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Jeanne Marecek

Swarthmore College, jmarece1@swarthmore.edu

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Chapter 4

Psychology and Feminism: Can This Relationship Be Saved?

Jeanne Marecek

Since its early days the field of psychology has issued pronouncements about women and set out prescriptions for their mental health and proper conduct. Women in the discipline often dissented from the pronouncements and prescriptions of mainstream psychology, but for much of psychology's one hundred-year history women's voices were few and far between. The past quarter of a century has witnessed a dramatic increase in the overall number of women in psychology. Moreover, many women, committed to feminism in their personal lives, have been committed to feminist ideals in their work as researchers, therapists, and teachers as well. Two organizations, one within the main professional association (the Division of the Psychology of Women of the American Psychological Association, established in 1973) and one outside (the Association for Women in Psychology, established in 1969), exist, providing a locus of collegiality and institutional support for feminist scholarship and activism (Mednick and Urbanski 1991; Tiefer 1991).

This essay concerns scholarship produced by feminist psychologists during the past twenty-five years.¹ The array of scholarship is impressive in its quantity, scope, and diversity. Yet developments have been uneven, with theory building lagging behind fact finding. In consequence, as the trees grow thicker, the contours of the forest seem harder, not easier, to discern. At the same time, the transformation of the mainstream discipline that feminist psychologists had predicted early on has not come. Instead, there has been only a "slow leak of feminist scholarship into the mainstream, [with] little change over historic time" (Fine and Gordon 1989). Thus, the record of the past is simultaneously one of positive accomplishment and of unfinished business. Critical reflection on that record is crucial to deliberating the character of future endeavors. This essay is one of many possible ways of viewing developments in feminist psychology to date. It should not be read as a definitive appraisal of the field; rather, I hope it will serve as a stimulus for a variegated set of reflections and reconstructions.

In the early 1970s many of us in feminist psychology were happy to locate ourselves at the intersection of psychology and women's studies. As time has gone on, however, that position has become awkward for some. From the

perspective of mainstream psychology, the subfield of psychology of women remains marginal to the field, a “special interest” that many regard as having a dubious and “unscientific” character. Note, for instance, that a recent survey showed that members of the American Psychological Association (APA) rated the Division of the Psychology of Women in the bottom third of divisions of the association in terms of interest and in the bottom quarter in terms of importance (Harari and Peters 1987).

Some feminist psychologists have come to feel undervalued and marginalized within women’s studies as well. What many feminist scholars who are not psychologists identify as psychology of women lies at (or beyond) the periphery of the field as it is defined by most of those on the inside. Referring to the “different-voice” theory of Carol Gilligan, Zella Luria has said, “If this is the whole of the psychology that our feminist sisters in other disciplines adopt, then feminists in psychology will have failed their responsibilities” (1991, 486). Luria was pointing to the thousands of quantitative studies, published in *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *Sex Roles*, and other disciplinary journals, that are largely unknown outside the discipline.

The epistemological turn in feminist theory—with its critiques of objectivism, empiricism, quantification, experimentalism, and positivism—has added to some psychologists’ sense of estrangement from women’s studies. These tenets have been and remain the dominant foundational assumptions of most of psychology and of most of feminist psychology in the United States. Nonetheless, it would be inaccurate to portray feminist psychologists as universally estranged from women’s studies or as univocally committed to the traditional assumptions and methods of psychology. A small but growing number of feminist psychologists have embraced the epistemological debates in feminist theory and, indeed, have argued that the foundational assumptions of psychology, as well as its conventional practices and procedures, operate to contain, silence, and sanitize feminism (Bohan 1993; Fine 1985; Hare-Mustin and Marecek 1994; Kahn and Yoder 1989; Marecek 1989; Marecek and Hare-Mustin 1991; Morawski 1990; Parlee 1990).

I will set the stage for examining present-day feminist psychology by pointing to a few recurring themes in mainstream psychology’s efforts to answer the “woman question.” There are, of course, many ways in which ideas about gender weave through psychological knowledge, and there is much more to the history of the discipline than I can mention here. Next, I will take up some of the many strategies that scholars, both early and present day, have used to forge a union of the intellectual, philosophical, and ethical commitments they have as feminists and as psychologists. Much has been accomplished, but these very accomplishments expose problems and contradictions that were hitherto hidden. In the latter part of the essay I consider possible new directions for feminist

psychology, new directions that build on work in other women's studies disciplines. One such direction re-envisioned gender as performative rather than constitutive, focusing inquiry on the practices by which gender is accomplished as a social fact. Another employs the developments in feminist theory and elsewhere to interrogate the discipline of psychology, its metatheory and epistemology.

THE WOMAN QUESTION IN PSYCHOLOGY

Women have been subjected to the gaze of psychologists since the earliest days of the discipline, one hundred years ago. At moments when women stepped out of "their place" or an eruption of feminism threatened the social order, male intellectuals and social critics of the day felt impelled to decide the question of "women's nature." The very form of the question "What is women's nature?" contains intimations of its answer. Women's nature was taken to be separate from human nature (i.e., men's nature), implying that, whatever they were, women were not fully human. Orthodox psychology has not hesitated to render its judgment of women's nature. In the late nineteenth century questions of women's nature were addressed in terms of mental capacities. Efforts to assess these capacities were carried out with reference not to skills and abilities but, rather, to various lobes, areas, and physical dimensions of women's brains (Shields 1975). It was even argued at one point that the brain itself was a secondary sex characteristic.

One of the most persistent ideas about women characterizes their psychology in relation to their reproductive physiology and function. This strategy has been a rich source of invention, but it is one that perforce focuses on the ways that men and women are different or even, as some would have it, "opposite." For Freud (1925) a little girl's realization that she is without a penis sets in motion a sequence of intrapsychic events that culminate in a normal feminine personality that is morally, socially, sexually, and emotionally deficient. Erik Erikson shifted the emphasis from external genitalia to women's awareness of their "inner space," the "somatic design" that "harbors . . . a biological, psychological, and ethical commitment to take care of human infancy" (1964, 586). Thus, for Erikson it is only within (heterosexual, monogamous) marriage and motherhood that women can find their identity and fully develop. In contrast, men's somatic design (their "outer space") gives rise to (pun intended) intrusiveness, excitement, mobility, achievement, domination, and adventure seeking. A similar line of reasoning was advanced (albeit with less stylistic grace) by Iago Galdston (1958), an eminent American psychiatrist, who proclaimed woman to be "a uterus surrounded by a supporting organism and a directing personality."

