



## What We Look For is What We Find *Lo que buscamos es lo que encontramos*

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this paper is to examine epistemological connections between the words used by psychologists, the way words influence what methodology we use, and how methods influence our beliefs about causality and construct phenomena regarded as psychological "facts." These processes are considered in terms of a personal and historical perspective gained from nearly forty years of studying the psychology of women and gender. This paper focuses the history of the distinction between "sex" and "gender" and the continued attention of researchers to the question of whether sex/gender differences exist. It argues that the issue continues to be researched because of the relative absence of socio-structural variables such as status and power from most psychological discourse and the current empirical focus of many feminist psychologists in the United States. I also argue that lack of attention to epistemology and to the connection between politics and scholarship has led to a definition of the psychology of women and/or gender that no longer attends to feminist theory and to a decline in socially activist scholarship. Women and men cannot be studied in isolation from other social constructions such as race/ethnicity, social class, sexual diversity, and cultural difference. Such synthesis will be difficult without a return to concerns about epistemology and question generation that are rarely addressed in U. S. feminist psychology today.*

**Keywords:** *Epistemology; Sex and Gender; Sex Differences; Feminist Psychology*

### Resumen

El propósito de este artículo es analizar las conexiones epistemológicas entre las palabras utilizadas por los psicólogos, la forma en que las palabras influyen en la metodología que usamos, y cómo los métodos influyen en nuestras creencias sobre la causalidad y los fenómenos entendidos como "hechos" psicológicos. Estos procesos son considerados en términos de una perspectiva personal e histórica obtenida a través de casi cuarenta años de estudio de la psicología de las mujeres y del género. Este artículo se centra en la historia de la distinción entre "sexo" y "género" y la atención continuada de los investigadores sobre la cuestión de si las diferencias de sexo/género existen. Afirmo que el tema sigue siendo investigado debido a la relativa ausencia de variables socio-estructurales tales como el estatus o el poder en la mayoría del discurso psicológico y en la atención empírica actual de muchas psicólogas feministas en Estados Unidos. También afirmo que la falta de atención hacia la epistemología y hacia la conexión entre política y academia ha llevado a una definición de la psicología de las mujeres y/o del género que ya no atiende a la teoría feminista y a un declive de la academia socialmente activista. Mujeres y varones no pueden ser estudiados de forma aislada de otras construcciones sociales tales como raza/etnicidad, clase social, diversidad sexual, y diferencia cultural. Tal síntesis será difícil sin un retorno a las preocupaciones sobre la epistemología y sobre la generación de preguntas que apenas son abordadas en la psicología feminista estadounidense actual.

Palabras clave: Epistemología; Sexo y género; Diferencias sexuales; Psicología feminista

More than thirty years ago I published an article entitled "Toward a redefinition of sex and gender (Unger, 1979b). The primary purpose of the article was not to change terminology (although this is what it became known for), but to challenge the study of what was then called "sex differences." I believed that the words we used influenced psychologists' assumptions about the causality of so-called differences between females and males. I also believed that the word "sex" was irrevocably connected to assumptions about biological causality.

Gender was still a word largely confined to linguistics although a few psychologists had begun to use the term. Ethel Tobach (1971), for example, made the point that masculine and feminine qualities were ascribed even to inanimate objects based on the gender to which they were linguistically assigned. This point was not, however, picked up by early second wave feminist psychologists.

There were three main strands of critical scholarship among U. S. psychologists doing research and formulating theory on the psychology of women during the early to mid-1970s. These were: demonstrations of sex discrimination in both the laboratory and the field; analyses of how sex-biased theory and method induced different behaviors in females and males; and discussions about the ways sex-related behavioral differences were validated and explained. The psychologists interested in the latter issue were especially interested in demonstrating that so-called sex differences were either unimportant or did not exist. Concern about the origin of difference came later. All of these issues influenced my decision to introduce the term "gender" to the discipline as a whole. In an attempt to add some historical perspective, I will discuss each of these issues in some detail below.

