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Work (still) in progress: Establishing the value of gendered innovations in the social sciences



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The extensive significance of feminist and gender research clearly does not need demonstrating to the audience of this specific journal; yet such recognition of its importance is far from being universal. Feminist economics belongs to a class of approaches stigmatized by the mainstream neoclassical discipline as 'heterodox'. Feminist philosophy, like feminist economics, is largely published outside the discipline's most prestigious journals, and is produced almost exclusively by women. Political science and international relations, likewise, are disciplines that in their mainstream incarnation, seem barely to have begun to engage with gender as a fundamental aspect of all political relations. Although in these disciplines, as across the social sciences, we see vibrant sub-fields, where feminist approaches and gendered analysis are the norm, the degree of gender segregation that often marks such scholarship in terms of practice, impact and citation, is cause for concern. In present institutional contexts, where perceptions of the 'excellence' of research shape funding decisions and career paths, and where many disciplinary fields continue to construct images of the social, economic and political world that are at best indifferent to questions of gender and at worst perpetuate ways of thinking intimately bound up with the preservation of gender inequality and subordination, it may be timely to reflect upon and construct accounts precisely of why gender matters in these fields.

At a conference held at the Australian National University in 2016,¹ we sought to elaborate instances of gendered innovations in the social sciences that would both serve as elucidations of the importance of feminist and gender research to those as yet unfamiliar with or unconvinced of this; and to reflect upon the extent to which recognition of the value of this work had been conceded by mainstreams that all too often remain heavily male dominated. The work forms part of ongoing investigations conducted under the auspices of an Australian Research Council grant into 'Gendered Excellence in the Social Sciences' (GESS).² The aim of our conference was at once to consider how feminist and gender research sharpens and reforms disciplinary approaches, showing

how our understanding of fundamental social science questions is improved by using a gendered analysis; and to compile evidence of the extent to which that promise of progress in knowledge is being realized - or not - through the uptake represented by disciplinary engagement and transformation.

The findings on this latter question vary widely across disciplines, as the paper by Rebecca Pearse, James N. Hitchcock and Helen Keane in this special issue discusses. If we ask how far the ground-breaking work of feminist and gender research has been mainstreamed or acknowledged in its importance by the academic disciplines that are tasked with understanding society, the story is a very mixed one. There appear to be large variations in the extent to which disciplines have become conscious of the importance of gender, with sociology a clear leader in this respect. In this special issue we thus place an overview of empirical research findings about the status and influence of feminist and gender research, based on analysis of citation patterns and other indicators, alongside three 'case studies' of gendered innovations in some of the most problematic disciplines: economics, philosophy and political science.³

Gendered innovations in social sciences have arisen from forms of inquiry that pay attention to multiple differences, modes of inequality, and potentials of human existence that were systemically overlooked or discounted by the androcentric paradigms that have dominated social inquiry. This has meant scholarship that is more adequate to understanding the lives and destinies of half the world's population, as well as the creation of public spaces where women have been able to articulate their individual and collective voices as producers of knowledge since second-wave feminism swept women into the academy. Yet in many respects the task of transforming disciplines by insisting on gender's broad significance is no less necessary today than it was when critical perspectives on androcentric social sciences were first being forged from the 1980s onwards by academic feminism. To be sure, data-driven social science research will now most typically include at least some

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¹ Gendered innovations in the social sciences, Australian National University November 6–9, 2016. <http://genderinstitute.anu.edu.au/gendered-innovations-social-sciences>.

² For further information see <http://genderinstitute.anu.edu.au/gess-home>.

³ Further case studies appear on our GESS project website. Note that the project embraces a broad definition of social sciences that includes the disciplines of philosophy and history.

attention to sex and gender differences, while much more extensive formulations of the importance and impact of gender in social worlds shape interpretative and explanatory approaches in many contexts. Yet the idea of what constitutes innovative or excellent research in the academy remains in multiple respects gendered, and often excludes or diminishes feminist research (Jenkins and Keane, 2014). The innovations that feminist scholars have brought to key academic disciplines have in many cases gone unrecognised and ignored in their implications. It is therefore of value to consider and highlight the extent and nature of the impact of this work, both within and beyond specific disciplines.

