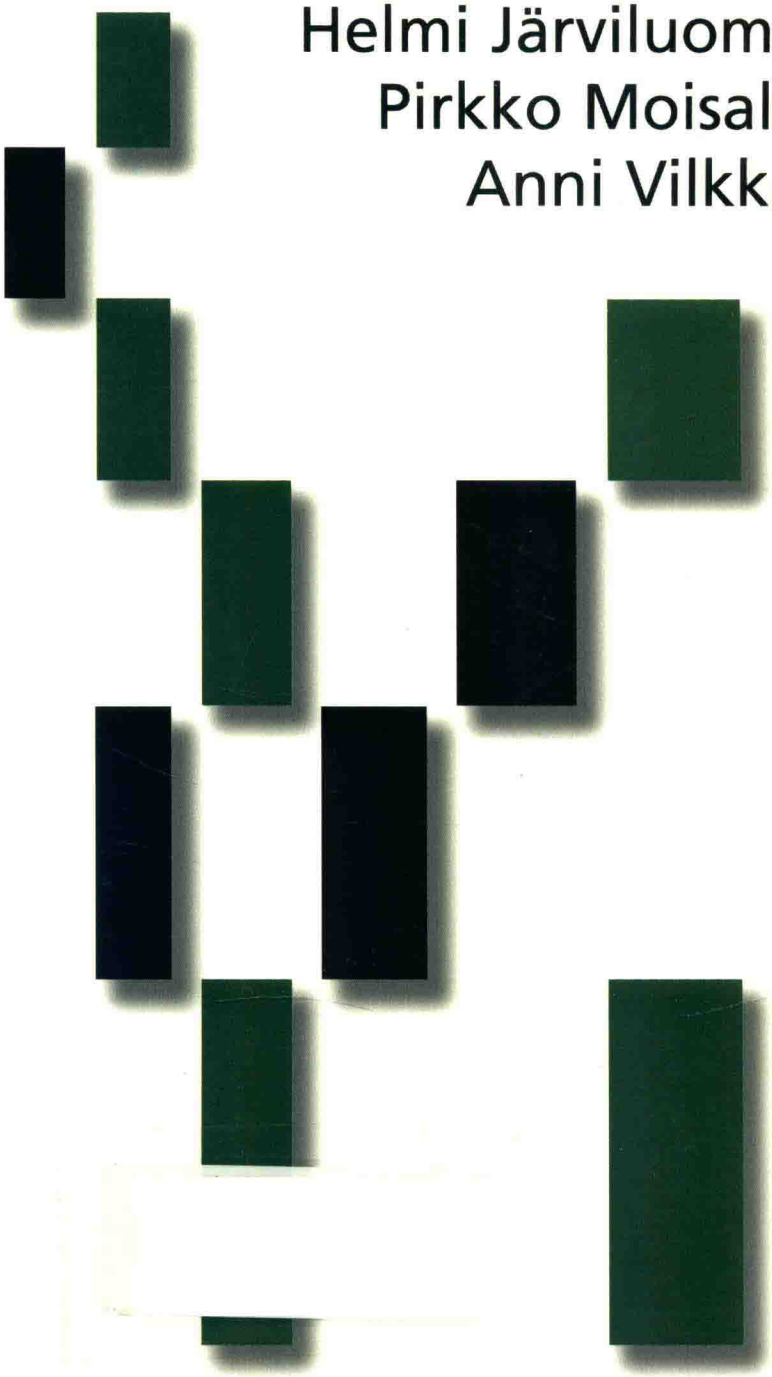
Gender and Qualitative Methods

Helmi Järviluoma
Pirkko Moisala
Anni Vilkko



...ducing Qualitative Methods

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Preface and Acknowledgements

Late in an August evening 2002 we three writers were drinking toasts at the Kolme Kruunua (Three Crowns) restaurant in Helsinki. Nearby in the Senate Square, the mayor of Helsinki had just finished hosting her annual popular music concert. We had planned to treat ourselves with music after finishing a five-year project: the manuscript of the textbook you are holding.

As usual, the final corrections, the printing, and packing the pages neatly to be sent to Sage took far more time than we had planned. We didn't make the concert, but actually we didn't mind. After five years of planning, collecting materials and bibliographical information, writing, re-writing, translating, negotiating, getting inspired, being desperate, arguing and sulking, melting, laughing and editing, we were nearly there.