### **Experimental demonstrations of sex discrimination and theories about power and status**

I was trained as an experimental psychologist and was (and still am) interested in empirical demonstrations of sexism at many levels of

society. What are the cues for such discrimination? Some of my first published studies (Raymond & Unger, 1972; Unger, Raymond, & Levine, 1974) involved a series of field experiments on the triggers for discrimination in everyday life. We found that both white women and black men as compared to white men were discriminated against in a variety of everyday circumstances although we also found that deviant (hippie) attire trumped sex and race as stimuli for discrimination. These studies fitted well with earlier studies that demonstrated women's vocational aspirations were influenced by sexist language in job advertisements (Bem & Bem, 1970); that women drivers were more likely than men to be honked at when stopped "too long" at intersections (Deaux, 1971); and that women were less likely to be hired as faculty members in psychology and/or given lower rank and salary than men with identical qualifications (Fidell, 1970).

Most of this early research was atheoretical. Early theory in the psychology of women was largely borrowed from sociology. Sociological theory offered a framework for understanding the underlying social dynamics for differential judgments of various groups. This was particularly important because, unlike other groups, women and men were part of the same relational networks. But the integration of socio-structural factors was relatively late because many early feminist scholars had been trained in personality or clinical psychology (c.f., Unger, 2010). Even social psychology had long been separated from sociology. It took time for U. S. psychologists to recognize the social and societal roots of sexism.

Sociologists were more aware of socio-structural factors. They early explored the idea that sex was a form of ascribed status--one that a person is born with rather than achieves (Berger, Cohen, & Zelditch, 1972; Coser, 1966). Higher status carried with it assumptions about the greater power and privilege of males. Some of these ideas trickled into psychology. Pioneering studies by Nancy Henley (1973, 1977) demonstrated, for example, that males had the "privilege" of touching women or invading their personal space

without females being able to reciprocate. Other early studies explored interpersonal mechanisms that limited women's power. These included discrimination against competent women (Hagen & Kahn, 1975) and differences between women and men in their choice of power strategies when attempting to influence others (Johnson, 1976). Later researchers demonstrated experimentally that such sex-related choices were not simply a reflection of sex-related differential preferences. Women who violate social norms by interrupting men were seen to be rude and unlikable although no such effect was found with same-sex interruptions or when men interrupted women (LaFrance, 1992). These women were upsetting established status hierarchies. Sociologists have long known that the power to interrupt is a mark of status (c.f., Goffman, 1963).

The link between status, power, and gender has long intrigued me. Early in my career I wrote several literature reviews discussing how the idea of sex as a status variable could be used to explain a great deal of psychological research on females and males both as children and adults (Unger, 1976; 1978). One of these papers was entitled "The politics of gender." Its abstract indicates the large and diverse body of literature that I attempted to integrate.

This chapter makes the case for the position that much of the behavioral differences between males and females. Is due to status and power differences rather than sex differences. It is suggested that male gender. In itself, carries with it stimulus value connoting high status and power which is relatively independent of characteristics that are considered to be appropriately masculine or feminine. Treatment of the gender with low ascribed status (i.e., females) parallels the treatment of other low status individuals under all conditions examined. Three aspects of the psychological and sociological. Literature are reviewed in detail with reference to the hypothesis that sex differences can more parsimoniously be viewed as power differences: nonverbal measures of dominance and submissiveness; husband-wife power relationships; and gender differences in small group behavior. ...

Other points raised by this review suggest that performance differences do not easily eliminate sex-related in ascribed status due to differential perceptions of competent performance on the basis of gender. Assertion of competence and power by a female is likely to define her as a deviant and make her liable to social sanctions. Gender/status identity is institutionalized by our society. It is also suggested that the covert role of physical force and differential size and

strength between the sexes may have been underestimated as a source of behavioral differences between them.... (Unger, 1978, p. 463).

Despite the fact that the paper was presented at a prestigious conference funded by U. S. government agencies in 1975 (see the description of the conference and its participants in Unger, 1998) and was subsequently published in an edited book (Sherman & Denmark, 1978), it received very little attention.

