



Feminist Theories Within, Invisible To, and Beyond IR

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I WOULD FIRST LIKE TO thank the editors of *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* for devoting an issue to “feminist theory and its future within International Relations.” The title of my essay was prompted by a series of questions the editors posed as guidelines for contributing authors. Suggested topics ranged from “the debate(s) on feminism” to “feminism in relation to IR,” and “feminist theory in relation to policy.” It struck me that the questions within each topic indicated a variety of assumptions about “feminism,” “theory,” and “international relations” that seemed to reflect what currently passes for awareness of and knowledge about feminist theory within IR. As a feminist-IR theorist, however, I found these assumptions familiar but largely mistaken.

Insofar as such assumptions *do* reflect how feminist-IR is generally perceived, they also reveal the narrowness of that perception and its failure to encompass what I consider the most significant—indeed the most *theoretical*—aspects of feminist-IR. Making sense of the discrepancy between ‘my take’ and the ‘received view’ suggested a strategy for responding to the editors’ invitation.

I therefore attempt in this essay (and not for the first time¹) to clarify my understanding of feminist theories and their relationship to theorizing ‘within’ and ‘beyond’ mainstream IR. In the process, I address a number of the questions posed by the editors, specifically:

Has the proliferation of feminist theory put to rest the debate over the field’s legitimacy in the academy? Does feminist theory still lack an additive/(trans)formative element? What misunderstandings remain unresolved in these debates? What impact has feminist theory had on ‘mainstream’ IR theory? Which feminisms have proven successful? Why? How has feminist theory evolved since its initial emergence in IR theory? What areas of IR do you foresee feminist theory exploring in the future?

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WHAT IS FEMINIST THEORY?

For decades feminists have insisted that there is no single ‘feminist theory’ just as there is no single IR, or realist, or constructivist theory. Rather, there is a wide range of theories linked by their attention to social differentiations based on sex (presumably ‘empirical’ distinctions between embodied males and females), or more recently, gender (socially constructed distinctions between privileged masculine and devalored feminine characteristics).

It is possible, of course, to study patterns of sex and gender differentiation without being critical of the power inequalities they have historically entailed. Insofar as non-critical studies effectively *validate* sex and gender inequalities, they have an ambiguous relationship to *feminist* theorizing. The term feminist, I would argue, is more appropriately reserved for studies and theories that are *critical* of masculinism and gender hierarchy.²

Hence, while feminist theories are in the first instance about analyzing the world more adequately than mainstream theory, they are at the same time about enabling a world with more equitable sex/gender relations. In this sense they are self-consciously “political,” though the politics they advocate vary.³ Most familiar are distinctions among liberal, Marxist, radical, and postcolonial feminisms, but analytical commitments (as described below) also differentiate feminist theories and their political implications.

Critique and self-reflection are integral to feminist theories in an additional sense. The diversity among women has forced feminists to take seriously such power-laden questions as: Who is included and who excluded in current definitions of ‘woman’ and ‘feminism’? Who is empowered to represent or speak for ‘women’? Whose interests (which actual women and men) are served by context-specific feminist or women’s movement agendas? Feminist theories then are not only about advancing some group called ‘women’ but also *interrogating the power to specify* insiders-outsiders, movement agendas, and even the progressiveness of theory and practice that claim to be feminist.

Insofar as feminist theories are a product of the academy, it is also important to note their multi-disciplinary features. This is atypical of academic theorizing, which has traditionally emerged from—and tends to reproduce—disciplinary boundaries and distinct methodological commitments. In contrast, ‘women’s studies’ and feminist theorizing have always challenged familiar academic boundaries, and especially, blinders imposed by disciplinary narrowness.

In addition to being critical and cross-disciplinary, feminist theories vary along a continuum of analytical commitments. I refer here to various ways of thinking about ‘women,’ sex, and gender in relation to the production of knowledge claims. At issue are the implications of differing ontological and epistemological starting points. In



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other words, assumptions made about the how we categorize ‘things’ and how we produce “truth claims” affect theorizing and further differentiate feminist theories.

A CONTINUUM OF FEMINIST THEORIES

To help clarify how feminist theories constitute a wide spectrum of political and analytical positions, I identify three *overlapping* feminist knowledge projects in relation to IR. These projects have emerged sequentially in IR but all can be found in contemporary scholarship, and combinations are the norm. Positions along the continuum link and reflect varying analytical commitments that are conventionally cast as positivist/empiricist, constructivist, and interpretivist (postmodernist/poststructuralist).