Other theorists tied women's cognitive and perceptual abilities to their reproductive physiology:

Known sex differences in cognitive abilities reflect sex related differences in physiology. . . . Females surpass males on simple, overlearned, perceptual-motor tasks; males excel on more complex tasks requiring an inhibition of immediate responses . . . in favor of responses to less obvious stimulus attributes. (Broverman, Klaiber, Kobayashi, and Vogel 1968, 23)

The words of Helen Thompson Woolley, penned in 1910, seem apt at this point. Describing the literature on sex differences even back then as a "motley mass," she offered the following assessment:

There is perhaps no field aspiring to be scientific where flagrant personal bias, logic martyred in the cause of supporting a prejudice, unfounded assertions, and even sentimental rot and drivel, have run riot to such an extent as here. (1910, 340)

Helen Thompson Woolley's work, like that of Mary Whiton Calkins and Leta S. Hollingworth, exemplifies one way to marry feminism and psychology. These women set about empirical research that was self-consciously aimed at debunking sexist assertions about women. Using the accepted research procedures of the day, they hoped to provide corrective scholarship that would counter unfounded assertions and call into question prevailing "rot and drivel" about women. Their strategy was akin to what Sandra Harding (1986) has called feminist empiricism. They were, to paraphrase Audre Lorde, using the master's tools to dismantle the master's house.

CORRECTIVE SCHOLARSHIP

Feminist empiricism—wedding the sensibilities of feminism to positivist epistemology and empirical research methods—still flourishes today. Indeed, it remains the predominant strategy for producing knowledge in feminist psychology. Moreover, the question of sex differences has remained an important subject of inquiry.

Sex Differences

Like Woolley, Calkins, and Hollingworth, contemporary feminist psychologists took up research on sex differences with the intention of debunking psychol-

ogy's shibboleths about female deficiencies. *The Psychology of Sex Differences* by Eleanor Maccoby and Carol Jacklin (1974) stands as a classic feminist inquiry into sex differences. Maccoby and Jacklin collated and summarized fourteen hundred psychological studies comparing boys and girls on a large number of cognitive abilities and personality traits. Of these traits and abilities, only four showed consistent evidence of a male-female difference. Maccoby and Jacklin drew several conclusions from their analyses. They pointed out recurring methodological weaknesses in the corpus of research: flawed measuring instruments, faulty research designs, and ill-chosen comparison groups. They also warned against uncritical biologizing, noting that there are many possible mechanisms through which male-female differences could come into being. Finally, they pointed out that beliefs about sex differences far outstripped reality.

Today research on sex differences is carried forward by the use of a statistical technique called meta-analysis. Like the conventional narrative review of the literature, meta-analysis aims to collate the results of many previous studies into a single integrated summary. In meta-analysis, however, the form of the summary is quantitative (i.e., numerical) rather than verbal. Advocates of meta-analysis believe that it is more precise and less open to error and misjudgment than narrative summaries. More important, meta-analysis incorporates information not only about whether or not a statistically significant difference occurred but also about the size and practical import of that difference. Of course, meta-analysis has shortcomings as well. It relies on extant studies, and thus it cannot be other than retrospective. Moreover, meta-analysis cannot reach beyond (or behind) published research. If publication biases exist such that only certain types of findings merit publication, these biases will infect the results of the meta-analysis. Feminist researchers have carried out meta-analyses of sex differences in a number of traits and capacities, including mathematical abilities, verbal abilities, certain personality traits, and sexual behavior (e.g., Eagley and Crowley 1986; Eagley and Steffen 1986; Hyde and Linn 1986).

What has the first century of research on psychological sex differences yielded? Under the lens of empirical scrutiny, sex differences have taken on a "now you see 'em, now you don't" quality, a quality evident in the tremendous inconsistencies that Maccoby and Jacklin found. Perhaps more troubling is that sex differences also have taken on a "you see 'em, I don't" quality. That is, most feminist psychologists have tended to read the empirical record as showing fewer or smaller sex differences than have their nonfeminist colleagues. Some claim that feminists are ideologically predisposed to minimize differences in order to favor women (Eagley 1987; Stanley 1989). Most feminist psychologists see ideological bias on the other side, believing that feminist researchers have substituted better (i.e., gender neutral or nonsexist) methods of analysis for conventional sex-biased ones.

Feminist contentions of sex bias in conventional research have been backed up by an impressive set of arguments. The opening volley was fired by Naomi Weisstein (1968), in an article entitled "Kinder, Küche, Kirche as Scientific Law: Psychology Constructs the Female." Carolyn W. Sherif's piece "Bias in Psychology" (1979) followed suit with a deeply thoughtful critique of epistemology and method in psychology, a critique that unfortunately remains just as pertinent today as when she wrote it. Maureen McHugh and her colleagues presented an exhaustive description of the myriad points in the process of designing, executing, interpreting, and reporting psychological experiments at which sex bias can enter (McHugh, Koeske, and Frieze 1986). Kathy Grady (1981) and Carol Jacklin (1981) pointed to yet other ways that bias was rooted in the conceptual schemas and interpretive modes of conventional psychological research. At the same time, other critics have noted heterosexism and racial/ethnic bias in research (e.g., Herek, Kimmel, Amaro, and Melton 1991; Landrine, Klonoff, and Brown-Collins 1992).

My own reading of such critiques is two-pronged. On the one hand, I applaud the sharp insights and critical acumen of the authors. On the other, the cumulative effect of their work is a sinking feeling and a strong sense of pessimism. I am reminded of Aylmer, the scientist of Nathaniel Hawthorne's story "The Birthmark" (1893). Obsessed with the birthmark that blemishes the skin of his otherwise perfect bride, Aylmer struggles to devise a potion strong enough to remove the blemish. When he succeeds, the dose turns out to be deadly. What had appeared to be a superficial blemish reached deep to the heart. Like the bride's birthmark, biases in psychology may be inextricably connected to the heart of the discipline.

I will develop this point in detail later. For now let us turn back to the subject of sex differences. As is often true of feminist empiricism, the questions guiding sex difference research are questions received from mainstream psychology, echoing mainstream culture. The feminist response is an effort to contest accepted wisdom and to disrupt the production of invidious stereotypes about women. Important though this work is, it inevitably has drawbacks. Contesting sexist claims paradoxically serves to dignify them as worthy of attention and continuing debate. Moreover, when feminist scholars assume a reactive stance, they relinquish control of the agenda. Keeping the focus on the "data" of sex differences serves to contain feminists' energies and imaginations (Hare-Mustin and Marecek 1988).

Lurking behind the question of male-female difference is the question of hierarchy: Which is better? The question is not "How are men and women different?" but, rather, "How do women differ from men?" In other words, how do women measure up to the norm, or typical case? Are women as good as men? The form of the question thus begs the answer and puts feminist re-

searchers in a no-win situation: if we conclude that sex differences exist, we admit women's deficiency. If we conclude that no differences exist, we are asserting only that women are "as good as" men, implicitly acceding to the premise that the male is the standard or referent against which women should be judged.

Many feminist psychologists have carried out studies of sex differences in the hope of setting the record straight on matters that would lead to fairer treatment of women, a goal that fits squarely with psychology's self-proclaimed interest in promoting human welfare. But feminists should be wary of trusting that a dispassionate assessment of "the facts" can serve as the basis for redistributing power, privilege, and resources. Whose version of the facts will be heard, published, and advanced and whose muffled or silenced? The history of psychology is, regrettably, replete with instances in which dubious facts were marshaled to reaffirm the social hierarchies already in place.

