



## Editorial: Nurturing inclusive and critical spaces for gender inquiry

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# Nurturing inclusive and critical spaces for gender inquiry

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## Nurturing inclusive and critical spaces for gender inquiry

It is a great pleasure to introduce you to this new section, within *Cogent Social Sciences*, on *Gender Studies*. In this editorial, we advocate for an inclusive, visible and critical space that promotes and advances the field of gender studies, which is more vital and relevant than ever. Providing a brief overview of the field, we set the scene by looking back to acknowledge the roots and history of gender studies as both theory and movement. We then outline the contemporary challenges facing gender scholars, with particular reference to the thematic areas currently served by this section: work and migration, violence, health, education, care and climate change.

### Looking backwards to look forwards: contemporary challenges facing gender inquiry

The area of gender studies is one defined by activism, resistance and social justice. Interdisciplinary gender studies developed alongside and out of women's studies, which consolidated as an academic field of study in the late 1960s and 1970s, driven by second-wave feminism and the women's liberation movement (Wiegman, 2002). Women's studies of this time challenged androcentric ways of knowing and instead pursued new knowledge through critical inquiry, to illuminate women's oppression and lived experiences (Feitz, 2016). Third-wave feminism, observable from the 1990s onwards, sought to distance itself from what was perceived to be an overly prescriptive and exclusionary White middle-class feminism of the previous generation (Aune & Holyoak, 2018). As such, third-wave feminists favoured foregrounding personal narratives and an intersectional and inclusive analysis (Snyder, 2008). This broadening interest in intersectionality, masculinity and queer studies saw a shift in focus from women to gender (Feitz, 2016). Although this shift has inspired much debate, the success of women's/gender studies is evident in how gender issues now underpin many disciplines in the social sciences (Richardson & Robinson, 2020).

As gender studies began to emerge and expand, gender mainstreaming was introduced as a global strategy to address gender inequality within international development agendas (Kataeva et al., 2024). Over 30 years ago, at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, governments pledged to take a comprehensive approach to combat gender discrimination, by mainstreaming gender globally (Caywood & Darmstadt, 2024). Since then, gender mainstreaming has been considered a pivotal cross-cutting strategy to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While SDG 5 specifically targets gender equality, gender-responsive policies cut across all 17 goals, such as poverty, climate, health and economic growth (Kataeva et al., 2024; UN Women, n.d).

Decades of tailored gender policies have secured unparalleled gains and progress in women's economic, educational and political status (Coffe et al., 2023). And yet despite these gains, no country has fully achieved gender equality or is on track to do so in the next century, let alone by 2030, the target for the SDGs to be achieved (World Economic Forum, 2019). Academic debates continue as to whether gender mainstreaming is an appropriate strategy for structural and cultural change (Lauritzen & Guldvik, 2025). A practical emphasis in many gender mainstreaming policies on ensuring equality of basic needs has historically distracted from achieving parity in strategic areas to challenge unequal power relations, for example (Kim et al., 2022). Further criticisms relate to a narrow and heteronormative conceptualisation of gender, namely the foregrounding of unequal power relations between men and women (Davids et al., 2014). It is beyond the scope and focus of this editorial to consider the potential and limitations of gender mainstreaming as a strategy to achieve gender equality. However, in light of principles and values of social justice, it is evident that the pursuit of gender equality globally faces a significant and co-ordinated backlash, which aims to disrupt and dismantle hard-won progress.

In recent years a growing resistance to the global pursuit of gender equality has been increasingly apparent. To some degree, opposition to social change is an inevitable response, as members of privileged groups push back to preserve the status quo, due to their vested interests (Flood et al., 2021). However, of note in the current climate is the way in which anti-gender equality organisations and movements have utilised new ways to grow in strength and visibility that pose unique challenges to the rights of women, girls and LGBTIQ+ communities (UNRISD & UN-Women, 2025). A global anti-gender movement, with roots in right and far right politics as well as some religious denominations, seeks to not only undermine feminism and LGBTIQ+ achievements in sex and gender equality politics, but also the value of democracy itself (Venegas, 2022).