This book is practical guide for recognizing gender/ing in different kinds of research materials. We show a selection of possibilities to analyse gender as something which is not given, but which is always negotiated and performed. In addition, this book is also a performance, prepared by the three of us – Helmi, Pirkko and Anni – in countless negotiations. Writing itself is always a process, and this book is one important step for us in our thinking and writing about gender. You can read more about our own positions in relation to qualitative gender studies at the end of Chapter 1.

Some kind of narration, however, can be constructed about the history of this book. In 1997 the series editor, David Silverman, contacted his former student, Helmi Järviluoma, suggesting the idea for the book. After pondering alone upon the subject for a short while, she contacted here colleague Pirkko Moisala, and together they started to intensively plan the contents and collect the bibliography. Helmi was able to write some of the book while working as a researcher in the Academy of Finland; and so did Pirkko at the last stage of the writing process – thank you the Academy of Finland. Finally, Anni Vilkko was recruited as a welcome new member of the team. In fact, it is better to say that a new team, or triad, was created. Everybody commented on each other's texts. Examples, exercises and bits and bites of text were transferred between the writers during the writing process. Helmi started with Chapter 2, Pirkko with Chapter 1, and Anni with Chapter 3, and they continued to bear the principle responsibility for writing those chapters. Pirkko and Helmi together drafted the framework for Chapter 5, after which Pirkko took charge of writing the gendered analysis of film and video music, and Helmi added the part on soundscape. Anni and Helmi shouldered the responsibility for Chapter 6, but Pirkko had a large input as well. Chapter 4 was written by Helmi and Irene Roivainen from the Department of Social Policy in Tampere University. Thank you Irene for the inspiring writing sessions. Thanks also go to

the journal *Sosiologia* for permission to use some parts of an earlier MCA article by Irene and Helmi.

We would like to thank the friendly and professional staff of Sage Publications, especially Louise Wise, Karen Phillips and Ian Antcliff. Associate Professor Bruce Johnson from the School of English in the University of New South Wales acted as a Translation Editor for us, for which we are very grateful. Without the series editor, David Silverman, the book wouldn't exist. We are thankful for his support and patience. Thanks are also due to Heljä Mäntyranta, Soili Keskinen and Taru Leppänen, the editors of the journal *Nuorisotutkimus*, and to all colleagues, friends and family members from whom we have received encouragement and support during this project.

13.02.03
Helmi Järviluoma, Pirkko Moisala, Anni Vilkko
In the cyberspace between Turku, Lieto and Helsinki

Contents

1

Performing and Negotiating Gender

This book has grown out of the conviction that gender, the cultural construction of femininity and masculinity, cannot be avoided in any research activity. It is present in all human action and its products, including researchers and their research. Gender is an important criterion in identifying ourselves and is central to the way we perceive and structure the world and events in which we participate. It influences all aspects of our being, of our relationships and of the society and culture around us. Gendered conceptualizations, norms (what is considered to be proper behaviour), values (the personal characteristics that are highly valued) and attitudes (the kinds of prejudices that come into play when we meet a person of a different gender), have a profound effect on both the personal and social, the micro and macro levels of our lives.

Gender must be taken seriously in every kind and at every level of research, from practical choices to methodological questions, as well as at every stage of the research process. This is a conviction which we have formed not only as gendered human beings but also as scholars working in a range of fields, including social politics, musicology, ethnomusicology, sociology and anthropology. In our opinion, the duty of researchers is not only to explore but also to question the cultural patterns relating to gender in all human actions and its products. Ignoring gender in qualitative research is the same as ignoring one of the most fundamental elements in the natural sciences.

In the analysis of qualitative materials, gender can be identified and analysed at all levels: at the individual/personal level (identifications, subject positions), and in the socially constructed and maintained discourses ('texts', ideologies and social institutions). Likewise, of course, in between these levels: how subject positions are negotiated within the prevailing gender systems, and how gender discourses produce individual gender positions.

In research work, gender should be understood as a concept requiring analysis, rather than as something that is *already* known about. The common-sense understanding of gender should be seriously interrogated. What is our common understanding of gender? How is it represented in cultural action and products? Which kind of power structures does it produce? And what are the mechanisms by which we construct our understanding of gender?