Across disciplines, the initial feminist project is typically one of *exposing the extent and effects of masculinist bias*. In this project, the omission of actual women and their activities is revealed, and how ‘woman’ is represented as deviant from or deficient in respect to andocentric (male-as-norm) criteria is documented. Within IR for example, the assumed model of ‘human nature’ (as atomistic, self-serving, acquisitive, competitive) is in fact based upon a particular subset of humans (elite males) in a particular historical context (modern Europe). These are not universal categories or conditions and are therefore suspicious as universalizing claims about all humans—or even all males—at all times.⁴

Similarly, the discipline of IR is dominated by Anglo- and Euro-centric male practitioners and by masculinist constructs such as sovereignty, national security, and military strength. It is a discipline focused on public sphere activities (power politics, foreign policy, war) that are defined as masculine and dominated by men. Feminists thus reveal how women, activities associated with women, and/or constructs, identities, practices, and institutions associated with femininity are rendered invisible by IR’s preoccupation with men and masculinized activities.

Attempts to rectify the systematic exclusion of women and the denigration of the feminine constitute a second project: correcting androcentric bias by *adding women and their experiences to existing frameworks*. To focus on women’s lives and private sphere activities involves new sources and topics (e.g., diaries, domestic activities) and prompts a re-evaluation of old ones. We learn more about everyday life but also more about men and conventional themes. In other words, popular and scholarly attention typically focuses on ‘the main story’ that is made up of what men do: work and decision-making in the public sphere. But the ‘background’ to the main story—and upon which it depends—is rarely visible, and hence the interdependence of both is erased. When we attend to women’s lives we make that background and interdependence visible, and increase what we know about the main story and its primarily male protagonists.



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Apparently, the most familiar feminist work corresponds to this second project and asks “where are the women?” in the context of mainstream IR topics. For example, feminists recast the stag hunt analogy by asking where the women are and how each man’s familial relationships affect his hunting priorities. By ignoring these aspects, the stag hunt is a misleading analogy for the behavior of states, which also depends on domestic arrangements. Other feminists recast security by asking how women are affected by war and whether the pursuit of guns over butter is in *their* interest. Historically, these shifts have led to greater understanding of global issues. Adding women to models of economic development exposed, for example, how assuming Western divisions of labor in Africa impaired development efforts. Programs that directed agricultural training and credit to men denied women’s traditional role as farmers, actually decreased their well-being, and effectively undermined agricultural development projects.

More recent literature adds women and an exploration of gender to international political economy, where women’s work significantly shapes national productivity and resources. Women are key, as ever, to the reproduction of future workers, soldiers, mothers, and citizens. They figure prominently in informal activities, household consumption, and marketing strategies and ‘take up the slack’ when states cut back on public provision of welfare, serving as a buffer between family needs and decreasing resources. As cheapened and flexible sources of labor, women are preferred workers in today’s global economy, and the percentage of women in employment is increasing worldwide. Yet poverty remains feminized insofar as women head one-third of the world’s households, bear a double- and triple-burden of work (in the household, informal, and formal sectors), and enter employment as “unskilled,” poorly paid, and first-to-be-fired workers. In short, although feminized work is devalued, it is essential to the economic order and thus to economic analyses.

Making women empirically visible is indispensable, and is the most familiar and most widely accepted feminist intervention in IR. It exposes the androcentric assumptions of conventional accounts, inserts actual (embodied) women in our picture of ‘reality,’ and reveals women as agents and activists, as well as victims of violence and the poorest of the poor. These are important and innovative insights and to the extent that they are noticed at all by the mainstream, they tend to be ‘accepted’ as empirically sound observations and hence have ‘legitimacy’ within IR.

At the same time, these observations appear to have little impact on ‘IR theory’ and are certainly not transforming it. Why? Empirical data may be accepted as accurate but not necessarily as relevant. Viewed through a mainstream lens, the agents identified in feminist accounts are neither the powerful players on the global stage, nor are their activities of central importance. Therefore, feminist empiricism may be deemed legitimate, even ‘successful,’ because it increases (by ‘adding to’) the body of IR knowledge, but the main-



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stream considers it marginal to the ‘real’ issues that preoccupy IR theorists.