There are probably a number of reasons for its lack of impact. First, it drew heavily from sociological theory. Social psychology in the United States had long disengaged from its sociological roots in its quest for scientific rigor in the form of laboratory experimentation (Danziger, 2000). Status and power could not easily be manipulated in the laboratory and certainly did not lend themselves to random sampling and other controls. Second, early work in the psychology of women focused on variables that could be found within "person's heads" rather than in relationships between them. Much of this work examined motivational variables such as "fear of success" or cognitive variables such as internal and external attributions.

Avoidance of socio-structural mechanisms was particularly evident in psychologists' unwillingness to study power. In a content analysis of the research literature I found, for example, that psychologists were much more likely to look at social influence (which can be manipulated in the laboratory) than at how power dynamics play out in the real world (Unger, 1986). As I will discuss later, this individualistic focus of U. S. feminist psychology continues to produce problems for distinguishing between sex and gender.

### **Critique of mainstream theory and practice and the politics of gender**

Critiques of mainstream theory and practice - pioneered by Naomi Weisstein (1968)- was very much part of the Zeitgeist in the 1970s and early 1980s. Many of the feminist psychologists doing this work were relatively young and low in the "pecking order" of academia. Many were either graduate students or untenured faculty. We did not entirely appreciate the professional challenges posed by our attempts to fuse science and advocacy (Unger, 1982). Indeed, a number of early feminist critics did not remain in academia

and since many of their contributions were in the form of conference presentations, their work has largely escaped the attention of historians.

“Toward a redefinition of sex and gender” began life as a paper entitled “The rediscovery of gender” in a symposium I organized for the Eastern Psychological Association in 1977. The title of this symposium was “Sex as a stimulus versus sex as a subject variable”. This was not an entirely new idea. Florence Denmark and I had already used the concept as a play on words for the title of our textbook “Woman: Dependent or Independent Variable?” (Unger & Denmark, 1975). We were trying to make the point that sex could be viewed as a property of individuals or as a stimulus for others’ behavior. Although the language was positivist and not used by feminists today, it was then part of a lively dialogue on sex bias in psychology. Many of the participants in this dialogue were part of a group of feminist psychologists located in and around New York City.

Unfortunately, I did not keep all of these papers and am reluctant to cite work that is not accessible or may not even still exist. Some of these studies were discussed in the introductory chapter of my text “Female and Male” (Unger, 1979a). And some papers were published and are still cited today. These papers discussed, respectively: the need to recognize that sex is a major feature of people’s perceptions of others even during rapid impersonal encounters (Grady, 1975/1979; 1981); the way researchers used different measures of the “same behavior” (aggression) in studies of women and men (McKenna & Kessler, 1977); and the nature of appropriate control groups for comparisons between the sexes (Parlee, 1981). The latter study found that researchers interested in health issues often used sisters as controls for their brothers rather than making comparisons to women in the same occupational roles as the male subjects. These contrasts implied biological rather than social causality.

My paper used the term “gender” to explore questions about what psychologists were actually studying when they looked at sex differences and why they were doing this research at all. The paper was very well received and people urged me to publish it. However, there were few outlets for theoret-

ical work and fewer still for overtly political critique. I believe it was Carolyn Sherif (who was the discussant at this symposium) who urged me to pursue the most prestigious and improbable venue first. I was quite amazed when I received a “revise and resubmit” letter from an editor of the *American Psychologist* (the flagship publication of the American Psychological Association) which stated that although reviewers had found a number of good ideas in the paper, they also found it “too polemical” and it could be considered for publication only if “I toned it down” (see Unger, 1998, pp. 92 - 93 for the final three paragraphs that I removed—these discussed the role of feminism in psychology).

Why is this story relevant? It reflects the ambivalent relationship that U.S. feminists had and continue to have with mainstream psychology. We have been successful in using their tools to challenge some of the most sexist aspects of terminology and methodology. We have been less successful in influencing its epistemological underpinnings. In particular, we have had little impact on U. S. psychology’s love affair with quantitative data and the implications that beliefs about value-neutrality and objectivity have on psychologists’ conceptualizations about the nature of human beings (Unger, 1983).

We have yet to convince psychologists (even many feminist psychologists) to move from a dialogue about methods to a dialogue about epistemology. We have yet to answer Barbara Wallston’s (1981) question about what are the important questions for the psychology of women. This is what I meant when I stated that the question of sex differences is not a feminist question (Unger, 1979b).