The field of gender studies ranges from radical feminist studies to areas without any overt feminist content. Even though women's studies and feminist theories have provided the major contribution to this field, gender analysis has also been conducted from various other political positions. Gender has been an issue both for the political interests of feminism and the intellectual interests of sociology and other sciences. Critical engagement with the contemporary social world in terms of the ways in which the usually asymmetric gender differences are produced, maintained and resisted – that is, critical feminist theory – has not been the only driving force of gender studies. Within sociology, for example, gender has also been examined as the social construction of difference, though without necessarily addressing questions of inequality and power, which are central themes of feminist theory. Only those gender studies which are committed to the struggle against sexism and patriarchal power can be regarded as feminist in nature (Moi, 1990: 18-21).

Institutionally, many study programmes which previously were called 'women's studies' are changing their names to 'gender studies'. While this shift of focus from women to gender might reduce the radical feminist impulses of these programmes, it more comfortably accommodates a broader range of questions regarding gender, such as the construction of masculinity and sexuality, areas of study which have, however, also traditionally belonged to the curriculum of women's studies.

In this textbook, we take the social constructionist approach to gender while simultaneously examining the mechanisms of power included in these constructions. As Deborah Cameron (1996: 84) has emphasized, gender should not be used as an explanation of things, because it is itself a social construction in need of an explanation. In addition to examining gender roles, we should ask what the mechanisms are which create/construct such roles. Thus, gender studies focus on the exploration of how the categories of men and women, masculinity and femininity, as well as possible other gender categories, are socially constructed. What ideas and judgements are attached to them? What are the mechanisms which maintain, support or challenge the prevailing gender system? How is power negotiated in gender constructions?

The concept of 'gender' refers to the social and cultural construction of 'biological' sexes. Our understanding of biology is also based on social and cultural knowledge. Gender and sex are 'created and recreated when practiced and discussed' (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 119). They are closely related, although not because one is 'natural' while the other represents its transformation into 'culture'. They are both cultural categories, that is, they are culturally constructed ways of describing and understanding human bodies and human relationships. Gender and sex affect our identities, our understanding of self and our relationships with others (Glover and Kaplan, 2000: xxv–xxvi.)

The categories of 'men' and 'women' may have some biological grounding in visual, aural and otherwise observable features, but these categories are simple homogeneous groups. The number of conceptualized sexes and genders not varies in different cultures. Categories of 'men' and 'women' are not the only possible sexes, and other categories are acknowledged, for example, transsexuals and androgynes. Our cultural categories of gender are even more numerous and varied. The socio-cultural possibilities implied in being a man or a woman, and what is socially expected of each, vary enormously depending on place, period and personal situation.

According to Linda Nicholson (1994: 101) our comprehension of what a woman is evolves from both differences and sameness. A woman is thus a map of intersecting similarities and differences, an internal coalition. The same may be said of men. Many social factors, such as class, race, ethnicity and age, play essential roles in the construction of gender. The gender of an Indian woman is different from that of a British girl and the gender of an old man differs from that of a teenage boy. A study focusing on gender should recognize the variations that are to be found in particular times and places. Gender 'is more relational rather than essential, structural rather than individual – a property of systems rather than people' (Marx Ferree and Hess, 1987: 17). Gender is a fluid social category, which is always being negotiated anew.

Stereotypical images of women and men, opinions about purported qualities of masculinity and femininity, as well as all beliefs concerning males and females, can be examined as aspects of a gender belief system (see Deaux and Kite, 1987: 97). A gender belief system – or dominant gender schema, as suggested by Devor (1989) – is working on us from the moment we are born. We learn the prevailing sex roles in the course of enculturation (primary learning of our first cultural surroundings) and socialization (the process of becoming a member of a society).

Psychological studies have questioned if socio-emotional differences between male and female babies are assigned by birth – if they are biological – or cultural. If newborn female babies are more sensitive to aural and social stimulus and more able to maintain eye contact with the carer than male babies, as psychological research (Weinberg et al., 1999) has revealed, is this actually a result of differences in mothers' behaviour arising from the child's gender? Lamb et al. (1979: 97) argue that learning to recognize masculine and

feminine styles of interaction begins long before a child can conceptualize gender. It also has more impact on their sex-role development than their parents' attempts to shape their gender behaviour.