Research on male-female differences has perhaps been most useful to feminists as a springboard to other questions. A sex difference (or a lack of difference) is never an explanation, only a description. Thus, the results of sex difference research do not provide an answer; they only prompt a further question: "Why?" In the mid-1970s scholars in women's studies began to use the term *gender* to open up new conceptual space for theorizing that question. That is, they appropriated a term previously used mainly by grammarians and linguists to make reference to the social quality of distinctions between maleness and femaleness (Scott 1985). Perhaps it was no coincidence that the term *gender* was borrowed from the study of language. Language is the medium by which social realities such as gender are constructed and legitimated.

Gender Roles and Socialization

A sex difference (or similarity) prompts the question "What is it about the social experiences of women and men that explains why they might think/feel/behave this way?" Feminist psychologists' efforts to answer this question have produced empirical studies numbering in the thousands. Much of this work can be encompassed by the rubric of gender (or sex) roles and its companion concept, gender-role (or sex-role) socialization. The term *gender role* lacks a precise definition, but it has been used to refer to the normative expectations for men and women. Gender-role socialization refers to the processes by which individuals (usually children) acquire knowledge of gender-role norms and come to accept them. The fuzziness of the concept of gender role leads ultimately to conceptual impasses, which I will describe later. Nonetheless, the construct has served as a useful lens for examining societal expectations imposed on women, as the abundance of published studies indicates.

Psychological Androgyny

One of the most popular ways for feminist psychologists to interrogate the consequences of gender roles was the construct of psychological androgyny. For nearly a decade, beginning in the mid-1970s, androgyny was a pivotal construct in feminist empirical psychology and feminist clinical practice. Psychological androgyny was advocated by some as a requisite for optimal mental health as well as a prime goal of feminist therapy (Bem 1978; Kaplan 1979; Marecek 1979). Sandra Bem (1976), whose work introduced and operationalized the concept of androgyny in psychology, defined it as follows:

An androgynous sex role thus represents the equal endorsement of both masculine and feminine personality characteristics, a balance, as it were, between masculinity and femininity. . . . Both masculinity and femininity must each [*sic*] be tempered by the other, and the two integrated into a . . . more fully human, a truly androgynous personality.

Research on androgyny used a measuring instrument devised by Bem (1974), known as the *Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI)*. To complete the *BSRI* individuals were asked to consider a list of sixty psychological characteristics and to indicate the extent to which each described them. From this, scores were calculated that purported to index masculinity and femininity; individuals were then categorized according to what Bem called their "sex-role orientation." An avalanche of studies quickly followed the publication of this simple measuring device. Sex-role orientation was correlated with such diverse attributes and behaviors as women's depression, male feminism, preferred coital positions, and diagnostic practices of therapists. By the mid-1980s, however, the *BSRI*, along with the concept of psychological androgyny, succumbed to the weight of various conceptual and methodological critiques and reformulations (Bem 1984; Locksley and Colten 1979; Morawski 1985, 1987; Spence 1984). The *BSRI* industry crumbled, leaving little imprint on the field.

Conceptual difficulties with the idea of androgyny have been articulated by many scholars across women's studies disciplines, and I will not repeat them here. Instead, I focus on aspects of the development and deployment of the concept of androgyny that are peculiar to psychology. In doing so, I hope to illustrate some of the tensions that psychology engenders for feminists, and vice versa.

The construct of androgyny as a sex-role orientation tacitly shifted the domain of gender roles from the social interpersonal world to the mental, intra-individual one. Despite its title, the Bem Sex-Role Inventory is not an inventory of "sex roles," as that term is conventionally defined. That is, it does not address

the roles of men and women (e.g., daughter, husband, worker, mother). Rather, the *BSRI* measures individuals' self-assessments of the extent to which they possess particular attributes or traits (e.g., compassion, leadership abilities). Thus, Bem's conception of androgyny shifted ground from *social* roles to *mental* self-conceptions.² This slide from the social and interpersonal to the mental could occur without notice because it is a move that takes place over and over in psychological theorizing. Yet focusing on self-concept as the locus of gender ignores the way in which gender (along with other socially demarcated categories, such as ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation) is a structuring principle of ongoing social relations in nearly every setting and institution in our society.

Like much of contemporary psychology, psychologists' ideas about gender roles and androgyny are often framed by the antimony of individual versus society. Bem (1976), for instance, saw androgyny as a liberation from society's "restricting prison" of "artificial constraints" on the freedom to express "one's own unique blend of temperament and behavior." Rather than taking the distinction between individual and society as a provisional one, androgyny theory took it as real. As psychology characteristically does, it posited a preexisting "true self" independent of the matrix of social institutions and ongoing relationships in which human beings are embedded. In this view the self exists in opposition to society: freedom from society allows people to be more truly themselves. Social life is seen as a constriction of human possibility, rather than the locus of all possibilities. Such ways of construing self and society echo themes in late-nineteenth-century romanticism, liberal individualism, and humanism, and they have come under scathing attack by a variety of contemporary critical thinkers (Marecek and Hare-Mustin 1990; Sass 1988).

The constructs of gender roles, gender-role socialization, and androgyny deserve further critical analysis. Like many of mainstream psychology's variables, they are mechanistic and simplistic abstractions, compressing the flux and flow of human life into a few static constructs. The construct of gender-role socialization too often has implied a unitary norm of behavior (a "gender role"), imparted early in life and enacted robotlike for the duration of the life span. It makes invisible the ways that culture, language, and relationships continually construct individuals as gendered beings, and it obscures the complexity, multiplicity, and contradiction in the meanings of gender. Mechanistic notions of gender-role socialization also leave little room to explain women's acts of resistance—their outright rebellions, silent refusals and subterfuges, ironic exaggerations. How could socialization theory explain Madonna? Or, for that matter, feminists themselves?

Psychologists' theories of gender roles and gender-role socialization often have skirted the issues of power, dominance, and subordination (see Stacey and Thorne 1985). Androgyny theory, like sex difference research, took gender to be

merely an aspect of personal identity, a set of qualities resident within the person. This diverted attention from more politically charged meanings of gender. Indeed, masculinity and femininity were sometimes said to be parallel and complementary and even regarded as if they were equivalent in the degree to which they created unhappiness and blocked personal development. Nonetheless, many feminist psychologists practiced what they did not seem to preach. Therapists who adopted androgyny as a goal of therapy seemed to work exclusively with female clients. The goal of "resocialization" entailed helping women acquire "masculine" skills and attributes in order to enhance their success and life satisfaction. Little attention was paid to the idea that men's lives would be enhanced by acquiring attributes of femininity, nor was there indication of a male clientele interested in pursuing such ends. In the domain of research as well the focus was on women's roles, perhaps because few men experienced the normative prescriptions for masculinity as problematic or debilitating.

The vicissitudes of sex differences, gender roles, and androgyny point up some of the strains of lodging feminist psychology within the conceptual and methodological framework of mainstream psychology. As a discipline, psychology has insistently set its sights on the individual and the mental. It has characteristically set the individual apart from (and at odds with) society and then trained its gaze on the individual. In theorizing gender roles, feminist psychologists too have tended to take the societal for granted, to merely wave in the direction of "societal forces" or "cultural expectations," as if those constructs had a single, self-evident, agreed-upon referent and needed no unpacking.