What, then, are our questions and how do we answer them? In part, we need to recognize that it is possible to do feminist research without dealing directly with sex or gender. I have tried to do this by examining how implicit ideology influences one’s view about the world (Unger, Draper, & Pendergrass, 1986; Unger, Gareis, & Locher, 2007). In this research we have found repeatedly that there are no significant sex differences in a measure of personal epistemology that ranges from positivist to constructionist views of how the world works although personal epistemology does influence how people view gender.

As I noted in 1979, sources of individual difference other than sex and race have been neglected by psychology. In today's world, religious ideology is very important. It can either interact with gender or override it in attitudes about social and political issues (Unger, 1992; Unger, 2005). I am not the only feminist psychologist interested in the role of covert ideologies. For example, Lauren Duncan (2006) has studied the role of right-wing authoritarianism in shaping attitudes about family life and career choices in young as well as midlife women.

Although feminists have long been aware of the role of sexist ideology in influencing the treatment of women, ideology has not, until recently, been of much interest to psychology as a whole. This is beginning to change although the contributions of feminist psychologists in this area remain unacknowledged (c.f., Jost, 2006). Despite this neglect, feminists need to continue to ask questions about what promotes biologically essentialist views about women and men and how such views are linked to support for inequality and social injustice (see Jost & Hunyady, 2005 for an excellent discussion of the attitudinal and behavioral correlates of various system justifying ideologies).

Ideology also influences when and how messages about difference are transmitted and how they influence our beliefs. We need more studies such as the recent study that documented a correlation between the politically conservative ideology of newspapers and the number of biologically essentialist stories about sex differences that these sources publish (Brescoll & LaFrance, 2004). More frighteningly, this study also found that biological explanations for sex differences influenced students' subsequent endorsement of gender stereotypes and their belief that human behavior cannot be changed.

This study shows how the laboratory can be helpful. Important research has been done there on the mechanisms through which gender is constructed. Although many feminists have discussed the idea of gender as performance, most of the work on the mechanisms of social construction has been done by individuals who do not identify themselves as feminist psychologists. Perhaps this is because the stimulus aspects of sex and other cues such as race/ethnicity appear to involve simi-

lar social cognitive mechanisms. Feminists may have difficulty recognizing this connection if they focus their studies only on women and men.

Since the first edition of our textbook (Unger & Crawford, 1992), we have always devoted an early chapter entitled "Doing Gender" to empirical research on power, the stimulus aspects of sex, and the social construction of gender. Most of this work deals with status and power as well as sex and gender. These social processes include studies of gender as a self-fulfilling prophecy. One such study demonstrated, for example, that individuals who are labeled by the experimenter as either "male" or "female" can be led to behave in stereotypically gendered ways, regardless of their actual sex. These studies, of course, require that the individuals involved communicate via computer, but subtle cues about ascribed sex are sufficient to change the target's behavior without their awareness that their ascribed sex has been manipulated by the experimenter. These studies demonstrate that gender is "performed" in reaction to the behaviors of the person with whom an individual is interacting (Skrypnek & Snyder, 1982).

More recently, researchers have focused on work in the area known as "stereotype threat". A number of well-designed studies have demonstrated that members of marginalized groups such as women or African Americans show decrements in performance when they are exposed to information that indicates the inferiority of their group in the domain being tested (Steele, 1997). And, although these processes appear to be more likely to affect members of marginalized groups with less social power, it is intriguing that white males also perform more poorly on difficult math tests when they are exposed beforehand to information that Asian males outperform white males on them (Aronson, Lustina, Good, Keough, Steele, & Brown, 1999). Although power differences determine which groups are the usual targets of stereotype threat, there are no specific gender nor race differences in how these social psychological mechanisms influence behavior.