Gender stereotypes within a culture are pervasive in a baby's surroundings. J. Bridges (1993) made a qualitative analysis of 60 randomly chosen congratulatory cards for parents of newly-born male children, and of 60 cards for those of female children. The study revealed that qualities emphasizing activity (pictures of running, building or wrestling boys), were associated with a male child, whereas passive qualities were associated with a female child. Girls were pictured watching the activities of the male children or sitting in the middle of roses and hearths. Similar kinds of stereotypical thinking were observed in the behaviour of those mothers, who more easily accepted shyness in their daughters' than in the sons' behaviour (Hinde et al., 1993). Through these kinds of gender stereotypes children learn the prevailing gender system. At the age of two months children can differentiate male and female voices (Leinbach and Fagot, 1993) and, at one year they can connect a male voice with a male face and a female voice with a female face (Poulin-Dubois et al., 1994). We learn to make gendered observations in early childhood, but gendering the world and its events around us continues as one of the central modelling systems throughout our lives.

Case 1.1 Agnes, learning to be a woman

A famous and instructive example of the cultural construction of the institutionalization of gender construction is the study by the sociologist Harold Garfinkel (1967). He studied Agnes, who was a patient sent, in 1958, to the psychiatric clinic of UCLA. Agnes had been born as a boy with boy's genitals, and raised as boy until the age of seventeen. However, at the age of twelve she also had started to get a female shape and breasts.

When Agnes came to UCLA she was nineteen and nothing revealed that she wouldn't 'really' be a woman: she had a shapely figure, she was tall, had pretty features and fine fair hair, and she dressed as a girl. She wanted to have a sex-change operation and was very determined to achieve womanhood.

Garfinkel begun to study Agnes as a 'case' in order to learn about the ways in which gender-identity is produced and refined through observable but subtle practices, which however, are part of institutionalized social interaction. As John Heritage has said, the result of the study was a profound analysis of gender as a constructed social fact (1996: 181).

Agnes had become a very sensitive ethnographer of gender. She was conscious of the connections between behaviour and gender in all kinds of everyday social situations. The key situations were dressing up and applying make-up, and the problems of 'proper

female behaviour', i.e. sitting/walking/talking like a woman. It was hard for Agnes to learn not to talk like a man.

Part of the problem was that she had little if any of the same biographical experiences as other girls. She had to achieve womanhood through undetectable, difficult and unending work. Heritage (ibid.: 186) describes Agnes' situation with a metaphorical question: What is it like to build a ship when it is already sailing? Such was the difficulty that faced Agnes in her attempt to construct gender identity through countless socially ordered micro-practices.

For Garfinkel, the constant differentiation between the cultural specificities of men and women was the outcome of study, not the starting point. The reproduction of these institutionalized genders is supported by processes based on moral accountability, which become actualized in everyday reactions towards people, who deviate from 'the natural' gender (see also Kessler and McKenna, 1979).

According to Deborah Tannen (1990: 8), who studied conversational practices of American men and women, gender socialization is so strong that girls and boys grow up in what are essentially different cultures. Even if one declines to adopt these roles and, instead, contests them, this also takes place in relation to the socially acknowledged gender roles. However, all boys and girls do not become socialized in the same way even though they may live in the same environment. This has been strongly confirmed by the so-called constructionist approach to learning (among others Leinbach et al., 1997). A girl growing up primarily among boys may develop physical skills that require strength and speed, whereas another girl in the same kind of male environment might emphasize qualities which usually are called feminine. In opposition to earlier psychological studies, which explored the differences between the genders and assumed homogeneity within each, more recent studies look for differences within genders.

Gender is also a fundamental principle of the organization of social arrangements and action. Almost everything in our surroundings is gendered in one way or another. For instance, we speak of Mother Earth, and *das Vaterland* (the fatherland, *patria*); various cultural practices are taken for granted as being gendered, so that, for example, heavy metal music associates more with masculinity than with femininity. In addition, most often our gendered understandings of the world and its phenomena are hierarchically ordered; certain qualities are accorded more value and respect than others because of the nature of their gendering. Gender, with the power attached to it, is a subject of constant negotiation in our daily social lives. In addition, today's representations of gender in the Western world are often, as Theresa de Lauretis (1987: x) has asserted, produced by a number of distinct 'technologies of gender' such as cinema or advertising. The impact of these mediated images of gender on people's gender beliefs and gender performance cannot be underestimated.

