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Including Women: Gender in Commonwealth Higher Education



An epistemology of gender — An aspect of being as a way of knowing

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Synopsis

In this article, I examine the concept of gender as applied in Sri Lankan Women's/Gender Studies, and discuss the methodological assumptions behind the usages of the concept. It is based on theoretical understandings of contemporary currents in non/post-positivist methodologies, feminist theory and epistemologies, as well as postmodernism and postcolonialism. I argue for the conceptualisation of gender as ontology in local feminist research/writing by referring to the multiple conceptual constructions of gender as aspects of 'being'—spanning gendered identities to societal systems. I then focus on gender as epistemology with regard to the ways in which Sri Lankan feminists use gender as political aspirations, theoretical constructs, analytical categories and methodologies. I argue that politicized experiences of gender are at the crux of conceptualising realities in formal knowledge. And conversely, that the gender realities conceptualized in knowledge also mediate in the actual enactments of realities; that gender epistemology (or a way of knowing) is also ontology (or a sense of being). This can be summed up with the convoluted statement that gender ontology as epistemology is gender epistemology as ontology.

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