

I. Moving Gender, Positivism and Feminist Possibilities

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Just barely settled at graduate school, now nearly 30 years ago, I was guided by a professor, Elinor Burwell, toward several recently published articles described as feminist. Anne Constantinople's (1973) 'Masculinity–Femininity: An Exception to a Famous Dictum?' was high on a critical list of interrogations of mainstream psychology's sexist scientific program. Scholars who did not yet call themselves 'feminist psychologists' eagerly consumed these articles, finding them the starting point of vigorous and extensive conversations. The list consisted of Weisstein (1971), Carlson (1972), Chesler (1972), Horner (1972), Spence and Helmreich (1972), Parlee (1973) and Taynor and Deaux (1973); this crucial bibliography quickly expanded to include Bem (1974), Maccoby and Jacklin (1974), Shields (1975), Unger and Denmark (1975) and Parlee's (1975) astute survey of this emerging feminist psychology. Appreciation of the import of Constantinople's article along with the others requires understanding the epistemic commitments, political purchases and scientific practices of experimental psychology of the post-World War II (Cold War) decades. It also necessitates an appreciation of what it was like to inhabit the everyday world of an academic department – a sense of living a scientific life in psychology. The late Professor Burwell was one of many women psychologists, trained in the 1940s and actively employed during the war years, whose career was constricted by post-war efforts to provide opportunities for veterans who were returning to civilian life. Professionally constrained, divorced and raising three children, her robust feminist inclinations matured with second-wave feminist writings of the 1960s. Her deep commitment – something I comprehended only much later – was to secure an intellectual space for women students, helping them acquire the critical knowledge as well as scientific skills to meaningfully change the experimental conversation about the psychology of women. Without Elinor Burwell, I

might have encountered those crucial publications but probably not have gained the practical and scientific skills needed to enter the conversations.

By 1974, feminist psychologists already were engaged in transforming the discipline's knowledge about women. Their critical engagements already were altering the 'narrative field' of the science (Haraway, 1986). Feminists' aims were two-fold: a theoretical goal to accurately distinguish the 'social' and 'biological' factors of women's psychology, and a methodological one to eliminate sex bias from scientific investigative practices. Indeed, one risks nostalgia when looking back at the fervor of this heady project. Everywhere, it seemed, consequential achievements were being announced. Each month brought a fresh interrogation of the long-assumed correspondence of the biological (sex) and social (gender), the dual assumption that an individual's psychological gender did and should correspond to what was taken to be his or her biological sex. Feminist progress during this period was far-reaching. Beyond the boundaries of academic psychology and the American Psychological Association, other projects insisted on the reformulation of our science of the sexed body. *Roe v. Wade*, the founding of *Ms Magazine* and the coalescence of a women's health movement (marked by the publication of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* – Boston Women's Health Book Collective, 1973), the (at least partly successful) removal of homosexuality from the DSM's roster of disorders¹ and Gloria Steinem's appropriation of Wonder Woman as a physically powerful heroine all exemplify the multiple disturbances of an androcentric world. Even the bio-medical sciences contributed to this project as evidenced in John Money's methodical discriminations between the biological and social-psychological determinants of sex identification (Meyerowitz, 2002).

For many scholars, these twinned missions, to refine theory about the ontology of sex and to institute gender-fair scientific methods, shared a distal political objective: equal status and fair treatment of women. Advocates and adversaries of the newly framed sex/gender system alike understood how contestation over the most adequate account of sex differences was a matter of culture and politics, not simply of science (Unger, 1983). Despite this seeming savvy about the 'social' dynamics of science, few if any of us fully comprehended just how complex and permeable are the boundaries between what we took as the 'scientific' and 'cultural' domains of this contest. Many of us dedicated substantive projects to clarifying these boundaries, even to patrolling them. If science, like the personal, was 'political', then politics could be rooted out or rendered benign – or so we believed. For budding feminist psychologists, optimism trumped scepticism. Good, sex-fair science would guide everyone, friends and foes, to relatively indisputable scientific conclusions and ultimately the larger social world would benefit from this objective knowledge.

To read 'Masculinity–Femininity: An Exception to a Famous Dictum?' in 1973 was to affirm that optimism. With the scientific tools of logical analysis and meta-analysis of empirical data, Constantinople deftly challenged the assumed correspondence between the biological body and psychological states. Specifically queried in the study are two central assumptions that structure the masculin-

ity–femininity (M–F) construct. Constantinople asked, first, whether M–F is a single bipolar phenomenon, as was presupposed, or two distinct phenomena, masculinity (M) and femininity (F). Second, she asked whether the constructs M and F actually exist and, if so, whether they are universal psychological kinds. Constantinople’s insightful bracketing of these two assumptions is matched by her astute utilization of scientific method itself to interrogate them. Seizing the epistemological canon, she examined the validity of the M–F measurement program, stating, ‘With the logical positivists, one must ask whether this term and our methods of measuring it are useful in the prediction, control, and understanding of behavior’ (1973: 389). Her analysis proceeds in this audacious scientific spirit, punctuated with moments of sub-textual cynicism. Logical and empirical questions are supplied with logical and empirical responses: ‘At this point in the history of the term M–F as a psychological construct, it is not clear whether our approach to its measurement is at fault or whether the term as such should be dropped from the psychologist’s vocabulary because its referents vary so widely that it adds little to our understanding of behavior’ (pp. 389–90). Logic. Precision. Subversion. Do not forget the cynicism. The comprehensive review of the extant M–F scales and associated empirical studies disrobed their two key assumptions. Although adhering to logical positivist and empirical rules of inquiry, Constantinople paradoxically toyed with scientific practices. She invoked the (in)famous psychologist’s proverb, ‘Everything that exists, exists in some quantity, and if it exists in some quantity, it can be measured’ (p. 389). She closed the review by summarizing, ‘While it is clear that something is being measured by the tests of M–F, namely, sex differences in response, the theoretical explication that would tie sex differences, regardless of content, to masculinity and femininity is absent’ (p. 405). To complete the undressing of that psychological model, she concluded by observing how the length of the big toe would be as good at the task of distinguishing ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’.

