Transportation, Mobility and Security: A Matter of Gender

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In the same way as in historical science\(^1\), the subject of women and sex differences has long been neglected in the field of transport. Transport planners did not want to distinguish individuals by their origin or social group, even though decisions were made primarily by men, based on their own interests and experiences\(^2\).

Beliefs about women at the wheel grew along with the automobile. However, the stereotype of women seen as bad drivers, unable to cope with stressful situations requiring rapid decision-making such as road situations, was initially intended to maintain "women in their place and protect them from the corrupting influences present in society and in themselves"\(^3\).

Women were not taken into account in transport policies and implicitly encouraged to stay at home: are transportation, mobility and safety a matter of sex or of gender? While the term "sex" is related to biological differences between men and women, gender refers to beliefs, stereotypes, activities, personality traits, or roles that a particular society considers more appropriate for women or for men\(^4\). Thus, gender is a social construct, leading to a social hierarchy between males and females. While biological differences between the two sexes are stable over time, social expectations related to gender are constantly changing.

To investigate the question of gender is therefore to take an interest in men and women, their similarities and their differences.

Mobility is a question of gender. The differences between men and women in mobility greatly increased with the advent of the automobile and the growing distance between places of life – the traditional field of women - and workplaces – the traditional field of men. While some differences tend to disappear among the younger generations, others persist and still reflect gender-differentiated social roles, particularly in relation to childcare\(^5\). This existence of the differences between men and women, especially in terms of social roles, has led to the accentuation and perpetuation of inequalities between men and women in terms of mobility\(^6\).

Road safety is also a question of gender. Globally, three times as many men as women die in road crashes. This is the largest sex difference in mortality rates due to unintentional injuries\(^7\). In Europe, men account for 75% of road crash fatalities. In France, this difference exists even before access to motorised vehicles, but is particularly noticeable among young drivers: one-third of the drivers killed on the road in France in 2015 were between 18 and 24, of whom 86% were men. Moreover, in 2015 men made up 82.5% of the alleged perpetrators of road crashes, 92% of the intoxicated drivers involved in a crash and 91% of drivers

\(^3\) Berger, M., L. (1986), Women drivers!: the emergence of folklore and stereotypic opinions concerning feminine automotive behaviour. Women's Studies International Forum, 9(3), 257-263
\(^6\) Tillous, M., & Lahmani-Saada, S. (2015), Boîte à outils Genre, Transports et mobilité, Paris: Agence Française de Développement,
\(^7\) WHO, (2002), Gender and road traffic injuries: http://whqlibdoc.who.int/gender/2002/a85576.pdf?ua=1
tested positive for narcotics$^8$. This difference is not only due to a sex difference in mileage. According to the last French National Transport Survey of 2008, the two sex groups differ only slightly in terms of average annual mileage: from 10% difference in the general population to 11.5% among active single persons.

The research carried out in this area by the French Institute of Science and Technology for Transport (IFSTTAR), Development and Networks, specifically examines the issue of gender in transportation, mobility and safety. IFSTTAR gathered an overview of this research in the form of a thematic dossier that can be retrieved from the Institute's website. Our goal was to improve the visibility, accessibility, and availability of this research and more broadly, of the research topic of sex differences and gender issues in transportation.

This thematic web dossier confirms that men and women don’t use the same travel modes neither at the same frequencies, nor for the same reasons. This difference occurs throughout life – older women give up driving earlier than men do – and may be partly the result of a higher risk perception among women. Thus, women feel less safe and secure in public spaces and when using public transport. Their risk perception and the stereotypes on women behind the wheel may explain some of their mobility choices – such as their low attraction to powered two-wheelers – as well as their behaviour as drivers, riders or pedestrians, or their lower achievement in the practical driving license test.

This thematic dossier on “Transportation, mobility and safety: a matter of gender” shows how considering women in transportation research can bring new perspectives on old issues and redefine existing problems. Placing women as subjects for transportation research also allows considering them as active participants in the definition of urban and transportation policies.

The thematic dossier is a work in progress. The dossier will comprise six articles and an introduction at the time of ITF. Four more articles will be added before the end of 2018.

**Useful links**

IFSTTAR website: [http://www.ifsttar.fr/accueil/](http://www.ifsttar.fr/accueil/)

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