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BASIC CONCEPTS OF GENDER STUDIES

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Gender Studies is an interdisciplinary academic field that emerged in the 1970s from the women's movement and early feminist theory. It critically examines gender as a key category of social differentiation that produces inequalities and shapes social relationships, institutions and power structures. Gender Studies explores how gender roles and expectations are constructed and maintained in different contexts: social, cultural, historical and how these constructions influence access to resources, opportunities and rights. It studies how gender norms shape everyday life and are embedded in areas such as education, labour markets, science, politics and family life.

A central concept in Gender Studies is the distinction between sex and gender. Traditionally, "sex" refers to biological differences, while "gender" refers to socially constructed roles, behaviours and expectations associated with being female or male. Modern theoretical approaches challenge this binary distinction and argue that both sex and gender are socially constructed. This means that even biological categories are interpreted through cultural and social norms, which influences how societies understand and regulate bodies and identities. Gender Studies therefore questions power relations behind dominant gender norms and highlights mechanisms that reproduce gender inequality.

Another fundamental concept is intersectionality, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), which explains how different forms of social inequality such as race, class, gender, age, ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation intersect and overlap. Intersectionality shows that discrimination cannot be fully understood by examining one category alone. For example, the experience of a migrant woman cannot be analysed only through gender, because her position is also shaped by migration status, language barriers, economic conditions and cultural perceptions. Intersectionality gives a more precise analysis of how systems of oppression interact and shape social disadvantages.

Gender Studies also provides practical tools for promoting equality, one of the most influential being gender mainstreaming. This internationally recognised strategy integrates a gender perspective into all policies and decision-making processes to address gender inequalities. It asks systematically: How does a policy affect women and men? Whose needs are considered? Who benefits? According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (2023), gender mainstreaming increases the social relevance and fairness of public policies by recognising that women and men are diverse groups with different needs and living conditions.

The presentation also addresses the situation of migrant women as a specific example of intersectional inequality. Migrant women may face legal and bureaucratic barriers to residence permits, language barriers that limit access to employment, education and healthcare, and challenges related to the recognition of prior qualifications. They are also at higher risk of job exploitation, low-paid work and housing discrimination. Cultural stereotypes and stigmatization, for example due to religious clothing, may further increase

social exclusion (Albrecht, Hofbauer Pérez & Stitteneder, 2021). These intersectional disadvantages show why policies must consider multiple dimensions of inequality simultaneously.

Reflective questions are necessary to analyse gender inequality in specific contexts such as urban environments. These include investigating how different groups use public space, whether there are safety concerns for women, migrants or elderly people, and whether social services, healthcare and participation opportunities are accessible to all. Such questions help identify structural inequalities and avoid reinforcing stereotypes. It is also important to challenge internalised gender assumptions and avoid treating women, especially migrant women as a homogeneous group.

In conclusion, Gender Studies offers essential conceptual tools for analysing power relations and understanding social inequality. By using key concepts such as gender construction, intersectionality and gender mainstreaming, it provides both analytical depth and practical strategies for promoting equality and social justice. Its relevance extends beyond academic theory into real social challenges, especially in addressing discrimination, diversity and inclusion in contemporary societies.