### **The problem of sex differences**

Despite epistemological and methodological critiques, U. S. psychology has not yet solved

the problem of what to do about sex differences. This has been an area of concern from the earliest days of second wave feminism. Indeed, first wave feminist psychologists also tackled the issue. Stephanie Shields (1975a & b) has provided well documented and incisive articles on the history of sex difference research by the first wave of feminist psychologists. Despite intensive, exhaustive, and successful studies to refute hypotheses purportedly demonstrating the superiority of males, they were not successful in changing the frame. Whenever their research failed to support any particular biologically determinist theory of sex differences, male researchers simply shifted to another domain.

A similar exhaustive effort to test the validity of sex differences in a variety of areas during the early years of second wave feminism (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974) also met the same fate. Despite their demonstration that sex differences were inconsistent or nonexistent in most psychological domains, psychology textbooks reported extensively only on those four areas where the researchers concluded that they had found sex differences.

Second wave feminists have spent more than thirty years debunking the idea that women and men are different in essential ways and demonstrating that sex similarities are more important than sex differences (see Hyde, 2005; Eagly & Diekmann, 2006; and Barnett & Rivers, 2004 for important recent work in the area). However, even when the work was engagingly written by a well-known social psychologist/journalist with good media contacts (Tavris, 1992), her book entitled "The Mismeasure of Women" never achieved the best-selling status that anecdotal accounts arguing that the sexes are from different planets routinely receive.

The question of sex differences is not a feminist question. It is also not a question that can be resolved. This is because the question is an epistemological rather than an empirical one. In 1979 I listed some of the reasons why those of us interested in gender should not concern ourselves with sex differences:

1. The questions of sex differences are someone else's questions—they do not, of themselves, illuminate the mechanisms that create such differences. In fact, they may obscure the origin of such differences by leading us to believe that biological explanations are sufficient for understanding these behaviors. It is also important to

remember that biological determinants which are used to distinguish between groups are sometimes chosen for other than scientific, objective reasons.

2. One cannot prove the null hypothesis and anyway, the argument can just shift to another phenomenon.

3. Examination of sex differences obscures the examination of sex similarities. Sex similarities are not as dramatic and are less likely to be published than sex differences. The fact that the sexes are similar in far more ways than they are different is not considered startling psychological news.

4. Analyses based on sex differences tend to imply a trait view of psychology that obscures the situational determinants of behavior. Under many conditions the constraints of the situation tend to play a larger role in determining the individual's behavior in that context than do the psychological characteristics the individual brings to that situation.

5. Studies of sex differences do not examine behaviors in which the rate is virtually zero for one sex. Thus, we do not find studies of sex differences in rape. And until recently, there was no comparison of periodic male and female cycles. In a sense, therefore, studies concentrate on those areas in which males and females are least different. (Unger, 1979b, pp. 1089 - 1090).

Despite these unresolved issues, many feminist psychologists continue to do such studies. Both mainstream and feminist journals (the *American Psychologist* and *Feminism & Psychology*) featured dialogues on the matter with an equal number of feminist psychologists weighing in on each side of the discussion (c.f., Eagly, 1995; Kitzinger, 1994).

### **Did the addition of the word "gender" change psychology?**

Of course, one can raise similar objections to examinations of gender differences. And there are reasons to believe that only the words have changed. David Haig (2004) documented the rise in the use of the word "gender" in psychological journals beginning in about 1980 whereas the use of the word "sex" remained flat or declined. However, he also found that differentiation between the terms remained vague. Occasionally, one even finds studies of animals that indicate their gender. Perhaps the most ironic example of terminological confusion is that of the journal "Sex Roles" which retains its name, but mandates authors to use the word "gender" in their articles (Chirsler, 2007). It is not, therefore, surprising that students are confused too.

When asked about the sex/gender distinction recently, many students were perplexed and believed that “sex” is an outdated word for talking about “gender” (Capdevila, 2007).

Part of the problem is that feminist psychology has still not come to terms with the epistemological assumptions induced by the words we use. For example, we cannot agree on what underlies either sex or gender (see Deaux, 1993; Unger & Crawford, 1993). These arguments have become even more complicated as we consider the properties of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered individuals (Smith, Johnson-Robledo, McHugh, & Chrisler, 2010). We have known about “doing gender” for a long time (c.f., West & Zimmerman, 1987), but have not yet become accustomed to the myriad ways that individuals can “do sex”.