Case 1.2 Masculinity in heavy metal music

Robert Walser (1993) studied gender constructions in heavy metal music demonstrating how it reproduces and inflects patriarchal ideologies and assumptions. To him, 'heavy metal is, as much as anything else, an arena of gender, where spectacular gladiators compete to register and affect ideas of masculinity, sexuality and gender relations' (ibid.: 111). Notions of gender are represented in the texts, sounds, images, and practices of heavy metal. In addition, fans of heavy metal experience confirmation and alteration of their gendered identities through their involvement with the music (ibid.: 109).

Simultaneously when heavy metal replicates the dominant sexism of contemporary society it also is a space in which female fans and female performers can experience power, dominance, rebellion and flirting with the dark side of life, usually designated as male prerogatives (ibid.: 131–2).

Case 1.3 Gendered theory of classical music

In Western classical music, the main theme or melody which is repeated throughout a symphony or other kind of work, is regarded as the masculine theme, whereas, the second theme, the role of which is to challenge the main theme but which, however, remains secondary and doomed to 'lose the game' to the main theme, is called the feminine theme (see, for example, McClary, 1991).

The negotiation of power is part of gender. The feminist branches of gender studies (see, for example, Marshall, 2000: 155) remind us that even though gender can be approached as a discourse, an ideological phenomenon, a fiction or a construction, it also has practical and material consequences for both women and men. Gender is not an 'innocent' social category or an unimportant aspect of our identity. Instead, it may open or close doors in our lives, limit or broaden our possibilities to live our lives to the fullest.

Gender studies is a wide field, which takes as its points of departure various methodological understandings of the term 'gender'. Gender can be regarded as (1) a social variable (what do men do, what do women do); (2) a system (gender order and gender hierarchy; that is, what kind of system do genders create in relation to each other, how genders are hierarchically ordered); (3) a social construction (how gender/s are socially and culturally produced in language, social action and cultural products); or (4) a political tool (how gender ideologies can be reconstructed and changed). Thus, gender analysis is not simply interested in examining what men/women are or do. It examines how the world surrounding us is gendered and how it affects us, our identity, everyday activities, as well

as all other products of human behaviour. It studies how gender is taken up, regularized, institutionalized, resisted, contested and transformed.

In this book we introduce different methods for recognizing gender/ing in qualitative research. We show ways in which gender can be analysed in different kinds of research materials, in life stories, interviews and conversations, in sound, music, film and video. We also discuss the roles it plays in fieldwork and research reporting. Our approach to gender is to examine it as a social construction, which involves the whole of the research process. The discussion is supported mostly by feminist theories and studies although we also acknowledge gender studies which are not feminist in nature. However, the driving force behind most gender studies – women's studies, men's studies, the study of masculinities, gay, lesbian, and queer studies – is anti-sexism, the political objective of resisting asymmetrical relationships between and within genders.

Case 1.4 Finnish gender order represented in music

Even though Finland was among the very first countries in the world where women were allowed to vote (in 1907), and despite the fact that women's work outside the home is more a rule than an exception and that the present legislation and social security system attempt to advance gender equality, gendered practices as well as ways of behaving and thinking in Finland are far from representing gender equality (see Anttonen et al., 1994). This obvious contradiction between policies of gender equality and practices of gender inequality creates a particular cultural climate based on the tension of negative gender difference. Negative gender difference is embedded in all aspects of Finnish culture. Even though the state school system (there are few private schools in Finland) gives equal opportunity of education to both genders, and men and women are both highly educated, different social expectations are imposed on different genders. Girls are expected to adopt patterns of care-taking and domestic maintenance. The social norms placed on females emphasize modest, if not withdrawn, and obedient behaviour, whereas boys are expected to grow up to be outwardly active, 'heroically' disobedient, and take an interest in sports.

According to 57 life stories written by music students, the conventional gender roles of today's Finnish culture are already essentialized in kindergarten (ages three to six): in musical plays, for example, girls perform the roles of angels and fairies and are expected to participate in singing, while the boys are bears or shepherds and are not expected to participate in singing. In primary school (ages seven to twelve), these roles continue: girls are expected to play recorders in a group, while boys receive more

encouragement and attention from the teacher and play instruments (such as drums) individually. The girls dance to the accompaniment provided by the boys. These gender roles in music were adopted early by the pupils themselves. One of the students remembered how, already at the age of six, she was astonished to realize that a woman could be a conductor or play trumpet. Another believed that any girl who wanted to play drums was boyish.