Historically, psychology has been committed to the discovery of presumed universals in human experience—"laws of human behavior" that transcend history, culture, class, caste, and material circumstances. Thus, the valued means of producing knowledge has been the experiment, in which behavior is extracted from its usual social context. Moreover, the study of specific groups of people has been viewed as "applied" research that is peripheral to and of lesser value than the "basic" mission of the discipline. Psychology is the study of "human behavior," but the psychology of women is only the study of a "special population." Similarly, psychology has "regard[ed] whites as 'people' and all other ethnic groups as 'subcultures' or nonpeople" (Landrine, Klonoff, and Brown-Collins 1992, 147). The folly of this orientation has been noted by critics, but practices within the discipline have not shifted appreciably. For example, a recent survey of the psychology research literature noted that studies of African Americans have actually declined in number over the past two decades (Graham 1992).

Over the past ten years or so, calls for a more inclusive feminist psychology have become increasingly insistent. Ethnic, cultural, sexual, and other forms of diversity are better represented in feminist psychology than they are in the

discipline as a whole. Yet, to date, women who are not white, not middle-class, and not heterosexual are underrepresented in the research literature. More important, in producing knowledge about women's lives, feminist psychology (especially experimentation) has often elided the role of material resources, institutional biases, historical contingencies, and cultural differences.

TOWARD FULLER ACCOUNTS OF WOMEN'S LIVES

Another way of joining psychology and feminism has been to eschew male-centered notions of what is important to study and, instead, to center the inquiry on women's lives. This approach has produced a rich tapestry of women's activities and experiences, at once diverse, complex, bewildering, and compelling. One women-centered strategy has been to focus attention on uniquely female life events, such as menarche, menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, the transition to motherhood, and menopause. Much of this work broke new ground by bringing unexamined issues to light and by reexamining old issues in new ways. By making women the center of inquiry, negative value judgments and invidious interpretations could be challenged and replaced. Much of the research refuted long-standing cultural biases, calling into question the notion of women's "raging" cyclical hormones, the sentimentalization of motherhood, hormonal explanations of the "new-baby blues," and associations between menopause and depression.

Much of this work has challenged the idea that biology shapes women's psychological destiny. But, paradoxically, the corpus of work as a whole stands as an unintended reaffirmation of a pervasive cultural assumption about women: that women, but not men, are defined by their bodies; and that women's psychology is connected to their physiology (Ortner 1974). Or, as one of psychology's founding fathers put it: "All that is distinctly human is man; all that is truly woman is merely reproductive" (Allen 1889). Thus, feminist work detailing the sociocultural meanings of reproductive events is only a first step. The next step is to question whether such events do (and should) define women's lives.

The transformative potential of this work is limited in more serious ways as well. Much of it takes its agenda to be disentangling the biological from the sociocultural. Behind this agenda is a set of ideas about biology and culture that demands critical scrutiny. In psychological theorizing, biology is traditionally accorded primacy as the "bedrock" of human experience. Biological explanations of human behavior are habitually privileged in the psychological literature, as they are in the popular media. Even Freud, whose psychology relies heavily on symbol systems and mentalistic constructs, held that the discipline of psy-

chology was just a stopgap, a waystation to pass the time until the science of neurology produced the ultimate cures for mental disorders. As Robert Connell (1987) says, the assumption that biology is the root cause of human experience is so powerful in U.S. intellectual life that biologism repeatedly co-opts intellectual currents initially unsympathetic to it.

Women's studies scholars in many disciplines have sharply challenged the presumed divide between the biological and the social as well as the notion of a core biological essence unmediated by language and social experience. Their work examines the ways in which the meanings of the body and bodily processes are situated within a given historical, cultural, and social framework. Key to this work is an analysis of language and the systems of metaphors deployed in talk about the body in health and illness. Emily Martin (1987), for example, has investigated the metaphors that women from different social class backgrounds use to talk about menstruation. Leonore Tiefer (1992) has interrogated the masculinist and heterosexist assumptions that frame diagnoses of sexual dysfunctions as well as the concept of the "human sexual response cycle." John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman (1988) have described how the meanings of sexuality and its regulation in U.S. society have shifted from colonial times to the present. In the aftermath of the confirmation hearings of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, a number of scholars have turned attention to the myths of the hypersexuality of African-American men and women (Chrisman and Allen 1992; Morrison 1992). Other scholars have explored the "epidemic of signification" (in Paula Treichler's phrase [1987]) that HIV infection has unleashed. In short, the meaning and experience of bodily phenomena depend on interpretation and values and on the language available to talk about them. Rather than being separable and in opposition, biology and culture are interrelated and interdependent. Culture, through the apparatus of language, creates the reality of biology and the body as we know it.

There is another way that culture creates biological realities. The social practices, material resources, and cultural values of any particular historical and societal context create what appear to be biological "givens." Take, for example, the monthly menstrual cycle. In many societies, especially those in which subsistence agriculture is practiced, women's menstrual cycles are neither monthly nor cyclical (e.g. Winslow 1980). Women reach puberty at a late age, marry shortly thereafter (if not before), conceive as quickly as possible, breast-feed for long periods, have several pregnancies spaced closely together, and die at a relatively young age. Thus, in their lifetimes they may experience relatively few menstrual periods, and there may be only limited spans of time when a regular monthly cycle is established. In our own time and place practices such as rigorous dieting, strenuous exercise, and the use of hormone-based contraceptives can interrupt monthly hormonal cycles. And, as medical advances extend

the life span, the proportion of a lifetime during which women menstruate is diminishing and is presently only about 50 percent. Age at menarche is also influenced by social practice, and here too there is wide variation across history and across different social groups. In the United States the age at menarche has dropped dramatically during this century. At present it is not uncommon for a girl to reach menarche as young as the age of ten. In other locales menarche may occur as late as the age of seventeen. Social practices—among them, nutrition, dietary preferences, and activity levels—effectively dictate biology. The metaphor of biology as bedrock is inapt on two counts: biology is neither solid and unchanging nor at the bottom of human existence.

Breaking the Silence: Women and Violence

Though marriage and motherhood are often taken to be the emblems of womanhood, intimate violence and sexual victimization are perhaps more ubiquitous. Male violence is a threat to women of all social groups, and the threat is sustained throughout the life span. Victimization often takes place in the context of relationships of love and trust and thus is especially hurtful. Like other cultural institutions, orthodox psychology heeded the long-standing taboo against acknowledging violence against women. Even clinicians who worked with distressed women or with couples in marital conflict often overlooked or minimized the possibility of intimate violence in their clients' lives.

