Sex or Gender? Bodies in World Politics and Why Gender Matters

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The title of this textbook can be read in two ways. It is ambiguous, and deliberately so, as it seeks to draw attention not only to the subject matter of the book – ‘gender matters’ in global politics – but also to an epistemological belief espoused by its contributors: that gender matters in global politics.1 As Jindy Pettman argues, ‘it should be possible to write the body into a discipline that tracks power relations and practices which impact so directly and often so devastatingly on actual bodies’ (1997: 105). If this is the case, and in this book various contributors argue that it is, then it behoves us to delve deep into the meaning of the body and explore the implications of studying gender in a global political context. This chapter, then, explores why and how gender matters, and interrogates various conceptions of the body in global politics through the discussion of some key gendered narratives of international relations (and International Relations as an academic discipline). In the second section, I present two accounts of bodies in global politics: bodies in social movements and bodies as scientists. I conclude with a summary of Judith Butler’s work on the performativity of gender and the implications of such theory for the study and practices of global politics.

EVERYONE HAS A THEORY OF GENDER

To understand what I mean by the claim that ‘everyone has a theory of gender’ it is necessary to unpack both what I mean by theory and what I mean by gender.
Theory is often represented, especially by those who see it as a tool, as ‘objective’ and ‘value-free’. A ‘theory’ is supposed to explain and predict things about the world (see Smith and Baylis 2001: 1–12) and it is supposed to be ‘scientific’. This has important implications for the study and practices of global politics, because International Relations as an academic discipline is usually described as a ‘social science’. However, theory needn’t be seen as a tool or device. Rather than retaining a commitment to theory as a something that can be applied to the world as it exists independent of our interpretation of it, we can see theory as practice and ‘theorising [as] a way of life, a form of life, something we all do, every day, all the time’ (Zalewski 1996: 346).

This is relevant to international relations scholars because it means that first, we are all theorising (not just the ‘theorists’) and second, that the theorising that counts or that matters, in terms of affecting and/or creating international political events, is not confined either to policy makers or to academics.

(Zalewski 1996: 346, emphasis in original)

‘Theorising’, in this context, means that the way we think about the world is constitutive of that world. How we think we might be able to ‘solve’ certain problems of global politics, whether we think certain issues are problems in the first place and who gets to make these decisions: all of these affect and effect how we perceive the world we live in and therefore our responses to it. These responses in turn affect and effect our social/political reality; this is what is meant by ‘constitutive’. On this view, theory is a verb rather than a tool to be applied, and is something that informs our everyday lives. If we think of gender as something we are ‘theorising’ daily, we can perhaps begin to see why gender matters. Ideas about appropriate and inappropriate gendered behaviours are wide-ranging, influential and sometimes unconscious, but because they affect and effect how we behave in the world, they are of interest to the scholar of global politics.

An example might help clarify the issue. Look at the image in Figure 1.1. Can you make sense of those signs? If so, then you have a theory of gender. You have a theory, or an understanding, of what the signs signify and of their social importance, because in order to make sense of the signs you have to accept that there are two types of people and that each type of person is represented by one or the other figure in the sign. (Furthermore, the difference between the two types of people is predicated on their bodies, a point to which I return below.) If you recognise yourself as part of the group signified by the picture on the right, you would certainly not (apart from in exceptional circumstances) go through the door on the left, and vice versa. As Butler says, ‘[d]iscrete genders are part of what “humanizes” individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right’ (1999: 178). We know what the signs mean, and even though they bear no necessary relevance to the way we look, today or ever, they order the way we act in the world.²

If we accept that gender is the social meaning attached to the shape of our bodies, we can begin to understand why it is that feminist IR scholars insist that gender is not something we add to the study of world politics, but rather is integral to
its functioning. That is, you cannot ignore (or abstract) the ways that gender informs and affects the practices of world politics. Gender is, on this view, not only a noun (i.e., an identity) and a verb (i.e., a way to look at the world, as in the phrase ‘gendering global politics’) but also a logic, which is produced by and productive of the ways in which we understand and perform global politics. This chapter wants to explore further the issue of gender and the body, and to suggest that the relationship between sex and gender is not as straightforward as it is commonly represented.