At secondary school (ages thirteen to fifteen), gender roles in music are stressed even more: 'The girls went to sing in a choir while the boys formed bands to play rock music.' Girls who nevertheless play rock music, choose to play more melodic rock (what the Americans call 'soft rock'), while boys play heavy rock. In music lessons, the boys are given more tasks to do and the more expensive instruments to play: thus, the girls either sing or play recorders, of which there are many in the classroom, whereas the boys get to play the two electric guitars and the only drum set.

The gender roles taught in kindergarten are reinforced by the two distinct musical spheres of boys and girls at primary and secondary schools. The young people themselves actively maintain their adopted gender roles; exceptions to the gender norm are not usually allowed. Girls in exceptional musical roles, such as those wanting to play drums or an electric guitar, were suppressed by ridicule or by having their wishes ignored, while boys in exceptional roles – a singing boy, the few boys taking a music class – were admired and encouraged. However, boys also reported gender limitations: a boy soloist in a female choir was ridiculed and a boy playing piano felt that his 'masculinity' would have been endangered among those peers who did not play music if he had not been competent in sports as well.

The fact that piano playing may compromise the masculinity of a Finnish boy, for example, refers to the possibility that art music, in Finnish music culture, is regarded as a feminine activity. This may be because the gender behaviour expected of Finnish males, heroic defiance and physical activity, does not correspond with behaviour related to art music. As we know, art music demands constant, controlled, obedient exercising, alone and indoors. Due to this gender expectation, rock music, with its creative freedom and group working patterns, works much better to support the masculine image of a boy.

Different kinds of gender categories may also be formed around music. Unusual gender roles become more permissable and acceptable during the later stages of music education: at high schools (ages sixteen to eighteen), conservatories, and universities, gender limitations are no longer as strict as at primary schools. The girls and boys are no longer pushed to follow gender norms. Unconventional gender roles become more or less accepted. 'Feminine boy' and

'masculine girl' were terms often used in the collected musical life stories. Some students claimed and others reported that their teachers had said that it was good for a boy dealing with music to be somewhat feminine: his manliness would give him strength and aggressiveness, but his feminine side would provide him with softer, emotional characteristics, also needed for the proper interpretation of music. In other words, the 'proper' interpretation of music required both genders or 'some kind of bisexuality'. In this case, the term 'bisexuality' was used by the students and their music teachers as a metaphor for whatever kind of behaviour (not necessarily sexual behaviour) that crosses conventional gender lines. However, female students were always said to be lacking masculine strength and the aggressiveness required to perform certain works. The collected stories give the impression that only boys can have both the requisite male and female qualities for the perfect interpretation of music ('only a man can make good music, but bisexuality gives the required sensitivity for interpretation'), while girls will always be lacking power. It seemed that it cannot as easily be imagined that girls/women have the required kind of bisexuality for a valid interpretation of music (Moisala, 2000a).

Short history and overview of gender studies

There is a lack of agreement about the origins of gender studies. Barbara Marshall (2000: 21) states that the distinction between sex and gender was originally introduced in the medical and psychoanalytical literature of the mid-1950s or perhaps even as early as the 1930s by psychologists. While Freud was examining human sexual behaviour in order to increase our understanding of the unconscious regions of mental life, psychologists interested in sexology were exploring the dimensions of human sexual behaviour. The concept of gender emerged originally in the early 1960s, in the area of overlap between sexology and psychoanalysis (Glover and Kaplan, 2000: xviii). Initially, scholars wrote about gender roles, cultural standards regarding 'manly' and 'womanly' patterns of behaviour, which an individual adopts. By that time, it was already understood that a person's sexual preferences and proclivities cannot be deduced from anatomical facts.

Even though not all gender studies are necessarily feminist in nature, feminist studies have provided the strongest foundations and theoretical innovations for gender studies in general. The concept of feminism was already current by the mid-nineteenth century, and many influential feminist writers of the early twentieth century, such as Simone de Beauvoir, still serve as an inspiration to feminist approaches. As an academic field, however, feminist studies first emerged in the 1960s.