

prestigious science journals in the world, cheerfully answered, "That's okay, how often do I get to do *real* science, working with test tubes?"

3. And no one has shown that differences in the size or shape of the amygdala, or differences in the numbers of neurons in it, can begin to predict differences in normal levels of aggression. Same punch line as with testosterone.

CAROL TAVRIS

The Mismeasure of Woman

In the early 1970s, when I was working at *Psychology Today* magazine, we ran an article called "A Person Who Menstruates Is Unfit to Be a Mother." In this spoof of the notion that women's hormones make women crazed, irrational and unreliable, the author said that women could not, therefore, be entrusted with the serious job of mothering. In those heady days of the modern women's movement, we thought we had driven a stake through the heart of the belief that women's hormones make women unfit for certain work.

That, of course, was before the rise of "PMS" as a biomedical abnormality in need of fixing, curing and treatment. To read any of Katherina Dalton's articles on the subject—"Menstruation and Crime," "Menstruation and Acute Psychiatric Illness," "Effect of Menstruation on Schoolgirls' Weekly Work," "The Influence of Mother's Menstruation on Her Child"—is to agree that a person who menstruates is unfit to be a mother, or anything else.

The mismeasure of woman is with us still, and still for the same reasons. In any domain of life in which men set the standard of normalcy, women will be considered abnormal, and society will debate woman's "place" and her "nature." Many women experience tremendous conflict in trying to decide whether to be "like" men or "opposite" from them, and this conflict itself is evidence of the implicit male standard against which they are measuring themselves. This is why it is normal for women to feel abnormal.

When man is the measure of all things, diagnoses of the goose's problem will differ from those of the gander's. Thus:

- Women and men have the same moods and mood swings, but only women get theirs packaged into a syndrome. Women's hormones have never been reliably related to *behavior*, competence or anything to do with work, but male hormones are related to a variety of antisocial behaviors. Yet there is no disorder called HTS, say, for HyperTestosterone Syndrome.
- The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* has concocted a "disorder"—Self-defeating Personality Disorder—that describes the extreme characteristics of the female role (e.g., putting others

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first, playing the martyr). But when Kaye-Lee Pantony and Paula Caplan (1991) proposed a comparable disorder describing the extreme characteristics of the male role—they named it “Delusional Domineering Personality Disorder”—they were told there is no “clinical tradition” for such a disorder.

- The problems that are more characteristic of men than women, such as drug abuse, narcissism, rape and other forms of violence, are rarely related to an inherent male psychology the way women’s behavior is. When men have problems, it is because of their upbringing, personality or environment; when women have problems, it is because of something in their very psyche or hormones. When men have problems, society tends to look outward for explanations; when women have problems, society looks inward.

In western society today, there are three competing versions of the mismeasure of woman.

One is that man is the norm, and woman is opposite, lesser, deficient—“the problem.” This is the view that underlies so much research in psychology that is designed to find out why women are not “as something as” men—as moral, as intelligent, as rational, as funny, as whatever. It is also the view underlying the enormous self-help industry; women consume millions of books advising them on how to be more beautiful, more competent, more independent (or dependent). Men, being normal, feel no need to fix themselves in corresponding ways.

A second view is that man is the norm, and woman is opposite, but better: “the solution.” This is the perspective of cultural feminists, who retrieved the qualities associated with women that for so many years had been devalued—nurturance, compassion, attachment and so forth—and who now claim them to be the sources of women’s moral superiority.

The third view is that there is no problem, because man is the norm, and woman is just like him. In her brilliant analysis of how this assumption pervades the diagnosis of sexual disorders in the *DSM*, Leonore Tiefer (1992) has observed that in this view, “Men and women are the same, and they’re all men.”

Today, in this social-constructionist age, the study of gender has entered what Mary Crawford and Jeanne Marecek (1989) call the “transformationist” era, in which the idea is to stand back from the fray and assume that we will never know the essences of male and female, for these are endlessly changing, and depend both on the eye of the observer and the conditions of our lives. These approaches transcend the literal and limited question of “Do men and women differ?” and ask instead: Why is everyone so interested in differences? Which differences? And what function does the *belief* in differences serve? We might ask, for instance, what is the result of the belief that women are emotionally and professionally affected by their hormones, but men are not? What are the results of the belief that women are the love experts, and that men are incapable of love and intimacy? This view asks us to consider where our theories come from, who benefits from them and where they lead us.