It was feminists who broke the silence within the discipline of psychology. Feminist activism and scholarship on issues of victimization stand as a sustained and successful example of claims making, transforming a set of conditions that, as Gloria Steinem once quipped, had been "just called life" into an urgent social problem. Thus, one accomplishment was interpretive change: violence against women became a public issue rather than a private problem. Feminist scholarship also challenged the conventional wisdom that minimized violence against women. Violence against women in all its forms—rape, child sexual abuse, wife beating, sexual harassment—was shown to be far more prevalent than had been imagined (Koss 1990) and to have more damaging effects on women's mental health and well-being (cf. Browne and Finklehor 1986; Herman 1981). At the same time, feminists pointed out that fear of violence affects women every day, causing them to worry and to take preventive measures that are restrictive, expensive, and time consuming (Gardner 1989; Gordon and Riger 1991). Feminist therapists and counselors have also contributed to knowledge about treatment for women (and men) with violence or sexual abuse in their past (e.g., Courtois 1988; Goldner, Penn, Sheinberg, and Walker 1990).

Feminist work on violence against women also has theorized the origins of violence and sexual victimization of women. The analyses have insisted upon a

connection between the victimization of women and quotidian male-female power dynamics (Burt 1980; Hollway 1984; Malamuth 1981; Walker 1989). Thus, some researchers have examined cultural assumptions about women, about heterosexuality, about male entitlement to women's sexual services, and about male-female antagonism. Others have explored how exposure to images of violence and violent sexuality affects rape-related attitudes. A key feature of these analyses is that violent and abusive acts are not the acts of deviant, disordered individuals but, rather, extreme manifestations of culturally accepted patterns of dominant-subordinate gender relations.

Women's Problems

Another strategy for producing women-centered knowledge has been focusing upon the difficulties women encounter as a result of the cultural imperatives of femininity. An early instance was Matina Horner's (1970) work on "fear of success." Horner identified what she characterized as a deep-seated feminine motive to avoid success, stemming from fear of negative interpersonal consequences. Over the years a succession of other attributes have been imputed to women to explain their (supposed) reluctance to undertake certain "masculine" endeavors, their (supposed) lack of success, or their unhappiness: math anxiety, the "impostor phenomenon," the "Cinderella Complex," lack of assertiveness, "secrets your mother never taught you," and lack of self-esteem. In the realm of psychopathology feminist clinicians, pointing to the parallels between stereotypic feminine attributes and the symptoms of certain psychiatric disorders, argued that conventional femininity placed women at psychiatric risk (e.g., Rothblum and Franks 1983; Widom 1984).

Although such efforts were often inspired by a feminist impulse to help women improve their lives, their common assumptive framework—which Mary Crawford and I (1989) called "Woman as Problem"—has had some unforeseen and unfortunate implications. Declaring that a problem is a "woman's problem" implies that it is universal among women and even an essential aspect of female psychology. This has rarely proven true; upon close scrutiny most "women's problems" have turned out to affect only some women and to affect men as well. In addition, when women's behavior is identified as the problem, the behavior associated with men is often taken to be correct or mentally healthy. For example, the truism that women have problems expressing anger implies that men's ways of expressing anger are unproblematic and to be emulated. But, of course, men, like women, express anger in many different ways, and not all of them are constructive or socially appropriate. Moreover, psychological analyses of women's problems abstract the problem from its context, locating it within women themselves. The proposed solutions—remedial educa-

tion, counseling and psychotherapy, “pop psych” self-help books—are all directed toward helping individual women remedy their deficiencies. In effect, they exhort women to make private changes in order to adapt better to social conditions.

In the Woman-as-Problem approach, as in other lines of endeavor, the relentless individualism that is part of psychology’s heritage channeled the inquiry along a particular path. When attention is fixed on the self in isolation, women’s difficulties appear as personality traits, motives, or deeply rooted personal attributes. The slide into essentialism is all too easy. When the focus is broadened to locate the phenomena in their social context, other formulations about their origins, continuation, and meaning emerge. An alternative interpretation of fear of success, for example, connects it not to gender but, rather, to relations of subordination. When success involves going “above one’s station,” people, whatever their gender, may fear that they will incur social penalties and thus may appear to “fear success.” Perhaps math anxiety, lack of assertiveness, and “impostor feelings” too can be reinterpreted as ways of managing social relationships. They might serve as strategies for negotiating from a position of low status or as self-presentations simultaneously necessitated and enabled by conventional gender definitions (Hare-Mustin and Marecek 1986).

Revaluing Women

The Woman-as-Problem approach takes women’s difference as a problem to be remedied and thus tacitly accepts the premise of male superiority. Other psychologists working within the woman-centered framework have rejected the conflation of difference with deficiency and, instead, have asserted the value, if not the superiority, of women’s ways of being. Carol Gilligan’s (1977) “different voice” is perhaps the most popular example of this approach. Gilligan’s formulation was intended to counter work claiming that women evinced a less-developed moral sensibility than men. Gilligan argued that women formulated their moral judgments within a different framework of moral assumptions, a framework that privileged care over principles of abstract justice. In subsequent work Gilligan has expanded her original claim to assert a uniquely female sense of self and a unique path of adolescent development for girls. In moves that closely parallel Gilligan’s, other psychologists have asserted that there exist uniquely female ways of knowing, modes of connectedness, and so on (e.g., Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule 1986; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, and Surrey 1991).

By and large, these projects have received a cool reception from academic feminist psychologists. One persisting line of criticism has focused on technical inadequacies in the work, with critics noting departures from the logical and

methodological standards customary in psychological research. Another line of criticism takes exception to the universalizing of women (cf. Broughton 1988; Crawford 1989). Essentialist accounts of women's psychology, no matter how flattering, conceal important differences among women and ignore the ways that the meaning of gender is intertwined with ethnicity, social class, and other categories of difference (Hare-Mustin and Marecek 1990; Spelman, 1988). Moreover, although these accounts intend to place women at the center of inquiry, to break out of gender comparisons, this intention seems to misfire. Claims of a woman's "voice," ways of knowing, and connectedness all seem to draw implicit comparisons to men, just as do claims of problems and syndromes unique to women. Even when the researchers demur, saying that they are *not* intending such comparisons, it is difficult to read their formulations without reading gender distinctions into them. Indeed, it seems logically impossible to speak about what is unique to women without implying difference from men.

Focus on Overlooked Groups of Women

With its avowed goal of discerning universal laws of human behavior, the field of psychology has historically been uninterested either in ethnic diversity or in history and culture. Researchers set their sights on college sophomores, a group that was at hand and could be pressed into service as research subjects at little or no cost. Feminist psychology, born during the women's movement of the 1970s, shared the concern of the women's movement with women's oppression in their everyday lives. Despite this concern, early research efforts focused primarily on white, young, middle-class, heterosexual women and produced knowledge about "generic" women.