What the mainstream (and even some critical theorists) seem to miss is that “adding women” to existing paradigms also reveals how deeply the analytical frameworks—theories—their presuppose male experience and viewpoint. In other words, it reveals the extent to which excluding women/femininity is a fundamental structuring principle of conventional thought, discourse, and theorizing. With the second project we begin to see that women cannot simply be ‘added’ to constructions that are literally defined by being masculine: for example, the public sphere, the military, rationality, political identity, objectivity, ‘economic man.’ Either

women as feminine cannot be added (i.e., women must become like men) or the constructions themselves are transformed (i.e., adding women as feminine alters their masculine premise and changes their meaning).

Thus, gender is not simply an empirical category that refers to embodied men and women and their material activities but also a systematically *analytical category* that refers to constructions of (privileged) masculinity and (devalored) femininity and their ideological effects.

These observations render the second project more disruptive (and less acceptable?) than it initially appears. In reality, adding women forces us to deepen our interrogation, to rethink foundational categories that are biased toward male bodies, experience, and knowledge claims. This rethinking draws us into the third overlapping project of the continuum: *reconstructing theory*.

It is here that the distinction between sex and gender becomes crucial.⁵ In contrast to positivist/empiricist notions of sex (as a biologically ‘natural,’ binary of male-female), gender is a historically contingent *social construction* that dichotomizes identities, behaviors, and expectations as masculine-feminine. As a social construct, gender is not “natural” or “given” but learned (and therefore mutable). Most significantly, gender is not simply a trait of individuals but an institutionalized, structural feature of social life.

On the one hand, gender is a socially imposed and internalized “lens” through which individuals perceive themselves and the world. On the other hand, the pervasiveness of gendered meanings shapes concepts, practices, identities, and institutions in patterned ways. Thus, gender is not simply an empirical category that refers to embodied men and women and their material activities but also a systematically *analytical category* that refers to constructions of (privileged) masculinity and (devalored) femininity and their ideological effects. In effect, “all of social life is gendered.”⁶

For example, as a *structural* feature of social life, gender pervades language, deter-



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mining how we identify, conceptualize, and communicate. It structures divisions of power and authority, determining whose voices, interests, and experiences dominate culturally and coercively. And it structures divisions of labor, determining what counts as work, who does what kind of work, whose work is highly valued, whose is devalued, and how compensation for work is distributed.

My description suggests that as we move through overlapping projects and along the continuum, feminist theories focus less on sex as an empirical variable and more on gender as an analytical category. In particular, feminists explore how the interdependence of masculine-feminine works *conceptually* and hence, the significance of gender in how we *think* as well as how we act. In sum, the shift from the second to the third project—and from sex to gender—entails a shift from ‘adding’ empirically to ‘rethinking’ analytically.

Accordingly—and consistent with constructivist and interpretivist perspectives—other conventional categories and dichotomies are no longer taken for granted but problematized. There is more attention paid to symbols, language, representations, and culture, and a greater interrogation of foundational constructs (power, security, rationality, development, violence). Similarly, there is more evidence of theoretical discussion and debate, and more self-consciousness about analytical assumptions and how they frame the questions asked, the methods adopted, and the politics involved.

This is especially telling in how ‘gender’ is deployed. As we move through feminist projects and along the continuum, gender refers less to taken-for-granted categories of male-female (which reproduces the terms as an empirically ‘given’ binary) and more to the socially constructed (historical and power-laden) hierarchy of masculine-feminine as interdependent constructs. The latter denies the assumption of sex or gender as “natural” rejects an oppositional (either/or) framing of terms, and politicizes the denigration of feminized traits and people. And it reconstructs theory by clarifying the implications of gender as analytical and structural.

First, regarding gender as analytical and structural means that claims about femininity are necessarily also claims about masculinity. Because they are interdependent constructs, the study of men and masculine activities *requires* the study of women and the feminine. In this sense, feminist IR does not just tell us something about women but necessarily alters our knowledge of men and the valorization of masculinist thinking and doing that is so definitive of IR. Feminist interventions are thus central, not peripheral to IR theory, though this is hardly appreciated by the mainstream.

Second, gender as analytical and structural means that gender pervades our conceptual and communicative world, which necessarily has political effects. Because gender is hierarchical and interdependent, the privilege and power attributed to masculine qualities *depends on* the devalorization of feminized qualities. Empirically, this applies



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to all embodied objects and persons who are denigrated by association with the feminine: not only ‘women’ but also nature, racialized minorities, effeminate men, and colonized ‘others.’