Within the last few years, abortion rights, sex education and gender studies, gay marriage and transnational treaties concerning gender-based violence have all faced attacks by an increasingly powerful and coherent anti-gender movement (Kuhar, 2024). The negative economic and social consequences of neoliberalism have offered ideal conditions for an anti-gender discourse, by indirectly triggering a reactionary return to traditional gender roles and family structure in response to the instability, inequality and individualism of neoliberal policies (Butler, 2024; Kuhar & Srdelj, 2025). Building alliances with right-wing populists, anti-gender actors have attacked the rights of women, sexual and ethnic minorities under the guise of promoting 'family values' (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022).

Now more than ever, nurturing inclusive and critical spaces for advancing knowledge is needed to navigate, challenge and resist anti-gender mobilisation globally. As education programmes in gender studies are being shut down across parts of Europe and the US, driven by accusations that they promote a 'gender ideology', rather than offering 'real' scientific investigation, the threat to critical and interdisciplinary knowledge is genuine and alarming. In response, our new section on *Gender Studies* within *Cogent Social Sciences* aims to provide a critical and interdisciplinary space to explore and illuminate gender-based inequalities and their complex interaction with other social characteristics such as ethnicity, class, sexuality, disability and age. Given that global challenges of economic instability, conflict, climate change and societal impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic disproportionately negatively impact women, girls and LGBTIQ+ people, an interdisciplinary and intersectional outlook on contemporary gender issues remains relevant and essential. In the sections that follow, the Associate Editors reflect on these challenges with reference to their themed areas of expertise. In doing so, they illuminate central ideas for potential critical inquiry within *Cogent Gender Studies* going forward.

## **Gender, work and migration – nicola chanamoto**

Gender has long been recognised as a salient factor in all aspects of migration processes, including immigration policy, institutional practice, and the daily lived realities of migrant communities. Indeed, a rich body of research applying a gender lens to patterns and experiences of work and migration has developed since the broader acknowledgement of women as migrants in their own right in the 1980s. Moving beyond the 'trailing spouse' narrative to recognise the global force of women labour migrants was indeed crucial in establishing an 'epistemic community' of gender and migration scholars (Kofman & in, 2025).

Since then, intersectional approaches to work and migration have challenged gender as a discrete category of enquiry, exploring how gender interacts with sexuality, age, ethnicity, race, class, disability and citizenship to shape experience. This is apparent in the burgeoning masculinities literature, for example, and newer work on girlhood and mobility. Intersectionality, employed both as an analytical tool and a political standpoint, has illuminated the complexities of the gender lens. The danger, however, is a steady dilution of intersectionality into 'buzz word' territory, necessitating a renewed and meaningful engagement with an intersectional frame (Yurdakul et al., 2025).

The Covid-19 global pandemic has further revealed the complex interplay between gender, work and migration. Blurred boundaries between what is considered 'work' and what is 'care' have enabled the invisible and devalued caring activities of women and minoritised people to be brought into public consciousness. This reflects broader efforts to disrupt and dismantle age-old dichotomies in migration research and policy, for example, the categorisation of migrant workers as 'highly skilled' or 'low skilled'. Going forward, further troubling of restrictive categories will constitute not only an academic exercise, but also a political act of resistance against the exclusion and invisibilising of marginalised communities.

Recent interest in the temporalities of migration has enhanced traditional spatial perspectives. This has been of benefit, for example, to scholars of transnationalism, seeking to understand migrants' simultaneous maintenance of *life here* and *life there*. In this vein, recognising the fluidity of concepts of home and belonging directly challenges the rhetoric of 'settlement' and 'integration' which – although widely critiqued – have retained a stubborn presence in global politics (Scuzzarello and Moroşanu, 2023). Maintaining a focus on temporal aspects of work and mobility will allow gendered consequences of broader global changes, such as the development of artificial intelligence and the effects of climate change, to be explored.

