

# Summaries

*Joan W. Scott*

## Millennial fantasies. The future of 'gender' in the 21st century

In this text the author wishes to argue that 'gender' may no longer be the useful category it once was, because it does not have the power to do the work we need it to do now, which is stopping the onslaught of evolutionary psychological theories. The author explains that the weakness of the concept to stop this habit of thought in which anatomy is destiny lies precisely in what was once taken to be its virtue: its refusal to deal with corporeal sex. For this left bodies as something natural, transparent, without history. This meant that a form of essentialism was built in the very idea of the sex/gender distinction, which undermined its effectiveness. Furthermore, it prevented feminists to engage with those aspects of biological knowledge that might historicize

anatomical sex. Using theories of neuropsychologist Elizabeth Wilson, the author argues that dealing with evolutionary psychology would mean thinking about the issue how bodies register their history.

Apart from the incapability of 'gender' to counter evolutionary psychology, the author notes that she had become increasingly uneasy about 'gender', because in her view it contributes rather than unsettles the stability of the man/woman opposition. For both these reasons, she finds herself using 'gender' less and less in her work, talking instead about sexual difference – a term that doesn't presume fixed differences, but studies the operations of difference – and about biological sex as an historically variable concept.

*Amade M'charek*

## The traffic in males. On different versions of sex in studies of genetic diversity

Ever since the nature-culture debates in the seventies and the sex-gender distinction in the eighties, little attention has been paid to 'biological' sex within gender studies. Differences between men and women were best understood as cultural. Gender became the field of study, debates and interventions. Biological sex remained the universal, but not so relevant reference. Whereas gender was treated as the contextual, constructed and mediated category,

biological sex became its stable and unified other. To counter this notion of sex, this article examines how sex-differences are performed in laboratory practice. It argues that biological objects do not exist by themselves. Rather they are enabled by technologies, methods and practical ways of getting the job done. Consequently biological objects, such as genetic sex, come in many different versions, and can not be reduced to one unified thing.

The author investigates two practices in studies of genetic diversity: the practice of theory and genealogy and the practice of DNA and the production of data at the bench. In the context of theory and genealogy, it is argued that geneticists are not so much interested in the sex of individuals as such, but rather in sex-differences between patterns of inheritance. Sex is not located in bodies of individuals, but in genetic kinship. In the second practice, that of producing data, the sex of individuals beco-

mes pivotal. However, sex is not so much a natural quality of an individual, but rather an effect of various technologies and ways of conducting research. Sex is thus performed as various different things. The author concludes that the many different versions of sex that can be found in laboratory research, challenge the sex - gender distinction, and draw our attention to the temporary and fabricated nature of sex-differences.

*Dymphie van Berkel and Marta Kirejczyk*

## Juggling with biology in assisted reproduction. Cultural reinterpretation of the relation between descent and kinship in the second half of the 20th century in the Netherlands

The second half of the 20th century witnessed a significant change in reproductive practices stimulated by the introduction of social and medical solutions for infertility problems. In this article we analyse the processes in the course of which some of these new reproductive practices became embedded in our culture. We focus on practices (adoption, artificial insemination, oocyte donation and surrogacy) that undermine the culturally deeply rooted perception of the direct rela-

tion between descent and kinship, between the biological and social ties. In the construction of the cultural acceptance of these controversial practices the mobilisation of traditional images of the natural nuclear family, of femininity and masculinity plays an important role. We demonstrate that the cultural perception of the relation between biology and kinship in each practice is far from being constant. It must be reinvented ever again.

*Anita Hardon*

## Dominant contraceptive-use practices explained

Since reproductive choice was adopted as a paradigm for family planning services worldwide, a wide range of contraceptives are available for men and women. Different users are assumed to prefer different methods. This article reveals that in practice one specific contraceptive is used widely; the method that dominates differs from setting to setting.

Describing dominant contraceptive-use practices in the Netherlands, South Africa and the Philippines, the article seeks to explain why such dominance occurs. Dutch women prefer the contraceptive pill because it not only prevents pregnancy, it also helps them plan their menstrual periods in accordance with their social lives. South African women prefer hor-

monal injections because these can be used without their husbands knowing. They associate the pill with 'forgetfulness'. Filipino women prefer not to use the contraceptive pill because they associate it with side-effects. In the predominantly Catholic country, contraceptives are viewed with suspicion. They use hormonal pills to 'induce' a menstruation when

they fear that they are pregnant. The author explains these different dominant practices by referring to the script of the technologies, the way in which the technologies fit in day-to-day life of women, the embodied experiences of women with the different methods, prescription practices of health workers, and the societal norms and values related to reproduction.

*Maaïke de Haardt*

## 'A Sound Base'. The challenge of traditional religious women's organisations for theology and women's studies

The activities of women in traditional women's organisation are seldom object of research, neither for feminists nor for theologians. The special chair 'women, faith and culture', initiated by the Union Dutch Catholic Women's Movements, functions as a challenge on this point. Central questions of this article are: how to detect the practices and beliefs, the creativity and competence of the members of catholic women's organisation and how to validate, characterise and integrate this 'knowledge' in theology and women's studies? Using thoughts and notions of the French postmodern scholar Michel De Certeau, especially his notion of 'appropriation', the author analyses the public and social activities of the Union of Dutch Catholic Women's Movements. She claims that

throughout the years, the central religious notion for these women has been the concept of 'imago dei': the conviction that everybody is in the image of God, despite all the differences between the women and between their organisations themselves. This notion founded their public struggle for justice, their protests against war, childhood labour, trafficking of women, etc., as well as their criticism of the church. From a spiritual perspective the author characterises this attitude as 'tender competence': a competence rooted in the knowledge of the vulnerability of life, in which care and attention for primary needs and awareness of different circumstances constitutes the sound base of all action.