Feminist psychology is now squarely confronted with the need to be more inclusive. Indeed, political developments on campuses, in the nation, and in the world at large are urgent indicators of just how little universality of experience there is and how fragile supposed commonalities among "us"—whether *us* refers to women, Americans, or even feminists—are (Rosaldo 1989). The moral and political commitment to the goals of diversity and inclusion is strong, but making good on this commitment will be difficult, and accomplishments are likely to be uneven. The body of work on lesbian women is growing, due in large part to the presence of many vocal and active lesbians in feminist psychology. This work has brought to light often-hidden experiences and challenged discriminatory stereotypes (e.g., Falk 1989; Rohrbaugh 1990). It has also been a source of methodological and epistemological innovation (e.g., Boston Lesbian Psychologies Collective 1987; Brown 1989). Studies of middle-aged and older women are also beginning to appear in the literature of feminist psychology. Indeed, a recent issue of the *Psychology of Women Quarterly* (14, no. 4) was

devoted exclusively to this topic. As cohorts of feminist psychologists have moved through the life course, many have turned their scholarly attention to the issues that have emerged in their personal lives. As in other women's studies disciplines, personal experience is a valued source of scholarly inspiration. Relatively few women in academic psychology are nonwhite, and virtually none are from impoverished backgrounds (in terms of their present circumstances, if not that of their family of origin). Thus, the task of making feminist psychology inclusive of all women cannot be passed on to scholars who claim membership in these groups.

The commitment to study women from diverse backgrounds, ethnic groups, and ages is a tacit repudiation of psychology's goal of discovering universal laws of behavior. If a universalist psychology were possible, then studies of college sophomores would serve our purposes as readily and far more conveniently. This repudiation of psychology's traditional mission needs to be made explicit and debated openly. If the goal of a universalist psychology is untenable, then what kinds of knowledge can (and should) feminist psychology produce? Knowledge about women that is historically situated and context sensitive will be judged not important (or perhaps even not psychology) according to the traditional standards of the discipline.

“DOING GENDER”

Throughout its history feminist psychology has conceptualized gender in terms of fixed attributes resident within the individual. Against this background of essentialist thought, constructivist theories of gender have become important sources of innovation in psychology. For example, Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1987) have reimagined gender as something people *do*, rather than something people *are* or *have*. In this view the focus of study becomes the actions, conversations, and relationships through which gender is accomplished as a social fact and made to seem natural.

Two pieces of work, one by a sociologist and one by an anthropologist, may help to show what this approach can yield. Arlie Hochschild (1989) examined how family work is shared between employed wives and husbands, focusing on how partners negotiate disparate gender ideologies, emotional commitments, and gendered identities to arrive at a workable, if not always fair or amicable, distribution of family labor. What she called gender strategies, the “plan[s] of action through which a person solves problems at hand, given the cultural notions of gender at play,” can be seen as ways of doing gender (1989, 15). So, for example, a husband may do the cooking and other housework but account for his behavior by explaining that he must “help out” his less-than-competent

wife with "her" responsibilities. Such a gender strategy enables divergences from traditional norms without calling the norms themselves into question.

Another study of doing gender turned attention to women in public places (Gardner 1980). Gardner examined street remarks, that is, comments, gestures, and other forms of communication that pass from men to women in public places. She noted the content of the remarks, the circumstances that elicited them, and how recipients understood and responded to them. In Gardner's analysis street remarks serve as a powerful means of enacting male dominance: they assert that women are on display for male approval or disdain, claim public space as a male preserve, and may raise threats of male violence or sexual attack. At a metacommunicative level street remarks put their female targets in a double bind in which any response (including no response) is effectively a gesture of submission.

The concept of doing gender is a provocative one, but it is hard to accommodate within psychology's customary research practices. To study doing gender, researchers need to observe mundane encounters and quotidian interactions situated in the "real-life" contexts in which they customarily take place. They cannot rely on self-reports elicited via inventories, scales, and questionnaires or on behavior witnessed in contrived laboratory situations. Moreover, if, in accord with psychology's traditional dictum, researchers restrict inquiry to observable behavior, the resulting accounts will be limited. Instead, researchers need to go beyond overt behaviors to examine people's accounts of their intentions and the meanings they impute to their own and others' behavior. This will require research approaches akin to ethnography, participant observation, and even literary criticism, ways of working that are far less codified and rigid than the procedures psychology typically endorses.

Breaking free of the methodological orthodoxy imposed by mainstream psychology is not an easy step. Psychology warrants its claims to truth on the basis of its highly elaborated "scientific method" of procedure. Many psychologists are deeply distrustful of interpretive ways of working, especially because these ways of working lack procedures for verification equivalent to those claimed by psychology. Moreover, adherence to the so-called scientific method is one of the few features (perhaps the only feature) that links the disparate areas of psychology and gives psychologists a disciplinary identity.

Studies like those of Hochschild and Gardner strain the frame of psychology in another crucial way. The knowledge gained from such studies does not take a form akin to the results of psychological research. The results of research in psychology customarily are cast as cause-and-effect relationships, which in turn are cast into generalized statements concerned with the prediction of future behavior. Hochschild and Gardner, however, are more modest in both their aims and their claims. Their studies yield "thick descriptions," to use Geertz's

(1973) phrase: richly detailed, historically contingent, situation-specific descriptions of behavior.

The concept of doing gender offers an important counterpoint to the construct of gender-role socialization. It challenges the idea that people are socialized into a monolithic "gender-role orientation" in childhood, which shapes their actions for the remainder of their lives. In place of that idea it asserts that people "do [and redo] gender" in innumerable context-specific ways throughout their lives. Thus, gender is at issue in all interactions throughout the life span. Moreover, in this conception individuals become agents in creating gender. At different times and in various ways they may enact, refuse, or ironize cultural definitions of gender.

FEMINIST SKEPTICISM

Like other social technologies, psychology is a modernist invention. The field flourished and expanded in the twentieth century, and its character and aspirations reflect the spirit of those times. Its approach to knowledge is ahistorical, and functionalism has been an important theme. The discipline has placed faith in technology, in the development of knowledge by rational analysis, and in the myth of progress through change. As the modern era draws to a close, American intellectual life has entered a period of broad-ranging skepticism about these tenets and especially about conventional ideas of knowledge and truth. Key among postmodern doubts are questions about the nature of knowledge: What can we know? How do we know? Who is the subject of knowledge? How does the social position of the knower affect the production of knowledge? What is the connection between knowledge and politics? How does a discipline (such as psychology) produce and warrant knowledge? How do its formal methods of knowledge seeking, as well as its everyday practices, inform the understandings of human behavior that it produces and promulgates?

Many of these questions have a familiar ring to them. They echo, albeit in a general and more abstract form, the questions and concerns that feminists have been raising about psychology's knowledge of women. Thus, feminists are well represented among the psychologists who have criticized psychology from either a postpositivist or postmodern stance (e.g., Allen and Baber 1992; Bohan 1992; Gavey 1989; Hare-Mustin and Marecek 1988; Hollway 1989; Landrine, Klonoff, and Brown-Collins 1992; Morawski 1990). It is premature to sketch the eventual contours of a feminist psychology that fully incorporates such stances, but it is possible to indicate some of the prime areas of inquiry.

The Critique of Positivism

Positivism, the reigning epistemology for psychology since its origins, holds that only the positive data of sensory experience should count as truth. The means to gain such data is scientific observation; by following scientific procedures of knowledge seeking, knowers can be assured of objectivity.