In undertaking this project, we have been influenced by the aspirations of the Gendered Innovations project hosted by Stanford University.⁴ This seeks to raise awareness in the broad science community of the importance of sex and gender analysis for all basic research. The website associated with this project, which is focused on Science, Health and Medicine, Engineering and Environmental disciplines, presents a series of case studies illustrating the ways in which androcentric bias and gender blindness has limited, distorted and hindered knowledge in medicine, engineering and biological research. For instance, research into heart disease, as well as many other medical conditions, has often taken male bodies and conditions as the norm, thus missing what are in fact large variations by sex in symptomology and underlying causes; medical research involving animal experimentation has typically failed to take account of the difference the presence of sex hormones can make to reactions to drugs, leading to distorted results and effectively untested drugs being given to women; car seat belts were long-designed with a normal male body imagined to be their wearers, with disastrous consequences for pregnant women; and transport systems designed without considerations of gender differences in daily schedules prove sub-optimal in utility. While strongly endorsing the value of this project in making the case for the importance of recognizing and including sex and gender differences, we became aware of limitations in the model of knowledge and persuasion embedded in the project, at least for our purposes. In turning to consider how 'gendered innovations' in the social sciences might be elaborated, important differences from these STEM discipline examples and the general approach of the Stanford project emerged.

To briefly enumerate some of these, whereas in the Stanford Gendered Innovations examples a positivist account of knowledge supports an additive and corrective model of improvement in research, much feminist scholarship has advocated for post-positivist commitments (Jenkins, 2018). Critical and transformative work is necessary to challenge entrenched androcentric models and basic conceptions of such fundamental elements in disciplinary knowledge as 'the economy', the 'public sphere' or 'freedom and autonomy', all topics explored in the papers that follow. Gendered innovations in social sciences, when pursued at this level, often involve engagement with contested social ontologies, conflicting economic interests and the disturbance of entrenched political arrangements that have long preserved the interests of a small minority. The persuasive power such innovations exert is therefore much less easy to establish than the incontrovertible examples presented as evidence by the Stanford project. At stake in gendered innovations in the social sciences, in many important instances, is the actual *transformation* of gender relations, not simply the tracking of sex and gender differences. Knowledge and power not only prove inseparably intertwined in this perspective, but the model of 'progress' in understanding gendered questions requires reflection on the institutional forms that acknowledgement and recognition, as aspects of promoting or blocking change, may take. Our approach to considering gendered innovations therefore includes acknowledging as historically and critically important the gendered distribution of power in different disciplinary fields, recognizing the ongoing ways in which this shapes

the production and impact of knowledge-claims. Where and how have feminist questions and methodologies received their uptake in the disciplines whose core work comprises accounts of society, the economy and politics? Where and how does gender as a category of analysis appear to matter in social science research? Who does this research?

The locations and occasions of the acknowledgment of gender's importance, whether as a significant empirical variable, or as a modality of power shaping fields of meaning and social relations, might serve to indicate the ways in which disciplinary knowledge has reformed itself - or not - around the questions posed by social movements committed to realizing gender equality and recognizing its absence. A further dimension is important, however, and returns us to reflection on how concerns for gender equality in academic contexts intersect with a concern for the quality of research. Where women have low status and representation in a particular field of knowledge, it seems reasonable to speculate that this leads to undervaluing certain types of knowledge and to underestimating the social effects of gendered inequity. A question to consider in this context, then, is how variation in the uptake of gendered innovations correlates with the rates at which women participate in certain fields or become leaders within them. Far fewer women than men appear at professorial level across most disciplines, but there is considerable variability between them, which leads us to ask how disciplinary norms and practices may function to enhance or diminish gender inequality.⁵ How do knowledge formation and certain characteristic forms of masculine privilege interact, for instance in determining 'mainstream' research agendas? If, in some of the social sciences, women make up less than 15% of the professoriate, it would seem a reasonable hypothesis that this gender imbalance will reflect and reproduce the effect of assumptions about what *kind* of research is most valuable and *whose* research that is. Yet the consequences of that go beyond gender inequalities internal to the academy, for these are the disciplines that should most aid our understanding of how gender works in society. What impact, then, does women's limited influence and status in these key fields of research have upon understanding social realities, or our capacity to grapple with the social, economic and political changes necessary for progress towards gender equality?