The study of work and migration has historically privileged ethnocentric perspectives, thereby reproducing global inequalities. The epistemological, financial and empirical bias of migration research towards the Global North arguably represents the greatest barrier to the advancement of the discipline. Going forwards, we will see a further decolonising of the field, underpinned by an examination of the role of colonial histories in shaping migration pathways (Mayblin & Turner, 2020). In practice, this could involve strengthened South-South partnerships, innovative co-production with participants, and exploration of less-studied localised contexts. Finally, there is an increasing insistence that researchers' own positionality is examined with reflexivity and transparency, in temporal as well as socio-spatial perspective (Fresnoza-Flot and Cheung, 2024). As scholars of gender, work and migration, we are being called to a deeper awareness and acknowledgement of how our identities shape research processes beyond data collection.

### **Gender and violence – Beverley Gilbert**

The relationship between violence and gender has consistently been identified as a fundamental determinant of both the perpetration and victimisation of violence (FRA/EIGE/Eurostat, 2024; Moore & Stuart, 2005; Pesta et al., 2019). This encompasses a broad range of abuse and violence, including sexual assault, domestic abuse, so-called 'honour'-based violence, sexual exploitation, reproductive coercion, female genital mutilation, and child marriage. These forms of violence are not isolated phenomena but interwoven with social inequalities, political structures, and cultural norms that require nuanced and sustained attention (Gill & Brah, 2014). A consensus in the literature is that violence is not simply a product of biological maleness, but is deeply rooted in the cultural scripts, normative expectations and identity formations associated with masculinity (Gutmann et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2015). Gender and violence scholarship holds in tension the need to illuminate the personal experiences of those who experience violence and the structural conditions that sustain it.

The gender and violence sub theme within *Gender Studies* seeks to advance high quality theoretical and empirical research that improves societal understanding of sexual and gender-based violence across global contexts. Future contributions will reflect the complexity of gender-based violence as both a global and locally embedded issue. This includes work that documents the prevalence, causes, and impacts of violence; evaluates legal, institutional, and policy responses; and explores how gender intersects with race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, disability, age, and socioeconomic status shape patterns of harm. Also welcomed are analyses of how contemporary social, political, and environmental global crises influence the dynamics of gender-based violence, as well as comparative and methodological contributions that offer alternative perspectives and advance the field.

Through this sub-theme, the journal seeks to foster scholarship that not only advances theoretical understanding but also supports evidence-informed approaches to prevention, intervention, and policy development. By drawing together global perspectives and encouraging research grounded in intersectional feminist analysis, the journal aims to contribute to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of gendered violence, and, ultimately, to the collective efforts to challenge and transform the conditions that allow it to persist.

### **Gender and health – Sarah McLachlan**

There is global recognition that gender influences health in multiple and complex ways, including susceptibility to illness, illness experiences, health and risk behaviours, access to resources and services, responses to treatment and health outcomes (World Health Organisation, 2021). Despite this, global studies on health disparities have tended to disaggregate data by sex because of the sparsity of data

on gender identities. Indeed, recent research exploring differences between females and males across the lifespan in the top 20 causes of disease burden globally found that there has been little progress in addressing these differences over the last 30 years (Patwardhan et al., 2024). Going forward, it is critical that research continues to explore the health needs and experiences of gender diverse groups. The challenges of trans and non-binary individuals face in accessing sexual and reproductive health services (Allen et al., 2025) and mental health services (Cronin et al., 2025), for example, represent one such area.