[T]he genital area accounts for only 1 percent of the surface area of the body. But – 1 percent or not – genitals carry an enormous amount of cultural weight in the meanings that are attached to them, and I would argue that they constitute nearly 100 percent of what we, as both cultural members and as producers of cultural knowledge, come to understand and assume about the body’s sex and gender.

(Valentine and Wilchins 1997: 215)

We in the Anglophone world conventionally share an ontological assumption of the duality of gender: humans (and most other living things, for that matter) come in either ‘M’ or ‘F’. This is best described as a commitment, most often unconscious, to dimorphism: the assumption that human beings can be easily and unproblematically divided into two (di) distinct categories based on their physical forms (morphism). This essential separation informs the ways in which we think about the body and
also the ways in which we think about a host of social and political events and relationships that we conceive of as being ‘to do’ with the body – for example, marriage ceremonies, parenting, sports, even eating. Because the separation occurs at a subconscious level, we are not even aware most of the time that our preconceptions about bodies are influencing how and what we eat, what sports we think we should or shouldn’t learn at school and who other people should and shouldn’t sleep with. The crucial insight of this book is that these assumptions about bodies are intrinsically, inherently related to the study and practices of global politics, because global politics is studied and practiced by gendered bodies.

It is very comforting to think of the body as something that we cannot change, something that does not affect our social or political lives, or even not to think of it at all. Conventional contemporary theories of International Relations do not speak much of bodies because the individual does not matter – only collectives of individuals, known as ‘nations’ feature, and only then insofar as they are assumed congruent with the state (hence ‘nation-state’). Admittedly, in classical realist theory, representations of state behaviours draw heavily on ideas relating to ‘human nature’ (Morgenthau 1952: 963). Classical realism claims as its antecedents theorists of ‘human nature’ such as Thucydides, Machiavelli and Hobbes, and appeals to logics of ‘human nature’ to explain self-interest and rationality as ‘evidenced’ by the unitary state. However, the ‘human nature’ under discussion is, on closer inspection, the nature of ‘man’ (see Morgenthau 1973: 15–16). ‘Men’ feature, then, but only inasmuch as they are abstract universalised individuals; men as bodies do not enter into discussion. This is largely due to the conventional understanding of the body as natural rather than social or political. However, as Chris Weedon explains, ‘[t]he appeal to the “natural” is one of the most powerful aspects of common-sense thinking, but it is a way of understanding social relations which denies history and the possibility of change for the future’ (1997: 3, emphasis in original).

Formulating a politics of the body, or a perspective on global politics that takes the body seriously, requires that we think carefully about how the body manifests in our understandings of international relations. ‘Formerly, the body was dominantly conceptualized as a fixed, unitary, primarily physiological reality. Today, more and more scholars have come to regard the body as a historical, plural, culturally mediated form’ (Bordo 2003: 288). This claim is a useful starting point for thinking about the body in global politics: how and in what ways is the body mediated? How have our understandings of ‘appropriate’ bodies changed over time? How do variously located practices of global politics mediate and situate bodies differently? As Michel Foucault argues, ‘the body is . . . directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs’ (1979: 26). If this is the case, then we need to understand the ceremonies and signs, and acknowledge that our understanding is affected by the bodies that carry and are carried by them. This is not a politics of aesthetics, that is, how the body looks in specific circumstances. In this volume we do investigate how bodies are represented, but also interrogate the political practices through which bodies come to matter at all in global politics.
Seminar exercise

INFORMATION FOR THE TUTOR: If you are planning to run this exercise in your class, you will need either to ensure that the students are told to bring a picture with them to class or to provide sufficient images for analysis, quantity dependant on the size of the group.

From online or print media sources, find a selection of images that represent contemporary practices of global politics. In small groups of two to four, discuss the images and prepare a brief presentation for the rest of the group, focusing on the following questions:

1. How does the image represent bodies?
2. How does this representation of bodies fit with ‘common-sense’ understandings of bodies in the world?
3. Is the image congruent with or disruptive of conventional conceptualisations of sex and gender?
4. What does the image tell us about global politics?