Objections to positivist doctrines have come from many quarters of intellectual life. In psychology they have been raised by a number of theorists, among them some feminists. As mentioned previously, feminist psychologists have documented how the procedures for producing knowledge in psychology are susceptible to the values and biases of researchers. Although some believe that correctives applied to these procedures can yield "purified" methods and bias-free knowledge, others are pessimistic. Disputing the positivist premise that facts can be separated from values, they hold that all knowledge is "biased," (i.e., inclined toward the predilections of the knower) and, thus, facts and values cannot be neatly separated. In this view the very constructs we use to talk about psychic life carry implicit valuations, and thus description is always intertwined with prescription.

The positivist doctrine of objectivity requires that knowers be separate from the objects of study and that they suspend their preconceptions, values, personal inclinations, and interests, because these would contaminate their observations. Skeptics assert that it is not possible for these conditions to obtain in the production of psychological knowledge. Researchers cannot detach themselves from their social, cultural, and historical context by an act of will, nor can they put aside biography and experience. All knowledge is thus necessarily situated knowledge (Haraway 1988).

Questions about positivism raise further questions about possible alternatives. How can we go beyond objectivism to new doctrines of knowledge and truth? How should feminists warrant their claims to truth? If we set aside the positivist faith in objectivity, how can we keep from sliding into radical relativism? If we assert that knowledge is situated and that it depends on the standpoint of the knower, then how do we choose the best among the multiple views of reality that confront us? One feminist has used the image of trying to climb a greased pole while hanging on to both ends to characterize feminists' struggles with these issues. For feminist psychologists it has often seemed that, without empirical facts, there are no grounds for feminist demands for political change and social justice. Thus, challenges to objectivity seem to open the way to political paralysis (Allen and Baber 1992).

The Social Construction of Knowledge

Social constructionism, a theory of knowledge with deep roots in the Western philosophical tradition, has gained prominence lately in certain quarters of

psychology. Social constructionism holds that knowledge is not a matter of a priori truths awaiting discovery but, rather, the construction of a community of knowers. That is, human knowers devise accounts of reality, and certain of these accounts come to be accepted as the true ones through processes of social negotiation (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Constructionism is, thus, in sharp opposition to positivism.

As an alternative to positivism, constructionism resonates with the unease that many feminists in psychology have felt about the discipline (Bohan 1992). Yet, as the idea that gender is a social construct has been introduced into feminist psychology, much of the force of social constructionism has been lost. Some have confused social constructionism with the unexceptional idea that behavior is a product of social forces rather than biology. Others have read social constructionism as nothing more than the study of varying explanations or attributions that individuals give for their own or others' behavior. Rather than studying the *social* processes through which knowledge is created and legitimated, the focus shifts to *individual* mental processes. Knowledge remains a subjective experience, rather than intersubjective collaboration and cocreation.

What has most often slipped out of sight as the term *social constructionism* has come into wide use in feminist psychology, though, is its epistemological force. The heart of social constructionism is its antirealist epistemology (Gergen 1985). That is, social constructionism disavows the idea of a preexisting reality outside of socially negotiated accounts of reality. Thus, like other postpositivist theories of knowledge, social constructionism presents feminists with the "greased pole" challenge to devise new doctrines of objectivity and truth.

Taking the full implication of social constructionism seriously would have far-reaching effects on feminist psychology. Constructionism opens a series of hitherto unexplored questions. For example, it asks how accounts of reality are devised and rhetorically justified. It also asks about the social processes and institutional mechanisms by which certain accounts are legitimated and others discredited. For feminist psychologists a key issue is how existing categories of psychological knowledge reflect and reaffirm the masculinist bias of society as a whole. So, for example, critiques have been launched against the construction of sexuality (Gavey 1989; Tiefer 1995) and heterosexuality (Hollway 1984). Other efforts have investigated the character of certain areas of psychological investigation, such as research on maternal employment and child care (Silverstein 1991) and attributions of blame and responsibility in childhood sexual abuse (Gavey 1990; Lamb 1986).

Language, Meaning, and Politics

A good deal of feminist critical thought has focused on the search for biases in the procedures used to carry out empirical research. This is consistent with

psychology's emphasis on empiricism and scientific method. For constructivists and other postpositivists critical scrutiny of the conceptual apparatus that organizes psychological understanding of psychic life is equally important. Language is not a transparent medium through which we view reality; rather, language gives form and meaning to reality as we know it. The categories of meaning that psychology has created shape knowledge of psychic life for psychologists themselves as well as for consumers of psychology, a group that includes students, psychotherapy clients, and readers of self-help books. Consider such constructs as self-esteem, assertiveness, mother-infant attachment, and female masochism. These categories have profound effects on personal identity, on social reality, and on the character of social relations. Clinical diagnostic labels also convey strong messages about social relations, including the power relations between people with problems and the experts who claim to help them (Edelman 1974; Wakefield 1992). An important line of feminist inquiry, then, is to trace the history and sociology of psychological constructs, asking when those constructs came into use, how and with what effects they have been deployed, who has deployed them, and who has contested them. One example is Mary Parlee's (1989) elegant portrayal of the contest waged by medical specialties, feminists, and corporate interests for the "ownership" of premenstrual syndrome (PMS). Another is Leonore Tiefer's (1991) inquiry into the construct "human sexual response cycle."

Textual analysis is another means of investigating how language shapes knowledge in psychology. Sharon Lamb (1991), for example, examined articles on wife beating to show how stylistic features of the writing obscure issues of male responsibility. Another investigation traced metaphors of control and mastery in research reports on social cognition, pointing out how the language inscribed a hierarchy of domination, with the researchers positioned at the top (Morawski and Steele 1991). Others have investigated the narrative forms in which psychologists have cast their accounts of human behavior. Inquiry into linguistic practices is likely to yield new and deeper knowledge about the way that psychology constructs gender. In addition, such inquiry may also point out ways in which gender constructs psychology. We can ask how certain dichotomies (such as reason/emotion; task orientation/socio-emotional orientation; and active/passive) take their meaning and their valuation from their cultural association with maleness and femaleness.

Uncovering Work Practices and Social Relations

Formal statements of the scientific method of psychology both reveal and conceal the operations of the discipline. Day-to-day work practices and the mundane conditions of work are not part of the formal record, nor do the social

relations among members of the discipline or between psychologists and their various constituencies (e.g., funders, students, university and clinic officials, patients, research participants) receive attention. Critical attention to the full array of work practices and social relations would yield fuller knowledge of the discipline and of how it operates to produce and warrant knowledge.

Ongoing efforts to uncover the history of women in the discipline reveal the obstacles women faced, the limits placed on their activities and roles, and the containment of their research agendas as well as their successes and triumphs (Scarborough and Furumoto 1987). Such histories and biographies provide knowledge that can assist scholars as they theorize how the social relations of the discipline give shape to the knowledge it produces.

