

**Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan: *50 Key Concepts in Gender Studies*.**

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1      Aimed primarily at students (both under- and post-graduates), *50 Key Concepts in Gender Studies* offers those new to this field an in-depth yet accessible introduction to the discipline's important concepts. The authors acknowledge that the choice of concepts is "not random, and value-free" and does, to some extent, reflect their own personal and academic backgrounds. The selection process also "evolved" over time, and they have sought to include not only issues of contemporary debates but also to discuss concepts that were central to the development, or fragmentation, of women's studies and gender studies over the past 30 or so years.

2      Whilst the book is structured in a straight-forward A-Z manner, each entry is fully cross-referenced, facilitating fuller reading of related concepts. The nature of the cross-references also means that as one is reading and moving from cross-reference to cross-reference, the interconnections within the subject area become evident. Each entry is also more than just a dictionary or encyclopaedia-like definition. A concise definition of each concept is provided, which then develops into a more in-depth discussion of the issues, theories and application of the concept. Examples illustrating each concept help inform and illuminate the discussion. Further reading is also suggested to encourage the student to turn perhaps to the original works cited and subsequent debates surrounding the concept.

3      Preceding the 50 concepts is an Introduction which provides a brief overview of the development of Gender Studies (primarily in the UK) as an academic discipline. Given the title of the book it is pertinent to note that the authors record the shift from Women's Studies and close ties to feminist movements to the broader term of gender studies, thus incorporating men and masculinities. They do however, also see feminist perspectives as "central" despite the shift in thinking.

4      Given that most people do not read an encyclopaedia from page one to the end, I approached this book in terms of dipping in and seeing where I ended up. Having recently read Susan Faludi's *Backlash*, I choose this term as my starting point. With just over two and half pages of discussion/definition (which seems to be about the average length for each entry), the entry manages to do justice to Faludi's concerns and theories whilst also bringing in more recent developments in the theory of a backlash against feminism. The cross-reference from here is to Post-feminism - a complex topic, and not one that I feel very

comfortable with. The authors begin by outlining the problems of defining post-feminism as there are numerous definitions and critiques of the term. In their discussions of the varying approaches, we can see elements of the backlash against feminism, thus resonating with the preceding term, whilst also appreciating the current debates surrounding the use of the term 'post' and its connections to postmodernism and theories of difference. Indeed, the cross-references here include these two terms along with Feminisms and Third wave feminism.

5 Like post-feminism, "third wave feminism has numerous definitions" (p.169) and there is considerable debate about its origins and place within feminist discourse. The authors here opt for a definition which locates third wave feminism within writings by women of colour and women from a younger generation who have grown up with the advances (derived) from their foremothers, yet do not feel empathy with the terminology, identities and concerns of second wave feminists. What the authors perhaps omit is the issue that one element of third wave feminism is that it tends to present itself in opposition to a single, unified second wave, often colluding with backlash commentators who present feminists from the 1970s and 1980s as a single stereotype of dungaree-wearing, bra-burning lesbians who all wanted to ban pornography and hated men. In fact, even writings from the 1970s and 1980s highlight the divisions within the women's liberation movement, and issues such as pornography actually became instrumental in fragmenting feminist movements (see Bailey 23). Despite this, the authors do highlight the strengths of third wave feminism, its focus on the individual, and some of its dynamic manifestations e.g. in the Riot Grrrl movement. From here, the cross-reference is to Second wave feminism, but strangely, not to First wave feminism which is also an entry in the book.

6 Thus we can see how several of the terms are inter-related and form mini circles or loops within the text. Another strand one could follow is Pornography, Sexuality, Queer theory, Lesbian continuum, Separatism and Consciousness raising, with each term forming a cross-reference from the preceding one. As well as quite concrete concepts such as Body, Class and Cyborg, there are also several entries dealing with theories and discourses such as Difference, Essentialism, Post-colonial theory, Post-feminism, Postmodernism, Post-structuralism, Psychoanalytical feminism, and Standpoint. There are also terms that many would see as central to discussions in women's studies such as the Family, Patriarchy, Pornography, Power, Sexuality and Violence. In addition, as the book is concerned with Gender Studies, there are the necessary entries on Gender, Gender Segregation, Masculinity/Masculinities and Men's Studies. As someone who is slightly less familiar with some of the theories of these latter terms, these entries provide useful starting points for

beginning to seek a deeper understanding of the concepts.

7 The authors note that the book, given its title, has to appeal to, and be appropriate for, students from a wide variety of disciplines. For this reason it is possible for a reader from one discipline to feel that certain concepts have been excluded, or not received sufficient attention. For example, I would have liked an entry on 'grass-roots activism' as this was central to many feminist and women's liberation movements and campaigns. Also, although there is an extensive bibliography, it might have been useful to have also included an index of key writers, theorists, etc with reference to where they occur in the text. However, as the book is part of a series of 'Key Concepts in...', perhaps this feature is not part of the series' structure.

8 In conclusion, *50 Key Concepts in Gender Studies* provides a comprehensive introduction to the multi-disciplinary field of gender studies. The definitions are even-handed critiques where a range of viewpoints are presented, leaving the reader sufficiently informed to either look further into a concept, or move on depending upon their requirements. Students from different academic backgrounds can explore the discussions and debates central to gender studies, whilst those already possessing knowledge within this field will find new approaches and clear critiques of some of the central concepts in this multi-disciplinary area. The book is rigorously academic yet also highly readable and sufficiently accessible to appeal not only to students but also to those outside of academia.