The papers in this special issue comprise a sociological approach to mapping the relative status of feminist and gender research across the broad range of social science disciplines, and three 'case studies' of gendered innovations within those disciplines less receptive to feminist and gender research: political science, economics, and philosophy. Pearse et al. (this volume) make an excursion into the sociology of knowledge, and undertake a citation analysis of feminist papers in influential journals in economics, history, international relations, philosophy, political science and sociology, as well as influential feminist journals. While studies of individual disciplines have previously been conducted, this approach is novel in providing a wide-ranging overview and comparison, reflecting on the reasons for the respective place of feminist research in the core or periphery of these disciplines. Editorial positions on a range of influential journals are examined, and gender inequalities are evident for woman as editors and authors for all disciplines. Citation data are presented as evidence of feminist sub-fields being marginalized within disciplines, and that the less permeable a discipline is (e.g. the less interdisciplinary it is in its citation practices), then the more marginal feminist work is. However, this effect seems to be mediated to some extent by the level of congruence between the citation practices of disciplines and the relevant feminist sub-discipline. Overall, feminist research is found to have more general influence in sociology and history, and less in economics, international relations, political science and philosophy. Pearse et al. therefore conclude that gender is a foundational topic in sociology, as it is home to larger

⁴ <https://genderedinnovations.stanford.edu/>.

⁵ For further details see the GESS project website, <http://genderinstitute.anu.edu.au/gess-home>.

proportions of gender-related research than the other disciplines, and evidence points to sociology's interdisciplinary nature allowing feminist knowledge to be more readily absorbed. On a sliding scale, sociology and history are revealed as disciplines where the reception of feminist ideas and research is 'strong', international relations and political science 'modest', and economics and philosophy 'minimal'. The more resistant disciplines are to absorbing feminist knowledge, then the less is the likelihood of gendered innovations and disciplinary transformation.

S. Laurel Weldon (in press) presents an account of what feminist innovations in political science have taught us about power and gender, how this has influenced political science as a discipline, and what gender studies can learn from feminist political science. She asks how, given the male domination of the political sphere (and other spheres), women can contest power, and explores this question by weaving together a discussion of contemporary concerns about sexual harassment and the #metoo campaign, the divergent directions of abortion policy and foreign policy in Canada and the USA, and a history of landmark feminist contributions to political science. She finds that key gendered innovations within the discipline have been transforming understanding of what constitutes the political. Feminist political scientists challenged the limitations of top-down approaches to politics and power that centred on people or positions at the top of the hierarchy by introducing the consideration of 'bottom up' informal politics. In this respect, 'a feminist understanding of power points to the importance of civil society and broader social norms as a potential area for resistance and empowerment' (add page number when known). Feminist research highlighted that informal norms and practices deserve as much attention as formal rules in understanding how power operates within political institutions. Crucially, feminist political science maintained that power and patriarchy can not only be exercised and challenged by women's movements within the political sphere, but also within public and private institutions such as the church and the family.

While Weldon observes that 'the reciprocal influence of feminist scholarship and political science has been one of mutual enrichment' (add page number when known), she laments that recognition of feminist contributions to political science has largely been obscured or discounted due to male bias. Yet Weldon finds that feminist political science provides innovations for other fields of gender studies, and she uses the examples of current abortion policy and foreign policy in Canada and the United States to demonstrate how formal and informal institutions can, in different conditions, reinforce or weaken male dominance, and help or hinder the effectiveness of women's social movements.

Dalziel and Saunders (this volume) celebrate the career of Marilyn Waring, whom we might regard as personifying gendered innovations in economics. The genesis and publication of her 1988 book, *If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics*, is presented as a case study of gendered innovations occurring because the starting point was not what Dalziel and Saunders call the 'Popper-Kuhn-Lakatos model of scientific progress' that continues to dominate the economics profession, but rather, 'a researcher embedded within a community of activists grappling with [a] burning issue of the day' (add page number when known). Waring's key innovation was offering another possible model for scientific research and a feminist economic framework by challenging 'what is permitted to be considered "economic problems"'.

A National Party member of the New Zealand Government from 1975 to 84, Waring championed women's issues, such as affordable childcare. When appointed chair of the Public Expenditure Select Committee in 1978, she first encountered the United Nations System of National Accounts (UNSNA), which was being adopted as the standard for New Zealand's National Income and Expenditure Accounts. She found that, in UNSNA terms, woman engaged in household labour were labelled as 'non-producers' and domestic work was invisible within economic policy, which then rendered affordable childcare economically unnecessary. After leaving parliament, Waring made a study of the UNSNA, and found that, for example, women's agricultural work in

developing countries was excluded if it supplied their household and was not for sale on the market, although this labour provided food for millions of people. In her book she argued that the patriarchal assumptions underpinning the UNSNA 'enshrines the invisibility and enslavement of women in the economic process as "of little or no importance"' (add page number when known). Rejecting patriarchal applications of economic theory to practice, she proposed an alternative theoretical framework starting with practice, and incorporating women's household work within measures of economic activity. This mission-led research, argue Dalziel and Saunders, stands in stark relief to the Popper-Kuhn-Lakatos model of scientific discovery, a double-inversion at the heart of Waring's radical and transformative approach to economics.