OF SCIENCE AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

In the previous section, I outlined a way to conceptualise or think of theory, particularly in relation to a ‘theory of gender’. I encourage you to think outside of the discursive limits that impose rather crude sex binaries on our conceptual frameworks, and instead to see gender as a performance, a series of representations. While these concepts are discussed further in the concluding section of this chapter, there are numerous carefully crafted accounts of the ways in which gender, when marked upon (and performed by) specific bodies, matters in global politics. Christine Sylvester argues that ‘men’ and ‘women’ as social subjects are just collections of the stories that have been told about men and women, and that we behave in accordance with these stories – remember: ‘Boys don’t cry’, ‘That’s not ladylike’ and so on (1994: 4). For the study of global politics, this means we have to pay attention to the stories that are told about men and women as well as attending to the positioning and marking of bodies, both male and female. (Analyses of masculinity in global politics – accounts of ‘men being men’ – are an integral part of studies of gender; an important function of this book as a whole is to remind its readers that ‘gender is not a synonym for women’ [Carver 1996]). Following this logic, I offer two accounts of bodies in global politics in this section: bodies in social movements and bodies as scientists. I have chosen these two accounts as they map on to and serve to problematise the description of International Relations as a ‘social science’, as discussed above. This section also makes an analytical contribution to the discussion, as I demonstrate how, in two different contexts, narratives about the body and representations of the body function in political space.
The following account of social movements begins with the body, in particular the female body, and behaviours appropriate to it. Symbols of motherhood, which represented both the women at Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp in the UK during the early 1980s, who campaigned for the removal of US nuclear weapons from the Greenham Common military base, and the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina from 1977 onwards, who congregated in the Plaza to protest at the illicit arrest and capture of their (biological and symbolic) relatives, had profound implications for the social movements and for the study and practices of gender in global politics. (Although these were both local social movements, both attracted the attention of and, in the case of the latter, support from the international community. Besides, problematising the divide between politics designated international and that designated domestic is an important analytical contribution of feminist scholarship in IR.) I identify three discursive practices, common to both groups but enacted in different ways, through which the women reaffirmed their identities as mothers. The first of these is biologically determined separatism. Second, I discuss the question of boundaries and political space and third, the role of ‘the child’ as metaphor and physical embodiment of vulnerability informing the politics enacted by these groups.

Both movements were explicitly ‘women only’: the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo from its inception and the Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp from a year after the protestors set up camp in 1981. Despite the cultural, political and temporal differences in the context of the movements, the accounts offered in explanation for their separatism are startlingly similar. From Greenham, the opinion that ‘women-only actions offered a more complete guarantee of nonviolence’ (Liddington 1989: 235) echoes the statements made five years previously by women...
on another continent: ‘We endure the pushing, insults, attacks by the army. . . . But the men, they never would have stood such things without reacting’ (Mariá Adela Antokoletz cited in Arditti 1999: 35). In terms of the Mothers’ protest, it was both justified and justifiable: the junta in power at the time, influenced by the Catholic family-oriented values of a traditional Argentine way of life, was less likely to ‘disappear’ mothers than fathers. This was in keeping with the gender expectations of the time that idealised motherhood and the family in the hope of rebuilding society in an image pleasing to the eyes of the regime. While it could be argued that by virtue of their femininity and in the voicing of a public protest, both movements offered resistance to the discourses of gender that construct properly passive female subjects, I interpret this separatism with a degree of gender scepticism. In maintaining a ‘women only’ ethos, both movements conserved rather than challenged gendered expectations about feminine passivity. However, the Greenham women also articulated a desire for greater equality of participation and less hierarchical social organisation, which they suggested would be best achieved through single-sex arrangements. This was represented in contemporary media coverage as threatening to family values at best and at worst as providing a sanctuary for ‘lesbians, one parent families, and lost causes’ (Newbury resident quoted in the Daily Mail, cited in Cresswell 1994: 50).

