

## **Editor's Preface: Masculinity/Femininity Binarism**

A clear answer to what it means to be a woman and a man has existed for centuries. Femininity and masculinity, in most cases, have been conceptualised in terms of two antinomies. In the course of socialisation, disparate identities, as well as aspirations and social roles of men and women were construed. He who was destined to function in the public sphere, yield power, and concur the world, had to be brave, self-confident, precise and success-oriented, intellectual, assertive, aggressive, and competitive. She, in turn, who was confined to the private sphere, was socialised to be emphatic, caring, delicate, focused on hearth and home, looking after children and psychologically defensive.

Thus, following J. Lorber, it can be stated that this way of thinking epitomises the fact that "biology has become an ideology" (Lorber, 1998, p. 12). As a consequence, as put forward by the same author, in the course of the last century, a number of gender stereotypes have emerged. They concerned, for instance, unequal (and biologically determined) competences in the area of "using technology". This resulted in women being excluded from dozens of professions as well as impacted mutual relationships between genders in the everyday life. For Lorber, the metaphor of driving a car becomes symbolic in this context. She writes that "if a man and woman who are a couple are in a car together, he is much more likely to take the wheel than she is, even if she is the more competent driver". "Men drive cars whether they are good drivers or not because [as it is assumed] men and machines are a «natural» combination. But the ability to drive gives one mobility; it is a form of social power". It is worth adding that at the time when the first automobiles were manufactured, "feminists «co-opted» the symbolism of mobility as emancipation «Donning goggles and dusters, wielding tire irons and tool kits, taking the wheel, they announced their intention to move beyond the bounds of women's place»" (Lorber, 1998, p. 16).

The recent decades undermined the dichotomous perception of gender. We are dealing with the radical women's emancipation in all spheres, but most importantly in education and the labour market. We are also witnessing the emergence of such forms of female identity which in the past were exclusively the male preserve. Masculinity and femininity ceased to be seen as contrasting poles, and within a given society a number of equally-important inflections of masculinities and femininities exist; sometimes determining which one is more adequate can pose considerable difficulty.

The majority of articles in this issue is inscribed in the debate on the essentialist and constructivist approaches to gender. It is hoped that they show new, very interesting ways of thinking in this field.

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#### REFERENCES

- Lorber, J. (1998) Believing is seeing. In: Weitz, R. (ed.) *The politics of women's bodies. Sexuality, appearance and behaviour*. New York: Oxford University Press.