### **A brief examination of current dialogues**

Most of the work that is discussed in this article derives from what is often termed “feminist empiricism”. This is partly because feminist psychologists maintain a dialogue with a mainstream field that remains committed to scientific “rigor”. If feminist psychologists want to change the discipline we must engage with its language and concepts while retaining a critical view of both.

But feminist psychology is also informed by postmodernism with its emphasis on the social construction of reality as well as the political nature of that reality. Meredith Kimball has pointed out repeatedly that sex differences and similarities are not a dichotomy but a necessary contradiction:

By this, I mean that there is no one single answer to whether sex similarities or differences are more true or accurate even within one area—e.g., interpersonal violence. Always context is important. Some constructions will generate gender similarities and some will generate gender differences. What is important is that we always pay attention to context and to see how changes in the context challenge our previous understandings. (Kimball, 2007, pp. 456 - 457).

These ideas challenge traditional mainstream ideas about universal laws of behavior. They also blur the distinction between the study of the individual and the study of the social world. It is noteworthy that Kimball, unlike most psychologists, has chosen to focus on

both individuals and groups during her long career (c.f., Kimball, 1995).

Abigail Stewart is another feminist psychologist who has been influenced by postmodernism who has also focused on both individuals and the social forces that influence collective behavior. One of her recent major contributions to the dialogue on sex and gender is to redefine gender as a political phenomenon rather than a property of either individuals or social interactions (Stewart & McDermott, 2004). In this definition, gender is a fundamental part of the social structure that controls individual behavior. Unfortunately, little attention has been paid to this kind of definition of gender in most feminist discussions of gender as a property of individuals.

But postmodernism also produces problems and unresolved questions. Language and metaphor do not fully explain human realities and may lead us further and further away from lived experience. Lived experience involves not only the individual’s interpretation of reality but also reality’s response to him or her (as manifested in others’ behaviors).

Gender-differentiating behaviors have real world consequences that cannot be ignored. Scholarship uses words, but it is not just about words. Problems such as violence, inequality, and social injustice do not go away because we understand their socially constructed nature. Feminist questions must be examined in terms of what impact they have on reality even as we argue about whether or not there is such a thing as reality.

### **Scholarship and social change**

Some activist scholars who seek meaningful social change are not part of dialogues about epistemology and the nature of reality. They have worked on problems involving the education of incarcerated women (Torre & Fine, 2005); the sexual implications of torture (Zurbriggen, 2005); and the impact of inequalities based on social class (Lott & Bullock, 2007). Other feminist psychologists who have contributed a great deal to theory have moved to more applied work. These include work on violence against women (Barata & Senn, 2003) and on how to bring more women into science and engineering (Settles, Cortina, Malley, & Stewart, 2006). It is a distressing limitation of feminist psychology in the United States that it does not usually

acknowledge applied research. This work is not often cited by textbooks on the psychology of women as an integral part of the field.

It is important to understand the politics of psychology as well as the politics of gender. The issue of how to generate hypotheses in order to ask meaningful questions has not been solved. Feminist critique has shifted focus over time from the language we use to define our concepts; to the methods we use to create them; and to the covert ideologies that lead us to believe that some ways of looking at reality are more true than others. But an examination of even feminist journals shows very little methodological change although the populations studied have become more diverse and some studies have become more applied. Many researchers continue to use methods that are easy to operationalize and do not question how and why they are using particular methods. This is not a new problem. Martha Mednick (1989) has written eloquently about a “bandwagon effect” and the tendency to reproduce research that use only the most popular constructs without questioning them.

Part of the problem is how easily we forget our history. This neglect is facilitated by short introductions to journal articles that focus only upon the most relevant and recent research. This leads to a lot of measures that seem little different from earlier ones and appear to be “clean-ups” rather than conceptual breakthroughs. But another part of the problem is that the field appears to have lost the passion that led many of us into it. One finds few papers with the passion (and humor) found in the work of some of its pioneers (c.f., Sherif, 1979). Is this what happens when we separate our scholarship from advocacy for social change?