The question of boundaries is the second element of the discursive construction of motherhood common to both groups. In addition to declaring themselves women-only, both groups self-consciously transgressed metaphorical and physical boundaries and used these transgressions to frame their protests. Both movements were comprised of women who would not ‘sit still and keep at home’ (Rowbotham 1972: 16) as women were expected to do, leaving the realm of formal politics to masculine/ised subjects. Instead they used their weapons of protest – their bodies, their female bodies – in a carefully articulated statement of female agency. Initially the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo organised their protests in socially sanctioned ‘women’s spaces’, ‘using feminine/maternal public parks and tea houses as places to make plans and exchange information’ (Radcliffe and Westwood 1996: 157), but in taking their protest to the steps of the government buildings in the Plaza de Mayo the Mothers altered the social and spatial impact of the movement. Through associating themselves with the Plaza de Mayo, which is deeply significant in Argentine history and politics, the Mothers achieved recognition and a public space for their political protest. This, however, is not the same thing as saying that the Mothers ‘moved in’ to that public space; it should be remembered that the Plaza de Mayo was occupied by the Mothers just once a week. In contrast, the peace camp at Greenham Common was a permanent fixture. The women involved in the camp inhabited an altogether more liminal space. They had left their fixed houses for tenuous settlements on common land; the mothers at Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp did ‘move in’ to that public space, both with and without their children by their sides in a confrontational bid to challenge notions of home and security in the shadows cast by missile silos. The permanence of their move is reaffirmed in the memories recorded by the women who lived there: ‘women who have been there . . . say they will never be the same’ (Elshtain 1995: 241). The women’s refusal to return ‘home’ at the end of each day was interpreted as the challenge to public order that it
intended. Instead of questioning that order, however, the widespread response in
UK media coverage of the events was to question the behaviour of the women. ‘The
question of women’s roles as mothers was used frequently as a stick of castigation
with which to beat the Greenham women: if they were so fond of children, why
were they not at home with them?’ (Young 1990, p.68).

Finally, the third discursive practice that helped construct the collective identity
of ‘mother’ for the women in question was a commitment to child-centred politics.
While the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo searched for their niños desaparecidos, the
disappeared children from their past in the present, the Greenham Common
Women’s Peace Camp was dedicated to ensuring a better life for the children of the
future in the present. The same key terms resonate in both cases: both movements
sought to offer children protection, to provide them with security and to honour a
notion of maternal care. The symbols used to denote this child-centred commit-
ment are also similar. The Association of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo adopted
a white headscarf, symbolising a baby’s nappy, as their emblem of collective identity.
As one mother suggested, ‘a gauze shawl, a diaper . . . will make us feel closer to our
children’ (cited in Bouvard 1994: 74). The whiteness signifies peace as well as life, in
a tacit refusal to don the black mantilla worn as part of traditional mourning dress
in Argentina. The symbolic function of the baby’s nappy reinforces the notion of
maternal care mentioned above, as well as evoking thoughts of birth, thus life, and
hope. The nappies and toys pinned to the fence at Greenham Common were among
the many symbols of ‘mundane’ domesticity deployed in contrast to the high-pow-
ered high politics of a nuclear base in the nuclear age. These symbols sought to
idealise motherhood and legitimise the presence of the protestors. This is by no
means an unproblematic view, but a culturally intelligible narrative nonetheless;
the children of tomorrow represented by a soft toy pinned to a hard wire fence being
protected, cared for, mothered by the women at the Peace Camp, who felt ‘a special
responsibility to offer them [the children] a future – not a wasteland of a world and

Despite surface similarities between two social movements that drew on repre-
sentations of and myths about motherhood to inform their protests, the dynamics
of the two movements were radically different. Later media coverage of the Mothers
describes them in positive language, with words such as ‘courage’ and ‘inspiration’
(Fisher 1998) validating the Mothers’ struggle and reporters acknowledging that the
Mothers became ‘world icons of courageous demands for accountability, the assertion
of human rights’ (Omand 2006). References to Greenham Common frame the
women’s efforts in a wholly different light, describing the Camp as a ‘debacle’ and
denying the protest any efficacy or legitimacy (Vuillamy and Hinsliff 2001, see also
Petitt 2006). The Camp was variously represented as ‘a criminal activity, a witches’
coven, a threat to the state, the family and the democratic order’ (Young 1990: 2).
In widening their protest from ‘acceptable’ women-as-mothers protecting the chil-
dren of the future to ‘deviant’ women questioning the gender order that assisted in
the construction of the missiles that sparked their protest, Greenham Common
Women’s Peace Camp lost the focus of its collective identity and the legitimacy this
identity afforded their protest. In contrast, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo main-
tained a conservative representation of motherhood, restricting their protest to the
recovery of the disappeared and denouncing the authority of the military regime. These two different performances of body politics in global politics had very different effects.