Another set of work practices involves scientific communication. The *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA 1994) provides remarkably detailed instructions governing both content and style. It dictates the narrative form for research reports, a form that is largely fictitious, insofar as it substitutes an orderly progression of discrete steps for a process that likely was nonlinear, disorderly, and far more inchoate. The manual privileges the production of data over inspiration, conceptualization, reflection, and interpretation. Thus, by and large, doing psychology is tacitly equated with nothing more than data collecting and statistical analysis. The manual further prescribes writing conventions that portray the researcher as objective, detached, and neutral; personal experience and the political or ethical stance of the researcher are not considered germane.

The *Publication Manual* effectively serves as a gatekeeper for knowledge in the discipline. Conformity to so-called APA style is required by the officially sponsored journals of the American Psychological Association as well as many other journals in the discipline, including the two primary journals of feminist psychology in the United States, *Psychology of Women Quarterly* and *Sex Roles*. Thus, prestige and wide readership—both highly desirable to scholars—come at the price of playing according to rules of writing that serve to sustain a pristine aura of science.

What is gained by disclosing one portion of psychology's work practices while keeping another invisible? Psychology's self-presentation serves to convey the image of elite experts whose knowledge places them above and apart from ordinary citizens. Uncertainty, ambiguity, and the intrusion of personal interests are all concealed from view, thus bolstering claims to authority. This serves to reaffirm the myth that psychology is outside society, with loyalties only to the abstract ideals of scientific integrity and objectivity. Researchers' dependence on government, corporate, and military sources for funding is minimized, as is the role of political, economic, social, and defense priorities in determining which research questions rise to the fore.

Power/Knowledge

Interrogating the politics of knowledge is a central project of postmodern thought. Since the Enlightenment, tradition has held that knowledge (including self-knowledge) is a means of liberation and a source of power. In the postmodern account the connection between knowledge and power is more sinister; knowledge is not a means of liberation but, instead, a technology of social control (Foucault 1980). What is promulgated as the truth serves to legitimate and perpetuate existing hierarchies of power.

At one level the idea that knowledge can be used to control women is not new to feminist psychology. From early on feminists have taken issue with received truths that pathologized women (or certain groups of women), that limited women's sphere of activity and influence, that valorized deference to men, and that excused male violence and sexual coercion. Postmodern thought takes a further step to ask what interests are served by competing ways of giving meaning to the world and by the very projects of Western thought, such as psychology itself.

Postmodern, social constructionist, and other critical theories all take a skeptical stance. A feminist psychology that takes this stance would define itself as an arena for debate about the production and justification of knowledge and a place in which the authority of mainstream psychology could be challenged. It would continually engage in efforts to problematize customary categories, concepts, and meanings and to interrupt self-serving idealizations of psychology's goals and practices (Fine 1992; Marecek 1989).

CONCLUSION

My title asks (somewhat facetiously) whether the relationship between feminism and psychology can be saved. What I have said thus far has not answered that question, only problematized it. The relationship has not been without its difficulties. Each of the strategies that feminists in psychology have employed has its own mix of problems and possibilities, pleasures and burdens.

Feminist psychologists who work within the positivist framework are in the most comfortable relationship to mainstream psychology. They can view their work as adding new and more accurate information on women to psychology's knowledge base and thus enriching the discipline. Their criticisms of bias may be received with anger or impatience by mainstream psychology, but those criticisms are offered in a spirit of confidence in psychology's self-described scientific procedures and faith in its overall self-proclaimed project of promoting human welfare. But the price of this loyalty to psychology seems to be marginal-

ization within women's studies. Feminist psychologists who conceive of themselves as "scientists" have felt excluded, and even attacked, by the discussions about truth and knowledge under way in women's studies as well as by attacks on conventional theories of objectivity and the repudiation of the Archimedean stance of neutrality.

Skeptics within feminist psychology, on the other hand, appear to make little common cause with mainstream psychology. No dutiful daughters, their skepticism ranges broadly over the foundational assumptions of the discipline, the character of psychological constructs, psychology's methods of producing knowledge, the resulting knowledge, and the uses to which that knowledge is put. Nonetheless, even skepticism can be seen as a kind of loyal opposition: the hope is to reconstruct psychology, not annihilate it.

Waiting for the Phone to Ring?

The question "Can this relationship be saved?" begs a prior question: Does a relationship exist? Feminist psychologists themselves would answer yes. But answers from the rest of psychology would include some resounding no's and many more "Huh's?" Many, perhaps even most, psychologists remain unaware of the knowledge produced by feminist psychologists. Moreover, even though academics usually take great pains to avoid displays of ignorance, this particular form of ignorance is displayed without compunction. Indeed, in everyday conversations colleagues in the field often use language that locates the study of women and gender outside the disciplinary boundary of psychology. I have heard, for example, colleagues say that psychology is "losing" female students because they get interested in studying women and gender. For many in mainstream psychology there is no relationship to be saved and no interest in entering into one. Indeed, there is even reason to question the apparent gains that women have made as members of the discipline. As the number of women entering psychology has increased, official alarms have been sounded in the American Psychological Association; a few years ago a task force was duly constituted to study (and stem?) what was officially labeled the "feminization" of psychology.

Studies tracing the impact of feminist scholarship on the discipline at large confirm these everyday impressions. Time after time such studies have reached discouraging conclusions: the knowledge produced by feminist psychologists has had limited impact on other fields of psychology (as evidenced by the citation patterns in professional journals), and it has not found its way into mainstream textbooks, training curricula, etc. (Fine and Gordon 1989; Marecek and Hare-Mustin 1991; Peterson and Kroner 1992).

If Not a Romance, Then What?

Perhaps the metaphor of a romantic relationship is simply the wrong one for feminism and psychology. Within the academy a relationship between feminism and psychology will always be a marriage of unequals, with psychology claiming the intellectual high ground and holding control over the purse strings. When interests conflict, pressures will mount on feminist psychologists to fall in line on the side of psychology.

Is it possible that feminist psychologists have expended enough energy on getting accepted by mainstream psychology? Maybe the time has come to look elsewhere, to play the field. Loosening the bond with psychology might allow feminists to face their differences from (and with) the mainstream discipline more squarely. Liaisons with other disciplines and with emerging interdisciplinary groupings could infuse new ideas into attempts to understand women's psychic life. Methodological promiscuity would surely lead to richer and fuller understandings of women's lives. Indeed, it may even be time to set aside the hope of a romance entirely and to recast the relationship between feminism and psychology in a different system of metaphors, one that highlights feminism's disruptive potential and rebellious possibilities.

NOTES

1. I use the terms *feminist psychologist* and *feminist psychology* for reasons of personal preference and stylistic convenience. Many scholars in the field do not refer to themselves or to the field this way, preferring the more neutral *psychology of women*. The primary journal in the field is called *Psychology of Women Quarterly*; only since March 1990 has the journal's description on the inside cover used the phrase "a feminist journal."

2. Sandra Bem (1981) herself offered a reformulation of androgyny theory, in which the focal point shifted from personality attributes to cognition. Her own subsequent investigations have centered on "gender-schematic processing," that is, a generalized readiness to encode and organize information on the basis of cultural definitions of gender.

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