

ISB Book Review

Reviewed by Jennifer Hennessy

Book: Gender Short Introductions

<i>Title:</i>	Gender Short Introductions
<i>Author:</i>	R. W. Connell
<i>Year of publication:</i>	2002
<i>Publisher:</i>	Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
<i>ISBN:</i>	-10: 0745627161 -13: 978-0745627168
<i>Pages:</i>	184
<i>Language:</i>	English

Author Background Information:

Raewyn Connell (born 1944) is an Australian sociologist. She is currently University Professor at the University of Sydney.

She was an activist in the New Left of the 1960s. She developed a social theory of gender relations ("Gender and Power", 1987), which emphasised that gender is a large-scale social structure not just a matter of personal identity.

Connell is best known outside Australia for studies of the social construction of masculinity. She was one of the founders of this research field, and her book "Masculinities" (1995, 2005) is the most-cited in the field. She has been an advisor to UNESCO and UNO initiatives relating men, boys and masculinities to gender equality and peacemaking.

Raewyn Connell is a transgender woman.

General Positioning of the Book (scientific/prose, (orthodox/heterodox):

Sociology study

Key words (not more than 5)

Social Embodiment

Gender Learning

Post Structuralist Theory

Hegemonic Masculinity

Psychoanalysis

ISB Top 50 (Yes/No):

No

Link to Social Banking:

This book is relevant to all in the work place and personally. It is relevant to Social Banking as social banks endeavour to invest in progressive companies/projects which consider the ethics of their decisions and thus support social justice and the equality of all people. Likewise social banks endeavour to support internal practices and policies which support equality of all people.

Description on Book-Cover and/or Amazon (or the like):

Book-Cover

“How can we understand the gender patterns of modern society? Are gender identities unstable? How do masculinities and femininities develop? Do gender patterns change under globalization? In this book R. W. Connell, one of the world's leading scholars in the field, answers these questions, and more. He provides a readable introduction to modern gender studies, gender theories, and gender politics. He presents contemporary classics of research, traces the history of Western intellectuals' ideas, and discusses current findings on gender differences, inequalities and patterns in the state and corporations.

However, the book is more than an introduction. It provides a powerful contemporary framework for gender studies, based on a synthesis of structural and post-structural analysis. Connell demonstrates the multidimensional and dynamic character of gender relations. He shows how to link individual life with large-scale social patterns, and how to locate gendered bodies in the historical process that constantly transforms gender relations. He also shows, in a deeply personal way, how gender politics arises in personal life and why we need to address injustice.”

Amazon (or the like) Rating/Feedback:

3.8 stars out of 5

"An impressive attempt at introducing readers to the question of gender from a broad interdisciplinary and international scope ... An engaging text covering a vast amount of scholarship that is at once intellectually challenging and personal. It is timely, meticulously documented and succinct. As an instructor I know the power of a brief introduction ... I am eager to use this text."

-- **Contemporary Sociology**

"Bob Connell has established himself as a leading theorist and analyst of gender. In *Gender*, he draws on a breathtakingly wide range of scholarship to offer a comprehensive and accessible sociological introduction to the study of gender in a multicultural, global world. A stunning, thought-provoking, wonderfully engaging volume to learn from and argue with."

-- **Steven Seidman, State University of New York at Albany**

Short Tabel of Contents:

1. The Question of Gender
2. Schools, Mines, Sex and War
3. Differences and Bodies
4. Gender Relations
5. Gender in Personal Life
6. Gender on the Large Scale
 - Gender in the Corporation**
 - The State and Gender
 - Gender in World Society
7. Gender and the Intellectuals
8. Gender Politics.

Short Description of Content:

This book covers the length and breadth of the gender question from studies of gender in mines in Africa to primary schools in the US. It looks at Gender learning, gender identities, the biological question, gender in personal life and on the Large scale.

I have zoned in on a small piece of the book called 'Gender in the Corporation' which comes under the chapter on 'Gender on the Large Scale'. This allows you to see the style and method of the authors writings and is quite relevant to the Certificate in Social Banking topics.

The piece on Gender in the Corporation starts off by describing the importance of the corporation/ company/ firm in modern Economics as the "key institution of developed capitalism".

The historic context of companies is given. Corporations are described as "Gendered institutions with a gendered history". Companies of merchants in early modern Europe were entirely composed of men. In the history of feminism, the corporation itself only came into focus in the 1970's, when liberal and academic feminism challenged organisational theory.

Connell cites a number of different studies undertaken in the 70's, 80's and 90's which look at the corporation as a place of work and which look at management styles within the corporation.

For example Miriam Glucksmann's account of British factory life in *Women on the Line* (1982) where Women were employed in the low paid routine jobs only, promotion was blocked, men could get twice the wage for doing easier jobs.

Connell also cites the findings of the *Glass Ceiling Commission*, a 21 person commission set up by the US Congress in 1991. The commission documented startling levels of exclusion of women and ethnic minority men from top management.

Amongst the biggest corporations in the USA (the 'Fortune 1,000 and Fortune 500'), 97% of senior managers turned out to be white and 95 to 97% were men. Of the Fortune 1,000 companies two had women CEO's .

The Glass Ceiling Commission proposed a change of attitude. They try to persuade controllers of corporations that a more diverse management would be *good for business*, relying on the profit motive of making US business more competitive.