A second set of significant bodies emerge as visible through the feminist interrogations of weapons technology and strategic culture. In 1987, Carol Cohn published an analysis of ‘nuclear strategic thinking’ evidenced in the ‘almost entirely male world’ of ‘distinguished “defence intellectuals”’ (Cohn 1987: 678–79). This article remains one of the most significant accounts of the impact of gender, gendered language and bodily images on the study and practices of global politics. Cohn also draws our attention to the complex intersections of race, gender and class (referring to ‘white men in ties discussing missile size’ [Cohn 1987: 683] in a typically snappy turn of phrase). In earlier analysis of the development of nuclear technology, the gendered imaginings used to make sense of the new weaponry are obvious, and function to inscribe a link between violence and masculinity that feminist scholarship has long sought to problematise. When the first fusion device was tested in the United States of America in 1952 the telegram reporting its success to authorities – describing an explosion about a thousand times more powerful than the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima in 1945 – read ‘It’s a boy!’ (Easlea 1983: 130; see also Cohn 1987: 701).5 Admittedly, that was back in the 1950s; surely we can expect to see contemporary defence experts refusing to deploy the gendered metaphors employed by their ancestors? On the contrary, Cohn reports that defence intellectuals continue to construct their language, which Cohn names ‘technostrategic discourse’, using a gendered framework. Cohn witnessed a country without tested nuclear capacity being referred to as a nuclear ‘virgin’ (Cohn 1987: 687). Similarly, phrases such as ‘more bang for the buck’, ‘the Russians are a little harder than we are’ and the assertion that ‘you’re not going to take the nicest missile you have and put it in a crummy hole’ all contribute to the ongoing masculinisation of nuclear weapons technology (Cohn 1987: 683–84). One recent example is worth quoting at length:

At one point, we re-modelled a particular attack, . . . and found that instead of there being 36 million immediate fatalities, there would only be 30 million. And everybody was sitting around nodding, saying, ‘Oh yeah, that’s great, only 30 million,’ when all of a sudden, I heard what we were saying. And I blurted out, ‘Wait, I’ve just heard how we’re talking – Only 30 million! Only 30 million human beings killed instantly?’ Silence fell upon the room. Nobody said a word. They didn’t even look at me. It was awful. I felt like a woman.

(cited in Cohn and Ruddick 2003: 14)

Feeling ‘like a woman’ compromised this interviewee’s masculinity, but also his professionalism: the underlying assumption is that women (irrational, emotional creatures) have no place in the hard-headed world of defence strategy. Crucially, Cohn’s research draws attention to the ways in which gender functions in security by not only interrogating the actions of physical bodies but also by asking what work gender is doing to organize and make sense of security discourses. The rationality employed and deployed by the communities in which Cohn has conducted her research is
literally dis-embodied, amounting to the denial of human experience in the narratives of the defence intellectuals: ‘it is not only impossible to talk about humans in this language, it also becomes in some sense illegitimate to ask the paradigm to reflect human concerns’ (Cohn 1987: 711–12). It is precisely these ‘human concerns’ to which Cohn wishes to draw our attention, facilitated by a nuanced and convincing analysis of the ways in which bodies, and particularly masculine bodies, delimit the domain of nuclear weapons technology.