Changes in research practice are needed to more fully explicate the impact of gender on health. Health researchers have highlighted that the frequent omission of gender-disaggregated analyses and reporting conceals unique patterns and needs in gender diverse groups (Peters & Woodward, 2023). Promisingly, health research funders, such as the National Institute for Health and Care Research in the UK, and the European Commission, have recently formalised a commitment to integrate sex and gender into health and care research, in recognition of the fundamental role of gender in shaping health experiences and outcomes. Similarly, the World Health Organisation adopted the Sex and Gender Equity in Research (SAGER) guidelines (Heidari et al., 2016) in 2023, to address suboptimal reporting of sex and gender data in health research.

As discussed above, gender intersects with other lived social identities to create inequities in health. Rather than exploring the impact of gender on health in isolation, scholars such as Subramaniapillai et al. (2023) favour creating an evidence base that accounts for the interconnected nature of gender and broader identities. This allows for the mechanisms underlying health inequities to be identified, thereby informing effective interventions and policy. In contrast, Chang et al. (2025), question whether the global aim of achieving gender equality in health is appropriate, suggesting that a focus on equality of outcomes across genders may detract attention from pervasive within-gender inequities. Moving from an equality to equity positioning, these scholars emphasise a need for research to explore avoidable and unjust differences within gender identity groups, to facilitate a more nuanced understanding of health inequities and develop tailored interventions.

These questions and positions are likely to shape gender and health research going forward, as are the findings of recent priority setting exercises, such as the James Lind Alliance's Youth Gender Diversity, LGBTQIA+ Perinatal Care, and Global Menopause Priority Setting Partnerships, and the World Health Organisation's global priority setting exercise on masculinities and sexual and reproductive health and rights. Furthermore, gender, health and technology is a burgeoning field, with recent research indicating the potential of digital health technologies in improving women's access to health care services, self-care and self-monitoring, and their empowerment (Borges do Nascimento et al., 2025). There is also increasing focus on gender inequalities in the health and care workforce; the World Health Organisation's 'Fair share for health and care' report positions these inequalities as underlying the global crisis in health and care systems (World Health Organisation, 2024).

The areas of emphasis, omission and need raised here show gender and health to be a topical and evolving field of study. However, against a backdrop of rising hostility toward gender-focused research, advocating for gender-equitable health services and policies is now more timely and critical than ever.

## **Gender, care and climate change – Anna Dadswell**

Within the broad field of gender and development, two interconnected priorities have come to the forefront: the crisis of care work and the deepening impacts of climate change. Care work – encompassing unpaid domestic labour, caring for children and older adults, and sustaining communities, as well as paid care in health, social care and education sectors – is overwhelmingly feminised, with the majority undertaken by women and girls (ILO, 2018; Kabeer, 2026; Razavi, 2007). This work is foundational to society, yet systematically undervalued within entrenched patriarchal norms, resulting in a 'crisis of care' (Fraser, 2016). Women and girls responsible for unpaid care work are often excluded from the market economy, while those providing paid care are often subject to poor wages and precarious conditions (ILO, 2018; Kabeer, 2026). The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted and further exacerbated this gendered crisis, yet calls for a gender-responsive recovery have remained unanswered (De Henau & Himmelweit, 2021; Esquivel et al., 2022).

At the same time, climate change is widely acknowledged not only as an environmental issue but as a profoundly gendered one. Its impacts – including extreme weather, food, water and fuel insecurity, health threats, displacement, poverty and conflict – disproportionately affect women and girls, particularly those in low-income, rural, and climate-vulnerable contexts (MacGregor et al., 2022; Pearse, 2017; Sultana, 2014). There is growing recognition that gendered climate impacts are inseparable from the crisis of care: environmental degradation and displacement directly increase the unpaid care burden whilst simultaneously putting pressure on paid care sectors (MacGregor et al., 2022; Sultana, 2014; UNRISD, 2025).