Catriona Mackenzie (this volume) reflects on her own role in developing relational autonomy theory, 'a perspective informed by feminist ethics and by feminist commitments to combatting both gendered and other forms social oppression and inequality' (add page number when known). She observes the devaluation of knowledge claims made by feminist philosophers, perhaps because the feminist challenge goes 'to the heart of philosophical methodology and disciplinary self-understandings' (add page number when known). Gendered innovations therefore arise in challenging orthodox positions and providing alternative thinking.

Relational autonomy theory is an example of such innovations, where feminist thinking has 'conceptually refigured the concept' by rejecting methodological individualism, the default position in philosophy, which reduces all social phenomena to individual behaviour and thus excludes the possibility of social explanations. Turning away from methodological individualism, a feminist lens focuses on social groups and social oppression, and so makes visible considerations of social justice as the context for autonomy. This is political in essence as it challenges methodological individualism for existing hand in glove with libertarian conceptions of justice, as well as non-interventionism, which bolsters neoliberalism and minimal state assistance to support vulnerable individuals and social groups. Feminist relational ethics eschews social atomism and centres on a socio-relational account of individuals who are constituted by 'interpersonal, familial and social relationships and intersecting social group memberships, and through processes of enculturation into specific linguistic, political and historical communities' (add page number when known). People are moulded and constrained by overlapping social determinants, such as gender, class, race and sexuality. The theory also emphasises the importance of personal autonomy for women and other social groups who have been subject to oppression.

The papers in this special issue cover diverse disciplinary terrain, yet they share three key themes in common. First, across the social science disciplines feminist and gender research has been overlooked or made peripheral, albeit to a greater or lesser extent. Second, there exists the idea of a 'hard core' of knowledge which 'normal science' or 'androcentric science' works to protect, and which excludes feminist perspectives. Third, that gendered innovations in social science are typically underpinned by a commitment to broader social impact, activism, and gender equality.

The focus on and commitment to gender equality also raises questions about the status and nature of gender itself. The GESS project is concerned with the gender composition of academic disciplines and the relationship between the representation of women and the valuing of feminist knowledge. In order to demonstrate the significance of gender in knowledge production it works with the category 'women', which is defined against the category 'men'. This follows convention in mainstream social science literature concerned with gender differences, and it does not imply an adherence to any form of essentialism in relation to identity. It does, however, produce consequences that require some reflection and elaboration. Firstly, it constructs gender as a binary, excluding non-binary and gender fluid identities (see Pearse et al., this volume). In the case of the citation analysis carried out by Pearse et al.,

authors are allocated to one of two gender categories according to first names. This enables insightful and important findings related to gendered disciplinary practices, but should not be understood as mimetic of the complexity of social reality in which gender is experienced and expressed. Secondly, as Weldon (in press) notes (add page number when known), the focus on gender obscures hierarchies of race, class, nationality and sexuality, which also profoundly shape patterns of knowledge production. Indeed, it can be argued that the dominance of the global north in research publication, across all disciplines, is the context for all discussions of the politics of scholarship (Connell et al., 2017).

While a detailed account of the concept of gender is not possible here, it is worthwhile to highlight some points relevant to the concerns of this volume. From de Beauvoir onwards, feminist scholars and activists have debated the question of gender and the issue of what unifies women as a group (if anything) (Hekman, 2014). The work of feminists of colour has powerfully challenged the false universalism of second wave feminist claims about women and the way such claims furthered the hegemony of the white subject (Collins, 2002; hooks, 1989, 2000). In addition, recognition of the limitations of the sex/gender distinction, most influentially elaborated by Judith Butler, further destabilise the identity category 'women' (Butler, 1990). As Linda Alcoff (2006) has observed, questions about the viability of the category 'women' place feminism in a paradoxical position. The political project of feminism is to challenge the oppression of women and to make claims in the name of women. At the same time it rejects the idea that there is a unified category of women.