Therefore, feminists theorize that not only gender hierarchy but domination more generally is naturalized (depoliticized, legitimated) by denigration of the feminine, and it is the feminization of “others” that links multiple oppressions.⁷ One implication is that for critiques of domination in its various guises (environmental degradation, racism, heterosexism, colonialism)

to be effective, they *must* incorporate feminist critiques of the denigration of the feminine.⁸ In other words, because denigration of the feminine serves to naturalize (depoliticize) a range of oppressive relations, we cannot eliminate oppression until

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we eliminate the hierarchical gender dichotomy that sustains it. Feminist theories are thus transformative because they address not only sex and gender oppression but all oppressions linked by denigration of the feminine.

Third, conceiving of gender as analytical and structural means that ways of thinking and even specific theories may be characterized as more or less masculinist (objective, rational, realist, quantitative, rigorous, parsimonious, formal, scientific, demanding) and hence, more or less valorized. On this view, feminists theorize that critics of masculinist theories encounter resistance not only to their argumentation per se but also to the ‘demasculinization’ (feminization) of IR theory their arguments entail. One implication is that for critiques of IR (and other masculinist) theories to be effective, they must take seriously how masculinist ways of thinking and knowing are privileged. In effect, they must acknowledge gender as an analytic category and embrace the feminist theories that explore this insight.

These are “big” claims and suggest what I consider the unique, powerful and transformative implications of feminist theorizing within IR. It is in this third project that feminist theories “come into their own” as feminist scholars engage specifically in reconstructing theory and expanding metatheoretical inquiry. It is here that feminist theories are uniquely *transformative*; they do not simply ‘add to’ but subvert and rewrite IR theory. Indeed, I would argue that the third project constitutes the cutting edge not only of feminist theory specifically but also IR theorizing, and indeed of all social theorizing in the broadest sense.⁹ Since it is here that feminist *theories* are most developed, I believe the third project should be a focal point of ‘debates on feminism’



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and of assessing ‘feminist theory and IR.’

Instead (and as the questions posed for this issue indicate), these theoretical insights appear invisible to the IR mainstream and omitted from the general perception of feminist-IR. More specifically, it is the third project that is least familiar to—and certainly not ‘successful’ or accepted by—mainstream IR. Why is this and what does it mean for “the future of feminist theory within IR”? I conclude my essay with a tentative and abbreviated attempt to answer these questions, and in the process shed additional light on the questions posed by the editors.

WHY IS THIS THE CASE?

To organize my answer I distinguish between political and analytical elements, though these are inextricable in reality. In regard to *political* elements, it seems fair to observe that feminist critiques are rarely welcomed and are typically resisted both within and outside of the academy. The pervasiveness of this opposition—and the resurgence of neoconservative and fundamentalist ideologies that are inherently masculinist—makes it hard to distinguish between a general anti-feminism and specific resistance to feminist critiques of IR. It would certainly be naïve, however, to deny that anti-feminist sentiments are powerful and that they serve variously to marginalize and obscure feminist insights and interventions.¹⁰

Moreover, the theory and practice of IR is dominated by *men* who engage in and study *masculinized* activities, and do so through *androcentric* lenses. As already noted, women can be added to this picture without necessarily disturbing what is foregrounded in it. But analytically and structurally exposing how gender operates to constitute the theory and practice of IR is thoroughly disruptive. It disturbs foundational concepts, conventional dichotomies, familiar explanations, and even the discipline’s boundaries. It effectively demasculinizes the discipline. I believe that many who sense these systemic implications resist feminism not because they deny its truths but because they prefer their investment in the current arrangements of sex, gender, IR, and theory.

In regard to *analytical* elements, I will make three points. First, IR is not noted for its metatheoretical rigor or critical self-reflection. Advocates of mainstream theories and methods seem content to leave epistemological and ontological debates to the margins of IR or to philosophers outside of the discipline. One widely-noted result is a lack of actual debate and dialogue regarding theoretical claims; the most we manage is talking past each other. Another is the relative lack of familiarity with social theory debates more generally, including those that animate feminisms and generate their most transformative insights.

Second and closely related, insofar as mainstream theorists are unfamiliar with



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and perhaps resistant to theoretical debates, they are rarely well-informed about them. This exacerbates a tendency to ignore, misunderstand, or prematurely dismiss theoretical developments at odds with mainstream orthodoxy. Feminists are not necessarily singled out here; all critiques of dominant theories and methods appear subject to this marginalization or dismissal. But insofar as feminist theories are the least familiar and raise the most unorthodox questions, they are especially subject to this fate.