The intersection of gender, care and climate change is therefore of central importance to gender justice and sustainability. However, one key contention is the risk of instrumentalising women as natural environmental stewards. While this draws attention to the care-climate nexus, it can essentialise gendered roles and further burden women with responsibility for tackling climate change (Lau et al., 2021; Leach, 2007). Similarly, unpaid care work is persistently treated as a free natural resource, with little consideration of how climate impacts affect those who undertake it (MacGregor et al., 2022). Feminist economists have critiqued climate interventions for overlooking investment in the care economy as a pathway to more equitable sustainable development (De Henau & Himmelweit, 2021; ILO, 2022). Academics engaging with feminist political ecology and care ethics instead advocate for the redistribution of care across households, states, and markets (Allison, 2017; Barca et al., 2023) and recognising care work as essential within climate policies (The Asia Foundation, 2024).

A further contention concerns the need for greater recognition of intersectionality. Much of the literature and policies assume women form a homogenous group, failing to engage with how other social categories compound the burdens of the care crisis and climate change (Lau et al., 2021; Rainard et al., 2023). This is particularly consequential given women in the Global South, Indigenous women, and care workers marginalised by race, class, and migration are most acutely affected, yet their knowledge and agency are least reflected in policy (Sultana, 2014; UN Women, 2023). Addressing this requires a fundamental shift towards critical climate justice, integrating feminist, anti-racist, post-colonial, and decolonial scholarship alongside activist movements to investigate the experiences of different groups and foster a praxis of solidarity and action (Sultana, 2022).

With 2030 approaching, progress on SDG Target 5.4 around unpaid care work is among the furthest from realisation (Azcona et al., 2025). It is essential that research and policy informing the post-2030 sustainability agenda incorporate a critical feminist and intersectional interrogation of the care-climate nexus, centring the participation, voice and agency of women and girls in aspiring to a gender-just, transformative approach to caring for both people and the planet.

## Gender and education – Charlotte Morris

Across the globe, there are enduring gendered barriers to education at all levels, concerning access, participation, progression, belonging and lived experiences. Education is key to working towards gender parity (UNESCO, 2019) and so remains a priority for research, intervention and policy development. Research in this area is vital, enabling exploration of specific issues in contrasting contexts, alongside identification of how barriers can be addressed, how harmful gendered stereotypes can be tackled and how lived gendered experiences of education can be improved. Whilst education can be life-changing and transformative for individuals, communities and societies, and is essential to achieving equity goals, all too often it can also be a site for discrimination, marginalisation, exclusion, precarisation and in many cases violence, harassment and abuse (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Haslop & Ringrose, 2025; Phipps, 2020; Phipps & Young, 2014; Setty et al., 2024; Vatansever, 2020).

Interventions are urgently needed at policy, sectoral, institutional, disciplinary and pedagogical levels. To support this, future studies should focus on how we ensure educational cultures and environments are equitable, safe and non-discriminatory for all students and staff regardless of gender. Recognising that gender intersects with multidimensional axes of power including racism, capitalism, coloniality, ableism and heteronormativity is vital for gender and education research (Varsik & Goročovskij, 2023), and intersectionality will continue to be an important lens through which to understand differential impacts of the global challenges we collectively face. It is important to understand and respond to ways

in which wider conditions in the contemporary world - such as climate crisis, conflict, religious persecution, political instability, gender-based violence, displacement, job insecurity and exploitation, access to welfare, changing technologies, health and care inequalities - affect educational opportunities, outcomes and experiences in relation to gender and interlinked power disparities. These issues inevitably impact on the most vulnerable populations, groups and individuals first and most intensively and can exacerbate pre-existing inequalities (Ngcamu, 2023).

