

Establishing A Critical Feminist Perspective on Phonetic Gender Research

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Gender is a multifaceted and multidimensional characteristic – despite all simplistic attempts to maintain a binary gender system that divides the social world exclusively into women and men. In addition to the question of how many genders can, must, and should be distinguished, central is how gender is defined in the first place. An approach established since the 1970s differentiates between biological sex, which can be considered at different levels (phenotypic, chromosomal, hormonal), and social gender, which reflects the gendered self. The latter includes both gender identity (i.e., experienced membership in a gender group) and gender role self-concept (i.e., self-attributed femininity and masculinity).

Phonetic gender research insufficiently incorporates findings from Gender Studies with the result that dealing with gender here sometimes appears undercomplex. This can be seen, for example, in the fact that it remains unclear how authors define gender, that gender is included as an independent variable in statistical analyses although this is not motivated by an underlying hypothesis, and that documentation of results sometimes includes linguistic discrimination (e.g., so-called othering). Is the collection of gender data even necessary? Which genders and gender levels should be considered? Which causal direction is assumed (gender influences speaking vs. speaking influences gender)? What might be an adequate operationalization of gender in light of one's research question? How can unintentional gender-based discrimination be minimized in one's research?

These questions will be answered and all stages of the scientific research process will be considered. The goal is to help raise awareness of gender in one's own research practice, to point out pitfalls, and to offer alternative routes.