PROBLEMATISING ‘BODIES THAT MATTER’

Above, I have illustrated how (certain) bodies matter in global politics and, more importantly, how certain performances of gender produce and are produced by (further, legitimise and are legitimised by) political practices on a global scale. In this section, I challenge the ways in which the valuable political interjections described above are still framed in reference to a narrative of dimorphism. This framing is in part due to what Butler identifies as a ‘matrix of intelligibility’ (1999: 24). Put simply, this means that in order to be recognisable to others and ourselves, our gender must be performed within particular cultural and historical boundaries. ‘The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of “identities” cannot “exist” – that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not “follow” from either sex or gender’ (Butler 1999: 23–24). Taking such a perspective on gender matters in global politics demands that we ask, How are various performances of gender congruent with or disruptive of the limits of intelligibility in a given cultural context? Seen in this light, the tales offered above describe actors that both remain within the boundaries (the scientists and the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo) and contest those boundaries (the Greenham women). The latter were seen as less ‘successful’ and more threatening precisely because they transgressed appropriate behavioural limits.

The question then becomes: How are these limits set? Who gets to decide that ‘boys don’t cry’ or that to ‘throw like a girl’ is an insult? In various ways, the contributors to this volume argue that gender does not ‘read’ from sex in any straightforward way. I would suggest that sex is as much a fiction as gender – that the foundational narrative of dimorphism on which our ‘matrix of intelligibility’ is so heavily dependent is itself contestable. Moreover, we frequently amend the bodies to fit the dominant (dimorphic) theory of gender, and not vice versa. At the moment of gendering – when an infant human is named as a ‘boy’ or a ‘girl’ – medical intervention is sometimes required to align the body with one side or the other of a dichotomous gender framework, so as not to disrupt the ‘matrix of intelligibility’. Interestingly, medical experts tend to focus on the importance of socialisation in such cases, arguing that it is a matter of whether the child is raised (read: trained to perform) as a boy or girl. ‘Of course, at normal [sic] births, when the infant’s genitals are unambiguous, the parents are not told that the child’s gender is ultimately up to socialization’ (Kessler 1990: 17). This would suggest that sex, as well as gender, is dimorphically constructed.
Throughout this section, I have used the term ‘performance’ to describe the ways in which gender manifests in social/political life. This is a concept most closely associated with the work of Judith Butler (see Figure 1.3 below), and refers to the identifiable linguistic and non-linguistic practices that constitute our understanding of gender. It does not mean that pre-formed individuals are free to perform gender as they wish; rather, the ‘matrices of intelligibility’ constitute the limits of sex (Butler 1993; see also Segal 1997).

One way to think about performativity is through the gender classification of a child at birth, as mentioned above:

Consider the medical interpellation which . . . shifts an infant from an “it” to a “she” or a “he” and in that naming, the girl is “girled” . . . But that “girling” of the girl does not end there; on the contrary, that founding interpellation is reiterated by various authorities and throughout various intervals of time to reenforce or contest this naturalized effect.

(Butler 1993: 7–8)

The ‘reiteration’ to which Butler refers is the continuing construction of identity through what she terms ‘performativity’. In this way, bodies themselves take on the gendered characteristics appropriate to their designated ‘sex’ from birth and throughout life gender is performed repeatedly. Crucially, in order to have a ‘liveable’ life, an infant must be ‘shifted from an “it” to a “she” or a “he”’. There are variations within the discursive construction of gender and it is therefore more appropriate to recognise and interrogate multiple masculinities and femininities, as do the authors in this book, rather than some fixed or essential notion of what constitutes a ‘man’ or ‘woman’. However, performances of gender, where gendered subjects are “tenuously

What continues to concern me most is the following kinds of questions: what will and will not constitute an intelligible life, and how do presumptions about normative gender and sexuality determine in advance what will qualify as the “human” and the “liveable”? In other words, how do normative gender presumptions work to delimit the very field of description that we have for the human? What is the meaning by which we come to see this delimiting power, and what are the means by which we transform it? (1999: xxii).

From Judith Butler’s 1999 preface to the second edition of her highly influential Gender Trouble (London: Routledge).