Connell is damning of this proposal, she believes this ignores the fact that the profit motive has been operating since the dawn of capitalism and so far has resulted in a management group 97% men.

The author goes on to describe the culture found in senior management and the change in managerial masculinities over time. Reference is made to a book called *Masculinity and the British Organisation Man since 1945* written by British Historian Michael Roper (1994). The book looks at 1940's British manufacturing firms where an older generation of managers had a hands-on relation with the production process, identified themselves closely with the firm and quality of the product and took a paternalistic interest in the workers. This style of management is contrasted with the growing power of finance capital and a new cadre of managers, sometimes gaining power through corporate amalgamations and restructuring, they are oriented to accountancy and profit.

Connell refers to Judy Wajcman (1999) book *Managing like a Man* where she studied both women and men managers in globally oriented British high technology firms in 1990's. She found that in order to survive in this world women were under heavy pressure to act just like the men, work long hours, fight office wars, put pressure on subordinates and focus on profit. Wajcman found no truth in the belief that women coming into management would bring a more caring, nurturing or humane style to the job.

Reference is made to a study by James Messerschmidt, an American criminologist and masculinity researcher who reconstructed the corporate decision-making that led to the fatal crash of the space shuttle *Challenger* in 1986. He found that the key move – a decision to ignore weather conditions – was conscious risk taking, which had been debated at the time within the engineering company. Doubts had been raised by technical engineers but a disastrous decision to go ahead with the launch reflected the organizational dominance of the tough managerial masculinity that was tough profit-oriented and unwilling to appear weak, they thus ignored other values or reasoning

which could have prevailed.

Connell concludes the chapter by saying that from the point of gender justice, the picture in top management looks bleak. A masculine culture emphasizing toughness and competitiveness prevails and the few women who make it to the top are unlikely to change this. She believes that the rise of finance capital and the process of globalization have certainly changed styles of management and that they have not necessarily produced more equal or more tolerant gender regimes in business. Among men too, only those who conform, who can 'stand the heat' are likely to be recruited.

Results / Insights

- I found the initial contextualisation of 'the firm' in history from a gender perspective interesting. I may have heard of the corporation/ the firm as being masculine structures but had not actually thought about it in that way.
- The study of the change in managerial styles as financial markets developed from the mid – 70's onwards was interesting. This reminded me of Professor Dembinski's lecture (presented at the second module of the Certificate in Social Banking in December 2011) on "Aspects of relation and transaction in a systemic view on financial markets". Dembinski described the gap between the real Economy and the Financial Economy, the justification of financial instrumentalisation for the sake of effect and where neat transactions are preferred to sticky relationships. Dembinski also referred to the golden years of the Economy from 1945 to 1975 to what he called the "Euphoric years" of the financial markets from 1975 until 2007.

Connell refers to studies by James Gee, Glynda Hull and Colin Lankshear (1996) who explore 'fast capitalism' where the new-model executive, according to management textbooks and magazines is a person with few permanent commitments but a driving interest in profit opportunities for his firm and himself.

- I was saddened and disappointed by the reference to the findings in Judy Wajcman (1999) book *Managing like a Man* that she found no truth in the belief that women coming into management would bring a more caring, nurturant or humane style. However I am optimistic that these more 'feminine' qualities will be displayed more commonly in senior management in time as women become more accustomed to senior roles and gain confidence and also as men and women become more aware of gender issues.
- Thoughts on these readings inspire me to be confident in my own management style when it embraces a caring, nurturing or humane style.
- I think I will be more aware of some of the subtle differences of behaviour within the work place from a gender perspective eg methods of communication, power play, how decisions are made etc.

Assessment:

Negative

- The book takes a while to get into, it introduces many new and complex concepts for someone who doesn't have any background in Sociology.
- While Gender studies tend to approach Gender as a social construct I found it very confusing to identify how far biological differences in males and females influence gender identity formation.
- The author questions the assumptions that gender distinction is 'natural', unchanging and fixed. At some stages in the book she seems extreme in her refutation of biological and psychological determinants of gender difference.

Positive

- For somebody who has not studied Gender from an academic perspective or formally considered Gender issues this book gives a wide and varied perspective of all the factors at play in Gender identities and issues. They include biological, sociological, psychological, historical and cultural factors.
- While it is described as "short introductions" to Gender, it is by no means a 'ladybird' guide to Gender. The book does not over simplify or gloss over the complexities and richness of Gender identities.

Possible Audience:

Sociologists

People who want an academic introduction to Gender

People who want to understand Gender issues in their personal life

Very Short Introductions (VSI) are a book series published by the Oxford University Press (OUP). The books are concise introductions to particular subjects, intended for a general audience but written by experts. Most are under 200 pages long. While authors may present personal viewpoints, the books are meant to be "balanced and complete" as well as thought provoking. He provides a readable introduction to modern gender studies, gender theories, and gender politics. He presents contemporary classics of research, traces the history of Western intellectuals' ideas, and discusses current findings on gender differences, inequalities and patterns in the state and corporations. However, the book is more than an introduction.Â Connell demonstrates the multidimensional and dynamic character of gender relations. Jung: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions #40), Anthony Stevens Originally published: 1994.Â Stevens says: "The specious idea that gender differences are due entirely to culture, and have nothing to do with biological or archetypal predispositions, still enjoys wide currency in our society, yet it rests on the discredited tabula rasa theory of human development and is at variance with the overwhelming mass of anthropological and scientific evidence."