Feminist philosophers and theorists have developed a range of responses to this dilemma which engage with the ways groups and collectives can be conceptualised without assuming or imposing sameness. For example, Iris Marion Young has argued that women make up a series, a particular kind of social collective (1994). A series differs from a group in that members are not unified by a shared feature or experience, nor by a common self-conception. Rather, 'members are unified by the objects their actions are oriented around and/or by the objectified results of the material effects of the actions of the other' (Young, 1994: 724). This idea of women as a gendered social series, unified by external rather than internal features, resonates with the opening section of Weldon's article on feminist accounts of power (add page number when known). Sexual harassment and assault are practices and realities which constitute gendered subject positions, from which a social movement can emerge.

From a more sociological perspective, the understanding of gender as a social structure and system of relations has enabled a different kind of move away from a focus on individual identity. As Connell and Pearse state, gender 'is not an expression of biology, nor a fixed dichotomy in human life or character. It is a pattern in our social arrangements, and the everyday activities shaped by those arrangements' (2015, chapter 1, section 2, para. 8). The work collected in this special issue can be considered as an exploration of the operation of the social structure of gender in social science disciplines. As the articles reveal, this is not just a matter of the representation of women as scholars, authors and editors, but of gendered arrangements in the way knowledge is produced, circulated and valued. Here gender is revealed to be fundamentally about power and its operation through disciplinary norms.

Moreover, disciplinary norms shape the often uneasy, embodied experience of being a feminist academic, by constituting certain kinds of voices as authoritative and others as marginal (Lipton and Mackinlay, 2016). One of the central concerns of our project is the effects of disciplinary knowledge norms and practices on the experiences of women and other marginalized people in higher education institutions. Margaret Thornton has eloquently described 'benchmark man', the ideal academic who emerges in a new masculine form within the contemporary knowledge economy (2013). Thornton's concern is with the relationship between notions of merit and the ideal academic in the

context of neoliberal systems of performance measurement. Our project expands this concern to reveal how norms and ideals of authoritative knowledge act to shape the careers of academics who fall outside the mainstream due to either embodied identity, or research interests, or both. Feminist and women academics navigate promotion and leadership in gendered organisations through varied forms of agency and resistance (Blackmore and Sachs, 2012; Lipton, 2017). The collective building of alternative networks and new disciplinary centres (identified in Pearse et al. in this volume as one of the key practices of feminist philosophy and feminist economics) has been a particularly productive response to marginalisation.

In its concern with reform and transformation in the disciplines, the GESS project intersects with debates about the relationship of feminist politics with managerial discourses of equity and diversity (Ahmed, 2006). University equity initiatives tend to leave untouched norms of success and excellence that support the *status quo* and indeed protect them from investigation (Jenkins, 2013). They also focus on the individual as the locus of change.

While feminist understandings of power shift attention to structural dimensions, it can be argued that feminism has also been preoccupied with identity and subjectivity (Zerilli, 2005). According to political theorist Linda Zerilli, this has limited its transformative and creative potential (2005). Instead she highlights the potential of a post-identity feminist politics focused on freedom and creative acts of imagination. For her, the thinking of radically new figures which do not already exist in embodied experience is crucial to feminism. It is radical acts of the imagination which are able to project 'a word like women into a new context, where it is taken up by others in ways we can neither predict or control, which has the potential power to change every political, worldly constellation' (2005, 65). Thus, feminist claims about 'women' are anticipatory political claims rather than statements about the truth of an existing collective. This insistence on the importance of openness to the new is valuable for projects such as ours which are concerned with innovations and seek to transform disciplines as well as diagnosing their limits.

The articles in this collection demonstrate the disciplinary innovations which have been produced by feminist scholarship, as well as the barriers to such innovations. As the articles by Weldon, Dalziel and Saunders, and Mackenzie reveal, disciplinary knowledge is transformed in powerful and meaningful ways by working with existing dominant concepts: power, work and autonomy in these cases. Feminist reformulations of these concepts are impactful and successful because they are legible within current modes of thinking while at the same time being subversive of deeply held gendered assumptions. However, Zerilli's account of politics provokes a reflection on how such innovations align with broader feminist projects both in and outside of the academy. How can moves towards a radically transformative undisciplining of knowledge be enabled and supported without the loss of the structures of meaning and hard-won influence and impact represented in feminist scholarship?

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