Looking back, we can trace the lines from Constantinople’s findings (along with Bem’s construction of a scale that assumes the independence of M and F characteristics) to the popular acceptance of the concept of androgyny and the analysis of masculinity as something other than what was tacitly taken to be the normal end of the M–F psychological continuum. We can see the links between this early unpacking of gender constructs to eventual development of theories of ‘doing’ rather than ‘having’ gender attributes and, more generally, to the introduction of transgender research and queer theory. Such a narrative trajectory bestows a victorious ending to the feminist, scientific contestation over biological and social bodies. The narrative underscores both the virtues and necessity of practising objective, not andocentric, science.

Such a recounting, however comforting, is partial. Just as the period from the early 1970s to the present witnessed, for instance, adoption of more gender-fair research methods and robust critique of sociobiological theories of sex differences, so did that period yield differently theorized models of biological bases of sex (and gender). The recent history of gender research is more complicated than

any progressive narrative suggests. Parlee (1991) has documented the significant feminist scientific work on the menstrual cycle and yet also the ultimate success of biomedical models of premenstrual experiences (notably that of pre-menstrual syndrome). She views this biomedical success as partly a paradoxical outcome of feminists' efforts to challenge faulty scientific claims about menstruation. By urging clear distinctions between the biological and social dimensions of menstrual experiences and identifying the social dimensions as the domain of feminist engagement, researchers inadvertently created an opportunity, perhaps an invitation, for biomedical researchers to structure claims about the biological bases of menstrual experiences. Similar reversions or rebounds in theorizing can be seen in neuroscience. For instance, employing new tools for 'seeing' the brain, some researchers have proffered strong claims about the neurobiological bases of sex differences. Even more successful, at least in the popular media, are evolutionary psychologists' speculations that psychological sex differences have evolved to enhance reproductive success. Purportedly evolved sex differences are posited to manifest themselves in mate selection, personality and even mathematical abilities. Such scientific movements toward biological and determined differences between males and females suggest that our partial history of feminist psychology needs revising. Perhaps the history should open with Joan Scott's (2001: 19) line: 'There was a moment not all that long ago, when feminists thought "gender" would be an invincible barrier against biology.'

Now that we have travelled 30 years or more from the publication of Constantinople's review and other kindred groundbreaking feminist analyses, it seems an opportune time to at once appreciate our accomplishments and also earnestly reflect upon our historical self-understandings. Through self-reflection, we can see the partiality of our histories and the necessity to critically examine how feminist researchers might respond to the recent recuperation of a conjectural science of sex differences and an associated refiguring of gender as a matter of the sexed body. Our aspirations to develop non-sexist scientific methods and, with them, more accurate depictions of the psychology of women and men remain. The achievements of feminist psychology are laudable indeed, yet the resurgence of extremist biological determinism laden with mythic gender assumptions warrants new strategies of scientific practice. We should continue a painstaking insistence on, and demonstration of, sound logical and empirical scientific practices, the sort that are exemplified in Constantinople's prescient review. We must sustain diligent queries into the scientific grounds of purportedly 'scientific' claims about sex and gender. And we need to interrogate science more thoroughly, going outside of the detection of 'bad scientific practice' to undertake critical analyses of science itself. As Barad (1998: 120) suggested: 'There is a need to understand the laws of nature as well as the law of the father.'

Better understanding of the 'laws of nature', in turn, necessitates extending our excavations of flawed or sex-biased methods of scientific inquiry to address the central tenets of scientific epistemology, including assumptions about the agents and objects of science along with the representational practices for making claims

about those objects. Although feminist psychologists have made great advances in locating 'private' dimensions of the 'public' image of the experimenter, the valences of agency inhering in the scientific observational stance and affecting the very outcomes of observation warrant our attention (Balsamo, 1996; Barad, 1998; Haraway, 1996; Keller, 1996; Terry, 1997). Further, as several feminist theorists have proposed, we must sharpen our analysis of the sexed body and not take embodiment of gender to be either irrelevant or a relatively simple matter (Barad, 1998; Bayer and Malone, 1996; Wilson, 1998). Just as our objects, gendered human kinds, must be understood in terms of bodies, so they also must be comprehended as kinds with individual and collective histories – human kinds with reflection, change and marks of temporal matters (Metzl, 2002; Scott, 2001). Moreover, critical estimation of the social determinants of scientific practice, particularly the social interests in demonstrating particular sex differences (female deficiency or fragility), needs to be expanded to probe even more critically the system of scientific representation, the modes of inscribing and transmitting observational claims (Smith, 2000; Terry, 1997, 1999). Finally, just as feminist social scientists successfully conveyed their scientific advances to worldly practices such as education, affirmative action, and equal rights, so we need to share widely these investigations of science itself, ultimately challenging yet another sacred binary – the science/culture division.

NOTE

1. DSM (which comes from the American Psychological Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*) is generically used to refer to the system of psychiatric classification of psychopathologies.

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