Gender and Mobility

Implications for Sustainability
Suffragette meets bicycle

A Wheel within a Wheel
A Woman's Quest for Freedom
Originally Published in 1895

Frances E. Willard
Why master this machine?
So much more than mobility!

“AT LAST.”
Mobility

- People
- Essential to daily life
- Central to energy consumption, carbon emissions, settlement patterns → Sustainability
Mobility

- Embedded in household/family, neighborhood/community, larger society
  - Importance of social and geographic context
Gender

• Not just a binary variable
• Based in perceived differences…
• Signifies unequal power relations based in those perceived differences
Gender

process through which differences based on presumed biological sex are defined, imagined, and become significant in specific contexts (Andrea Nightingale)
Gender

- Develops through everyday practices in place
- Varies from place to place

Importance of social and geographic context
Gender

Alternate (structural) view:
an innate source of fixed, universal male/female difference
Sustainability

- The 7 generations principle

- 3 dimensions
  - Environmental
  - Economic
  - Social justice/equity

- Dependent on context
Context

- Place/time specificity
- Geography matters!
- e.g., Geneva vs Zurich
Overview/ Bare bones argument

- Large literature on gender and mobility

- BUT, not useful for sustainable transport (ST)...literature is divided

- Women’s travel looks more like ST than men’s
Overview/ Bare bones argument

• But we don’t know why; don’t know how to interpret
• Reason: lack context-specific understanding
• Need to address these gaps to inform ST policy
Overview/ Bare bones argument

• Will require synthesizing along 3 lines
  – Gender and mobility
  – Quantitative and qualitative
  – Across places

• Make context central; how to do this
Basic division within literature

1. Mobility $\Rightarrow$ Gender? How does mobility shape gender?

2. Gender $\Rightarrow$ Mobility? How does gender shape mobility?
(Mobility) → Gender?

How do patterns of mobility/immobility create, reinforce, and disrupt gender norms?
Mobility at core of traditional gender ideologies

Women = home, the private, domestic spaces, restricted mobility (the quotidian, familiar, routine)

Men = not-home, public, urban spaces, extensive mobility (excitement, the new/unknown, risk, personal growth)
Mobility empowers

“IT’S DOGGED AS DOES IT.”
Yorkshire Proverb.
Mobility as empowering

Denial of mobility is used to oppress women, keep women in their place.
On the other hand... Mobility not necessarily empowering

Long bus ride to a low-wage job
In sum -- (Mobility) → Gender?

- Emphasizes **gender** to neglect of mobility
- Mostly qualitative studies
- Emphasizes social and cultural contexts (less re spatial)
- Does delve into meanings
(Gender) → Mobility?

- Most studies are from Europe or Anglo world
- Gender simple M/F
(Gender) → Mobility?

Types of data (quantitative)
• National samples; little about context
• Travel-activity diaries—usually for one metro area
Big Generalization

Women’s spatial range is smaller than men’s
More evidence for the Big Generalization

- Less likely to have mobile workplace or extreme commutes (> 90 minutes)
- Less overnight travel for business
- Start businesses closer to home
- True for kids too
(Gender) \rightarrow {mobility}

Women more likely to run errands, serve passengers (!), link trips
The Big Generalization challenged

• By studies that disaggregate the population by race/ethnicity

• By recent studies of certain places (Quebec; Bay Area)
(Gender) \rightarrow Mobility

- Big Generalization re women’s spatial containment

- Countervailing evidence re specific times, places, groups \rightarrow importance of context
(Gender) → Mobility?

What about causes? How *does* Gender affect mobility?

Measures of gendered processes are over-simplified or absent.
(Gender) \rightarrow Mobility?

- For example, measures of ‘intra-household social relations’
  - Marital status
  - Number of children at home
In sum -- (Gender) \(\rightarrow\) Mobility

- Emphasizes **mobility** to neglect of gender
- Mostly quantitative approaches
- Sees context mainly as urban spatial structure and built environment
- Ignores identities & meanings
Synthesizing for Sustainability
Synthesizing for sustainability

- Shared view of women’s greater spatial containment
- Interpreted as less mobility not good
- Because we lack contextualized knowledge re choice vs constraint
Gender, mobility & sustainability

Women’s mobility looks more like sustainable transport (ST)
• Travel shorter distances; activities more local
• Use car less, public transit & walk more
Gender, mobility & sustainability

- Women contribute fewer VMT (VKT)
- Reducing VMT (VKT) as ST goal?
Gender, mobility, & sustainability

Two Problems

(1) Linkage of women’s mobility to ST along two dimensions
   – Environmental
   – Economic

What about social (equity)?
Gender, mobility, & sustainability

(2) How to assess the gendered social/equity dimension of ST?
- Choice or constraint (When? Where?)
- Empowering or oppressive? (When? Where?)
Gender, mobility, & sustainability

Need to complicate things
Gender, mobility, & sustainability

Answering these questions very tricky

– Issues of identity and meaning

AND

– Details re mobility patterns

Because of split in the literature, at present no answers
Gender, mobility, & sustainability

Example: How to reduce VKT?

• Increase vehicle occupancy
• Reduce number/length of trips
• Shift to transit, bike, or walk
• Change land use patterns
Gender, mobility, & sustainability

- Poor understanding of how different groups of people change their mobility practices in response to changing circumstances

- Currently lack knowledge re potential policy impacts
Gender, mobility, & sustainability

To move toward sustainability:

• Gender…and

• Mobility…as embedded in…

• Social, cultural, and spatial context
How to do this?

Need in-depth, place-based, contextualized studies (qual & quant)

How to pull these together to sort out general and specific?
How to do this?

Goal: insights that are…
--contextualized *and*
–(somewhat) portable

Need studies that take context seriously
What aspects of context...?

- Household/ family/ social networks
- Geographic context at various scales
- Cultural norms/ expectations
- Institutions
How to make sense of disparate studies…?

- Make context **central** to analysis
- Link details about context to details about gender and mobility →
  - Improved understanding/ explanation
  - Easier links to policy
Concluding thoughts & questions

• Masculine mobility all that desirable?
• Equity questions remain
• …and remain cloudy, unknown
Concluding thoughts & questions

Need studies that bring together…
- the two strands; Mobility and Gender
- quantitative & qualitative approaches
- context-sensitive studies from different places
Concluding thoughts & questions

• **Mobility → Gender**: How can [sustainable] mobility be an agent of change in gender relations?

• **Gender → Mobility**: How can gender be an agent of change toward sustainable mobility?
Ride on!

“So easy—when you know how.”