### **Conclusions**

If someone asked me today, I would probably define both sex and gender as social constructs and argue that any biological underpinnings are irrelevant to those who are interested in psychological reality. Biology may influence how individuals see themselves, who they attracted to as sexual partners, and how they behave under some conditions, but it is the responses of others that maintain a sex/gender system.

What we know today is that human beings are very complicated and that simple dichotomies of male and female do not work. Neither do simple dichotomies between sex and gender. Like many other so-called dichotomies, the debate between working within and working from outside the mainstream also seems to be a false dichotomy. We need to recognize the limits of doing either one alone. Working inside can lead to cooption and working outside can lead to marginalization (Michelle Fine, personal communication, May 21, 2007).

We have a rich past and present, but what is the future of feminist psychology? U. S. feminist psychologist cannot be complacent. Fewer and fewer young women are willing to identify with the term “feminist” although they agree with many of its positions (Zucker, 2004). Many believe all of the problems of gender inequality have been solved and/or cling to individual rather than social and cultural explanations for social injustice. Where is the new cohort of feminist scholars to come from?

There are now many more women psychologists than when I received my Ph.D. in 1966. If one looks at the expansion of journals on the psychology of women, there are also more people doing research in this area. I am not sure how many of these younger researchers would characterize themselves as feminists nor do I know what they would mean if they did so. The cohort of feminists in academia is aging and when well-known feminists leave their positions, these are not always filled by another feminist. Who will mentor and train the next cohort?

Many academic institutions have shifted the titles of their programs from women’s to gender studies. While some argue that the psychology of gender is more inclusive, it is also less overtly political (LaFrance, Paluck, & Bescoll, 2004). Textbooks in this area are also more likely to look at sex differences than texts in the psychology of women (Unger, 2004). Although we know the power of words, few of the textbooks in this area include much discussion about feminism.

Few current textbooks in the psychology of women and gender deal with the conceptual distinction between sex and gender or discuss it only to deny that the distinction is meaningful today. I agree it probably is not. Per-

haps we could/should have predicted the current conflation of sex and gender from the absence of feminist theory from much of present discourse.

Rather than end on a pessimistic note, there are some promising developments. Some theorists have become concerned about differences among women rather than differences between women and men. The concept of “intersectionality” is particularly promising because it incorporates the perspectives of black as well as white feminist psychologists (c.f., Cole, 2009; Shields, 2008). It posits that individual identity is fluid and shifts depending on whether gender, race, or class is more salient at any given time. This theory brings the social system inside the individual and is certainly less reductionist than most psychological theories. This theory also brings in cultural factors and may reduce the hegemonic influence of scholarship based primarily on professional literature from the English-speaking world.

Qualitative, narrative, and various forms of action research are more popular outside of the United States than within it. There have, however, been few attempts to reconcile these perspectives with beliefs about the objectivity of quantitative methods and the validity of laboratory experiments. When feminist scholars ignore mainstream demands they expose themselves to multiple charges of deviance. In addition to the still problematic practice of focusing on women (which may be one of the reasons that the study of gender differences is still so popular today), they are open to charges of violating scientific norms of value neutrality as well as concerns about the objectivity of their methods. Michelle Fine (2006) addressed the latter issue in an outline for a fictional methods text. She examined questions of objectivity and subjectivity, history and psychology, relations among units of analysis, expert and construct validity, and the ever-thorny issue of generalizability. It is noteworthy that Fine drew her inspiration from black and liberation psychologists as well as from feminists. It is also noteworthy that this essay was not published in a feminist journal.

Feminist theory needs to be practiced. It needs to be scrutinized. The basic feminist question is: For whom are we doing this work and why? At its best, it can change the world

as well as inform our scholarly communities. If we are lucky, it may ignite our passions. But it is clear that we need to generate the “right questions” because if we ask the wrong ones, those who wish to maintain the status quo will not have to worry about our answers.

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Unger, Rhoda K. (2010). What We Look For is What We Find. *Quaderns de Psicologia*, 12 (2), 35-46. Extraído el [día] de [mes] del [año], de <http://www.quadernsdepsicologia.cat/article/view/841>

#### HISTORIA EDITORIAL

Recibido: 15/06/2010

Aceptado: 17/09/2010