

# gendered

In simple terms, something is ‘gendered’ when its character is either masculine or feminine, or when it exhibits patterns of difference by gender. Pink and blue, for example, are gendered colours, the former regarded as ‘feminine’ and the latter as ‘masculine’. Paid work is a gendered institution, in that women and men undertake different forms of paid work (women tend to work part-time, men tend to work full-time), in different types of paid work (say, women in nursing, men in construction), and have different average earnings from paid work; see Crompton 1997). In this sense, to say something is ‘gendered’, is a way of *describing* it. ‘Gendered’, though, is also used as a *verb* and therefore gives expression to action, or ‘the doing of’ gender. As noted by Davies (1996), the shift to using gender as a verb (‘to gender’, ‘gendered’, ‘gendering’, ‘engender’) is a reflection of changed understandings of gender as an active ongoing process, rather than something that is readymade and fixed. In this sense, then, something is gendered when it is, in and of itself, actively engaged in social processes that produce and reproduce distinctions between women and men. ‘Gendering’ and ‘gendered’ are concepts which ‘signify outcomes that are socially constructed and give males advantages over females. They describe the production of assumptions about gender as well as the institutions that are shaped by those assumptions’ (Reskin and Padavic 1994: 6).

There are many examples of studies that describe the gendered character of the culture, institutions and organisations of contemporary Western societies. For example, Pilcher (1999) draws together a range of British research evidence that shows the gendered character of education and training, paid work, household work and caring, love and sexuality, body-related technologies, popular media culture, crime and criminal justice, and politics. Lisa Adkins’ (1995) study is an example of an approach that focuses more on the processes or practices which make an institution recognisably ‘gendered’ in its character. Adkins describes her research as concerned with the ‘gendering’ of the contemporary labour market. ‘That is to say, it has as its focus the processes through which power relations between men and women in employment are constituted, and how “advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, and meaning and identity are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female” (Acker 1990: 146)’ (Adkins 1995: 1). Using the hotel management and leisure park sectors of the British tourist industry as her case studies, Adkins’ specific aim is to explore the significance of the family and of heterosexuality in the process of gendering. One of Adkins’ main findings was that the very practices of production are themselves gendered. Women and men working in the leisure parks, for example, were required to perform differently in their work, even when they were ostensibly doing the same job. Women, in addition to the tasks they were directly paid to do, also had to be what Adkins calls ‘sex-workers’, working both for the public and for their male colleagues and bosses. In other words, they were ‘required to fulfil conditions which related to the production of an “attractive” female workforce’ (1995: 145). This gendering of production practices meant that women and men employed in the leisure parks were *qualitatively* different kinds of workers: ‘To be workers, women had to be “attractive” workers and carry out forms of sexualised

work, whereas men did not have to do this' (1995: 147). Adkins argues that her research shows that the labour market was gendered *prior* to jobs being differentiated. In other words, women workers in the leisure parks had to fulfil the conditions of being sexualised workers *regardless* of their specific occupation.

The move from thinking about gender as a noun, to a focus on the way distinctions between men and women are actively reproduced through 'gendering' processes and 'gendered' practices has usefully encouraged the sort of analyses represented by Adkins' work. However, more remains to be done on gendering, including variations by sexuality, social class, and 'race'. While the concepts of 'gendering' and 'engender(ed)' give a clear emphasis to the ongoing, processual quality of gender relations, a more cautious use of 'gendered' might be advisable. It suggests an action already taken place, in the past, and so may work to damage the understanding of gender relations as not being 'ready-made', fixed and unchanging.

**See also:** *gender, gender order, gender segregation*

### **FURTHER READING**

Kirkham's (1996) *The Gendered Object* examines the ways objects of everyday life are made 'appropriate' for women and for men. For an account of gender as practice and process, see Connell (1987).