Third and related to the disturbance effect noted above, insofar as mainstream theorists *do* grasp the systemic implications of taking gender seriously, they may resist the disruption of disciplinary givens (and career trajectories!?) that extensive rethinking entails. This may involve resistance to problematizing objectivity, abandoning disciplinary givens, rethinking models and methods, reframing research agendas, recognizing complicity, or taking responsibility for the power we wielded by theorists.

Resistance may be more or less conscious and more or less fueled by personal, professional, analytical and political investments. But the collective and cumulative effect is that only a narrow understanding of feminist theories occurs within the discipline. The empirical move of 'adding women' to existing frameworks is relatively acceptable and legitimate: it conforms to positivist/empiricist commitments and *appears* to add knowledge without disrupting the discipline's fundamentals. The liberal move of creating space for women in the discipline, for feminist panels at conferences, and for gender-oriented chapters in edited volumes is welcome and important. And like adding women to masculinist constructs, these moves too have more radical, transformative potential.

But realizing that potential requires movement toward the third project and this does not appear to be happening. The *analytical move* of 'examining gender' is neither well understood nor generally accepted by the mainstream. Feminist theories have indeed 'evolved' since their emergence in IR but the effects of this are muted. Whatever the reasons for it, feminist theories with the most significant, systemic and transformative implications remain invisible within IR.

I have already noted the relative lack of informed debate and dialogue within the discipline. Alternative, critical and dissident voices other than feminist theories are also relegated to the margins and left to their own devices. This is not to argue that IR is static or that critiques have had no impact on the mainstream. It is rather to note the relative weakness of these effects, and the resistance of the mainstream to contending approaches.

In regard to feminism specifically, the discipline's empirical and liberal 'acceptance' of adding women and creating space for feminist voices is a significant and desirable adjustment. It marks considerable changes in the discipline, and those who took personal and professional risks to support these changes are to be sincerely applauded. However, like racial assimilation policies, it 'offers' acceptance and space en-



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tirely on its own terms. If ‘adding’ stirs up trouble the tendency is to curtail the welcome or trivialize the trouble, thus confirming that transformative moves and their political upheaval are not really ‘acceptable.’

I have argued that feminist theories are understood narrowly within IR and that feminists’ most significant and transformative *theoretical* insights—despite fifteen years of explication—remain invisible to the discipline. At the same time, feminists have a political agenda, and they recognize that change must occur within as well as outside of academic disciplines. Therefore, some feminists keep trying to clarify feminisms and engage mainstream IR in dialogue. But the future of feminist *theories* within IR looks unpromising as long as reigning positivist/empiricist and narrowly rationalist perspectives resist anything other than adding women empirically.

At the same time, feminist theories do not originate within, or remain confined to, IR. Out of frustration or aspiration, many feminists have moved beyond the discipline to forge futures in more receptive, productive, or stimulating locations. For feminists who are comfortable with and may even favor cross-disciplinary engagements, abandoning a “home” discipline and venturing into less bounded terrain is an attractive option. Ambitious theorists might also observe that cutting-edge theory emerges less in confined than in unmapped and less disciplined spaces. Additionally, because feminists have a political agenda, many see their future in a shift from academic commitments to activist engagements.

In short, while IR has made some—and in some ways quite significant—accommodations for women’s participation and feminist ‘additions,’ it has missed the most exciting and transformative elements of feminist *theories*. Instead, feminism ‘within IR’ is narrowly conceived and feminist theoretical insights remain ‘invisible to’ the mainstream. I believe that the discipline’s resistance to self-reflection and systemic, transformative critique(s) has impoverished the development of IR theory. In contrast, feminist theories ‘beyond IR’ continue to develop, even flourish, and to have significant effects on social theory (not in contrast to but) *as practice*.

NOTES

1. This essay draws variously on—and goes beyond—a series of earlier efforts to clarify feminist theories in relation to IR (see V. Spike Peterson: “Transgressing Boundaries: Theories of Knowledge, Gender, and International Relations,” *Millennium* 21, 2 (Summer 1992): 183-206; “A ‘Gendered Global Hierarchy?’” in *Contending Images of World Politics*, ed. Greg Fry and Jacinta O’Hagan, London: Macmillan (2000): 199-213; “On the Cut(ting) Edge,” in *Millennial Reflections on International Studies*, ed. Michael Brecher and Frank Harvey, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press (2002): 289-300; and *A Critical Rewriting of Global Political Economy: Integrating Reproductive, Productive, and Virtual Economies*. London: Routledge (2003)).

