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### Making A Difference: Psychology And The Construction Of Gender

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## Preface

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In a period when what we know and how we know are once again challenging academic disciplines, feminist theorists have raised questions about our ways of knowing men and women. In psychology, feminists have challenged what we know about men and women, that is, the findings of conventional research. In this book we ask how we know about men and women and how psychology has contributed to the meaning of gender in the daily lives of men and women. Psychology had sought to separate from its forebear, philosophy, by identifying itself with natural science. We reexamine this identification in the light of contemporary challenges. In exploring these issues, we hope this book will involve readers in the ongoing conversations about feminist theory and postmodern approaches to psychology.

Both of us have been engaged with the issues of gender and meaning in relation to research and practice in psychology for nearly a decade. Some of our ideas have been presented at professional and scientific meetings, some have appeared in journal articles. An earlier version of chapter 2 appeared in the *American Psychologist*. Ensuing conversations with colleagues in psychology, in the therapeutic professions, and in women's studies have pushed us to clarify our ideas and stimulated us to think more deeply. As our ideas have evolved, our contributions to this book as editors and authors have been equal.

To further our own thinking and that of others about gender theory in psychology, we organized a symposium for the American Psychological Association meeting in August 1987 on "The Meaning of Gender." We invited three respected scholars in psychology, Bernice Lott, Jill Morawski, and Rhoda Unger, to join us. The enthusiasm for our presentations at the symposium encouraged us to proceed with this book.

The book opens with an introductory chapter that describes some of the ways in which psychology has dealt with women and the question of the difference between women and men. As psychologists, we are interested in the processes by which gender, like other social categories, is constructed. Psychology has long emphasized the study of individual differences. We present feminist challenges to this tradition.

Chapter 2, "Gender and the Meaning of Difference: Postmodernism and Psychology," by Rachel T. Hare-Mustin and Jeanne Marecek, describes more fully the debate on the meaning of difference and details the contributions that feminist psychology has made to it. We demonstrate how constructivism can be fruitfully applied to current representations of gender in psychology, particularly to representations of gender as difference. We suggest how the linguistic categories available in the culture, the modes of explanation privileged by the culture, and the dominant cultural ideology influence constructions of reality. Under conditions of social inequality, privileged members of society have control over meaning-making, and thus representations of reality serve the interests of those who authorize them. It is only when gender is disrupted as a category that its instability becomes apparent and other marginalized meanings emerge.

Chapter 3, "Dual Natures or Learned Behavior: The Challenge to Feminist Psychology," by Bernice Lott, points to the remarkable diversity in behavior associated with each gender. Psychologists have found considerable overlap in gender characteristics of men and women. Differences between them are less pervasive than has been popularly thought. Bernice Lott suggests that behavior does not depend on male or female sex but on acquired attitudes, expectations, sanctions, and the situational demands that separate the experiences of girls and boys, women and men. The social context and the human capacity for learning critically influence behaviors identified as masculine and feminine. She also addresses a major variable that distinguishes the adult lives of most women and men: power.

In Chapter 4, "Imperfect Reflections of Reality: Psychology Constructs Gender," Rhoda Unger challenges the idea of stable gender differences by pointing out the extent to which behaviors associated with gender vary according to specific social and interpersonal contexts. Rather than devising a taxonomy of ways in which men and women differ, Rhoda Unger thinks that social psychologists should focus on the social settings that create gendered behavior. This logic poses a sharp challenge to the traditional psychology experiment. If settings create behavior, then the laboratory experiment, which tries to remove the influence of the broader social setting, has limitations for the study of gender. More generally, Rhoda Unger examines several of the ways in which the traditional norms, assumptions, and practices of social psychology shape the study of gender. She counters with several innovations that would direct the study of gender into new and potentially more useful directions.

Chapter 5, "Toward the Unimagined: Feminism and Epistemology in Psychology," by Jill Morawski, suggests a future direction for feminist scholars concerned with transforming the structure of the psychology of gender. Jill Morawski notes that despite the tremendous intellectual accomplishments of feminists, there have been no fundamental changes in the way gender is conceptualized in psychology. Feminists have influenced psychological research, largely through the study of psychological androgyny, but androgyny research has reached an impasse. This impasse is rooted in the social relations constituting scientific work: the social marginality of women researchers, the way empiricist science curtails critical questioning and self-reflexiveness, and the reproduction of relations of power in science. The author offers an alternative epistemology for the future.

In our concluding chapter, "Beyond Difference," we observe that the politics of gender has become the politics of difference. We believe there is a need to reconstruct gender and we call for a paradigmatic shift beyond existing dualisms.

We draw inspiration from different sources for this book.

Rachel's interest in epistemology developed from early acquaintance with Gestalt perceptual theory, notably the ideas of Wolfgang Köhler, Hans Wallach, David Krech, Kurt Lewin, and Tolman's Sign-Gestalt learning theory. Edna Heidebreder served as a model through her work on systems in psychology and her cognitive studies. Rachel also recognizes the influence of systems and communication theorists such as Gregory Bateson and Paul Watzlawick, and colleagues concerned with theory in family therapy such as Salvador Minuchin and Jay Haley. Support and stimulation have also come from many friends in the forefront of family therapy, especially Monica McGoldrick, Marilyn Mason, Betty Carter, and Morris Taggart. Above all, Gilbert Mustin deserves thanks for his consistent encouragement of the project and faith in its accomplishment.

Jeanne traces much of her interest in epistemology and critical theory to work with colleagues in the women's studies programs at Swarthmore, the University of Wisconsin, and the University of Pennsylvania. Interdisciplinary teaching, first with Mary Poovey and then with Abbe Blum, was an important context for learning about poststructuralism and other postpositivist approaches. A sabbatical leave funded in part by a Eugene M. Lang Fellowship provided that most scarce commodity—time for uninterrupted work. In addition, Jeanne recognizes the support and challenges offered by her reading group on gender studies—Jeanne Allen, Joy Charlton, Michelle Fine, Carole Joffe, Louise Kidder, Demie Kurz, Joan Shapiro, and Ronnie Steinberg. Special thanks are due to Mary Crawford, Jon Copeland, Diane Kravetz, and Scott Gilbert for unfailing inspiration and encouragement.

Rachel T. Hare-Mustin    Jeanne Marecek

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*Westport Point, Massachusetts*