Judith Butler’s works on gender theory, political philosophy and ethics have been highly influential across a range of subject disciplines. It is specifically her work on the performativity of gender that is of interest here, not least because it can usefully be employed as an analytical frame to great effect in the study of global politics. David Campbell (1992), for example, draws on her theory of performativity in Writing Security, his exploration of US foreign and security policy. Lene Hansen (2000) uses Butler’s work to critique the ‘Copenhagen School’ of security theory and Maria Stern (2006) draws on Butler to interrogate the concept of insecurity.
constituted in time . . . through a stylized repetition of acts” (Butler 1999: 179, emphasis in original), despite the variants, must be congruent with culturally and historically specific gender narratives in order to be recognised as legitimate – the ‘matrix of intelligibility’ I discussed above. Crucially, on this view, ‘gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed . . . There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results’ (Butler 1999: 33).

This chapter has provided an overview of one way in which it is possible to conceptualise sex and gender, and introduced you to some illustrations to show how and why gender matters in global politics. As you proceed through this text, you will be presented with different perspectives on the relationship between sex and gender, and the contributors would all encourage you to reflect critically on the stories they tell about bodies in global politics. We encourage you to develop a ‘feminist curiosity’ (Enloe 2007: 1) about the study and practices of global politics. Challenging the assumptions of conventional theories and approaches, unsettling that which was previously taken for granted – these are among the ways in which a feminist curiosity works. Through its attention to the fact that, and the ways in which, gender matters in global politics, this book is both pioneer of new ways of studying gender and acknowledgement of the noteworthy feminist scholarship without which it could not have been thought.

Questions for further debate

1. Why should the study of global politics attend to the practices of bodies? In other words, why is ‘gender’ a useful category of analysis?
2. What additional examples of bodily actions in global politics can be included alongside those mentioned here? What do these practices tell us about the relevant ‘matrices of intelligibility’?
3. Why might people be resistant to the idea that gender matters in global politics?
4. Is it helpful to think of trans/intersex as a ‘third gender’?
5. Are you persuaded that there is a significant difference between sex and gender?

Relevant web-based resources

- Center for Gender Sanity, which provides a series of resources for transgender individuals and ‘A refuge from male/female dichotomies’, sex-based stereotypes, and other gender madness . . . ’, available HTTP: <http://www.gendersanity.com/index.shtml>.
• The website of Stonewall, a UK charity and professional lobbying group aimed at securing equality rights for LGBTIQ individuals and communities, available HTTP: <http://www.stonewall.org.uk/>.
• Trans-academics, ‘a place where people of all genders can discuss gender theory, the trans community and its various identities, both as a part of the academic world and day-to-day life’, available HTTP: <http://www.trans-academics.org/about_us>.

Sources for further reading and research


NOTES

1 An ‘epistemology’ is a theory of knowledge. Ontology, epistemology and methodology are discussed fully in Chapter 2.
2 Interestingly, the BBC News website recently ran a story about ‘transsexual toilets’ at Kampang Secondary School in north-east Thailand. The school built the facility for the male students who ‘consider themselves to be transgender’; now, ‘[b]etween the girls’ toilet and the boys’, there is one signposted with a half-man, half-woman figure in blue and red’ (Head 2008). However, even this discourse of gender, which apparently offers more than two options, is still faithful to the narrative of dimorphism discussed above, as the sign on the door signifies that ‘transgender’ is still seen as half-and-half of the two genders we accept in humans.
3 Of course, the body can be shaped and adorned according to, or in transgression of, social norms, but the physical form cannot be re-gendered except through recourse to complex sex reassignment therapies including hormone treatments and surgery.

4 Cynthia Weber calls these stories ‘unconscious ideologies’, which she describes as ‘the foundations of our ideological and political thinking that we place beyond debate’ (2005: 4). She suggests, and I agree, that drawing these common-sense accounts of gender back into debate can be profoundly unsettling as it can threaten our own ideas about being in the world (see also Peterson and True 1998).

5 The nuclear weapon dropped on Hiroshima on 6 August 1945 was named ‘Little Boy’.

6 This subheading is borrowed from Judith Butler’s 1993 text of the same name.

7 In this chapter, I have not discussed various other ways to conceptualise this relationship, which are explored in sophisticated detail in a range of political writing. In addition to the suggested readings, see, for example, Oakley (1972), Fuss (1989), Connell (1995), Lloyd (2005).