2. I understand masculinism as the discursive, cultural, material, and structural privileging of that which is associated with ‘maleness’ or masculinity (which is not limited to men) over that which is associ-



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ated with 'femaleness' or 'femininity' (which is not limited to women). Gender hierarchy refers to the institutionalized dominance of males over females (e.g., men's domination of economic, political, military and religious power) *and* its legitimation/depoliticization through masculinist ways of identifying, thinking and practicing (e.g., heterosexual subjectivities, foundational dichotomies, rationalistic/scientific paradigms, fundamentalist religious dogma, heteronormative family relations, militarization of culture).

3. Because all theorizing begins from some particular location and favors some interests over others, all theorizing is political; feminists and other critical theorists are distinctive for acknowledging this and addressing the power relations it entails.

4. Consider how a model of human nature based on females whose mother would foreground not independence, selfishness or competition but mutual aid, 'altruism,' and cooperation—i.e., *relationships*—insofar as these are essential for sustaining group existence. It is not simply that women as mothers are doing something different than men (and that mothering is more transhistorical than accumulating or warring!), but that the very existence of adult males *depends on* mothering activities. To ignore these truths generates a deficient—because *unrealistic*—model of 'human' nature.

5. This distinction has been productive for feminist scholarship but carries its own dangers insofar as it tends to essentialize sex as a biological given rather than insisting on *both* terms as historically contingent social constructions (e.g., Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, New York: Routledge, 1990).

6. The objectivist underpinnings of Western philosophy and positivism have naturalized a series of binaries that are also inextricably gendered, privileging the first (masculine) term in each dichotomy: mind-body, reason-emotion, fact-value, self-other, culture-nature, order-disorder, autonomy-dependence, freedom-necessity, public-private, production-reproduction. These gendered dichotomies pervade language, dominant conceptual paradigms, and even "common sense." In the third project of reconstructing theory, feminists join other critics of positivism who challenge essentialist categories and dichotomies. But they also go further, to argue that the ruling dichotomies of Western thought are fundamentally gendered; they constitute and reproduce a hierarchy of male/masculinity over female/femininity (e.g., Susan J. Hekman, *Gender and Knowledge: Elements of a Postmodern Feminism*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990). Understanding gender as an *analytical* category thus enabled feminists to criticize not only the exclusion and/or denigration of females (as a sex category) but also the masculinist constructs that underpin philosophy (reason, abstraction), political theory (atomistic individualism, sovereignty), economic models (rational choice, waged labor), and science (objectivity, dichotomies).

7. Briefly: the naturalization of women's oppression—taking gender hierarchy as 'given' rather than historically, politically constructed—*serves as the model for depoliticizing exploitation more generally*. That is, feminists argue that gender hierarchy is not 'natural' or inevitable' as it is typically represented but socially constructed and historically contingent. Masculinist ways of thinking, however, perpetuate a denigration of the feminine that serves to naturalize/depoliticize domination of feminized objects and 'Others.' In effect, the ostensible naturalness of binary sex difference and masculine dominance is thus generalized to other forms of domination, which has the effect of legitimating them as equally 'natural' hierarchies. This is quintessentially political, because the justification of oppression as natural is extremely effective and difficult to contest.

8. Another key insight that this affords is that 'adding women' (as an empirical category) may be an effective strategy for improving the lives of (some) women, but it falls far short of taking gender (as an analytical category) seriously. The latter entails politicizing *all* hierarchies that rely on denigration of the feminine. In this sense, a critique of gender hierarchy, that is, a feminist perspective, is a necessary starting point for deconstructing linked oppressions and improving the lives of all who are oppressed.

9. See especially Peterson, 'On the Cut(ting) Edge.'

10. Moreover, feminists long ago observed that the personal is political, and this is especially and painfully true in regard to the politics of gender. When it comes to critiques of gender hierarchy, it is the rare individual who escapes feeling defensive and hence resistant because we all participate—personally and structurally—in reproducing the gender order. And we do so not only in public activities but especially in our bedrooms, nurseries, and kitchens. We are therefore uncomfortable personally as well as politically when confronted by feminist critiques and this, I believe often translates into unconscious and irrational resistance and even aggressive hostility to transformative feminist critique and indeed to feminists.