Currently, as discussed earlier, we are witnessing anti-gender backlash in many parts of the globe in tandem with anti-progressive movements seeking to undermine hard-won rights (Burke et al., 2022). It is indeed concerning that, in some contexts, curricula and teaching materials which relate to feminism and gender have been banned (Barát, 2021). Attending to ways in which this intensified politicisation of gender shapes educational environments and outcomes in the contemporary milieu is key, as is connecting this to growing extremism and far-right movements (Butler, 2024). It will become increasingly important to illuminate and examine strategies for resisting gendered and intersectional forms of oppression and to capture the efforts of resistance movements, particularly from the Global South (Motta & Nilson, 2011; Raft and Dahlin, 2025). Educators have a significant part to play in resistance through their pedagogies, practices and curricula (Darder et al., 2012) and in supporting those rendered most marginalised and precarious through shifting political and socio-geographical terrain (Kadiwal, 2023). Inclusive practices, alongside feminist, queer, decolonial and other liberatory approaches, are as important as ever in creating possibilities for transformation (Hooks, 1994). As education is a cornerstone for the achievement of gender parity, inclusion and quality of life, work in this field is highly valued and welcomed.

### Methodological roots and possibilities

The thematic areas discussed above - arbitrarily separated for the purposes of this editorial - undoubtedly interrelate and intersect with each other. For example, we cannot consider experiences of work, migration, health or education without acknowledging the violence inherent in such systems. Reflecting a heritage of activism in gender studies, the section highlights the role research and scholarly investigation plays in highlighting gender inequality and experiences of marginalisation, injustice and disadvantage. Additionally, these thematic areas demonstrate the value of an intersectional approach to revealing, challenging and resisting such inequities.

Notably, an intersectional lens can show how different forms of privilege and discrimination interact and exacerbate inequality, ultimately leading to a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of the issues discussed above (Humbert et al., 2025). Whilst we advocate for intersectionality as a foundational analytical tool and political standpoint within this section, we note concerns over the misuse and dilution of the 'intersectional lens'. In response, as identified in some of the thematic sections above, creative and diverse methodological approaches will contribute to illuminating systemic oppressions by moving beyond a descriptive 'ranking' of oppression.

In examining and revealing intersecting and often invisible disadvantages, inclusive methodologies can offer deeper analytical explanations. In the 1970s feminist scholars and activists, amongst other critical theorists, challenged the exclusion of women and other marginalised groups from universal, androcentric narratives, arguing that positivistic methodologies of the time largely served the researcher, rather than the researched, and were carried out in ways that objectified participants (Letherby, 2003; Harding and Norberg, 2005). In challenging the value neutrality of positivistic social science, feminists and others highlighted the dominance of this paradigm of inquiry as stemming not from its objectivity or universality, but from its privileged position within patriarchal power relations (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007). Highlighting the connection between power and knowledge, and how knowledge claims are intrinsically linked to domination and exclusion (Abbott et al., 2005) led to a reworking of traditional methodological paradigms of inquiry to ones that privileged collaborative, non-hierarchical and reflexive approaches (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007). Against this backdrop, the new *Gender Studies* section encourages submissions to uphold and work within these foundational methodological principles. In doing so, authors can offer an inclusive and critical way forward to generate knowledge that challenges gender inequality.

Valuing diverse global voices, the section welcomes submissions from practitioners as well as academics, inclusive of both early career researchers and established authors. As the issues we face are globally shared, a multiplicity of voices drawn across and within different countries and regions, is needed to address the critical issues now facing gender studies and the pursuit of gender equity. The interdisciplinary nature of gender studies is reflected in our interest in submissions that extend inquiry in this area. We therefore welcome reviews, original research and reflective pieces that illuminate and engage with gender inequity and discrimination in diverse areas, underpinned by relevant theories and concepts. As the section evolves and grows, its themes are likely to shift and expand. Nonetheless, our commitment remains to provide an inclusive and nurturing space for the critical reflection in exploring gender-based inequalities to further gender equity in policy, practice, theory, action and debate.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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**Dr Nicola Chanamoto** is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Lincoln where she leads the Higher Education Achievement Report. Her research interests and expertise are in the areas of gender, work and migration, including international student mobility and international academic staff mobility.

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