The study of “difference” is not the problem; of course people differ. The

problem occurs when one group is considered the norm with others differing from it, thereby failing to "measure up" to the ideal, superior, dominant standard, and when the dominant group uses the language of difference to justify its social position (Scott, 1988). In *The Mismeasure of Man*, Stephen Jay Gould (1981) used the study of race differences in intelligence to illustrate how science has been used and abused to serve a larger cultural agenda: namely, to confirm prejudices that "blacks, women, and poor people occupy their subordinate roles by the harsh dictates of nature" (1981: 74). The mismeasure of woman serves the same function. The antidote, as Gould reminds us, is always to ask: Who is doing the measuring? And for what purpose?

This article will consider these questions, concluding with new perspectives that go beyond differences in examining the complexities of gender.

Let us start with a contemporary version of the "Women as problem" view. Consider this study of the reasons that women and men offer, in a mock job interview, for their success or failure on creativity tests (Olson, 1988). The researcher reports that women attributed their successes less often to their own abilities than to luck, and they reported less overall confidence in their present and future performance. "Why," she asked, "do women make less self-serving attributions than men do? The feminine social goal of appearing modest inhibits women in making self-promoting attributions in an achievement situation which involves face-to-face interaction." The premise of this study—to explain why the women did not behave like men—is apparent if we rephrase the question and its answer: "Why do men make more self-serving attributions than women do? The masculine social goal of appearing self-confident inhibits them from making modest explanations of their abilities or acknowledging the help of others and the role of chance."

Of course the bias of seeing women's behavior as something to be explained in relation to the male norm makes sense in a world that takes the male norm for granted. In this case, the researcher showed that the female habit of modesty does American women a disservice in job interviews, because they appear to be unconcerned with achievement and unwilling to promote themselves. (This is useful information to *both* sexes in cultures that value modesty, such as Japan and Great Britain, if they want to do business in the United States.) However, the research masks the fact that the male norm frames the very questions that investigators ask, and then creates the impression that women have "problems" and "deficiencies" if they differ from the norm. For example, here are some typical findings in psychology:

- women have lower self-esteem than men do;
- women do not value their efforts as much as men do;
- women are less self-confident than men;
- women are more likely to say they are "hurt" than to admit they are "angry";
- women have more difficulty developing a "separate sense of self."

Most people would agree that it is desirable for women to have high self-esteem, value their work, be self-confident, express anger and develop autonomy, so

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- men are more confident
- men overvalue their efforts
- men are not as easily hurt
- men are more likely to admit they are "angry" than to say they are "hurt"
- men have more difficulty developing a "separate sense of self."

Most people will see this as derogatory, but that is the negative tone in the way of seeing women as the problem. The deficiencies and weaknesses

For this reason, many men's weaknesses into strengths. It is not surprising to believe that women are "gullible"; men are "inflexible"; what is funny. Women are not like their parents throughout their continuing needs for

After centuries of trying to be exhilarated by having female characteristics at last. This exhilaration that there are indeed problems for men and men, but women's areas, including psychoanalysis. Cultural feminists (e.g., moral reasoning, their emotions) (e.g. Eisler, 1987) have proximity to nature, their

This movement represents because it corrected two biases: generalizing from men to women's studies and many of women's "differences" that

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such studies usually conclude with discussions of "the problem" of why women are so insecure and what can be done about it. But had these studies used women as the basis of comparison, the same findings might then lead to a different notion of what the "problems" are:

- men are more conceited than women;
- men overvalue the work they do;
- men are not as realistic as women in assessing their abilities;
- men are more likely to accuse and attack others when unhappy, instead of stating that they feel hurt and inviting sympathy;
- men have more difficulty in forming and maintaining attachments.

Most people will see at once that this way of talking about men is biased and derogatory, but that is the point: Why has it been so difficult to notice the same negative tone in the way we talk about women? The answer is that we are used to seeing women as the problem, and to regarding women's differences from men as deficiencies and weaknesses.

For this reason, many women have responded to the transformation of women's weaknesses into strengths with delight and relief. It was enormously liberating to believe that women were not the problem; men were. Women are not "gullible"; men are "inflexible." Women are not "humorless"; men do not know what is funny. Women are not "emotionally immature" for remaining attached to their parents throughout life; men are "emotionally inhibited" from expressing their continuing needs for family connection.

After centuries of trying to measure up, many women, understandably, feel exhilarated by having female qualities and female experiences revalued and celebrated at last. This exhilaration has fueled the rise of cultural feminism, the idea that there are indeed profound and basic psychological differences between women and men, but women's ways are better. This view is gaining ground in many areas, including psychoanalysis, theology, history, psychology and feminist theory. Cultural feminists (e.g. Gilligan, 1982) celebrate women's allegedly care-based moral reasoning, their emphasis on attachments and kinder values. "Ecofeminists" (e.g. Eisler, 1987) hope to save the planet by celebrating women's alleged proximity to nature, their empathy, cooperation and peacefulness.

This movement represented an important step forward in the study of gender because it corrected two biases: the habit of excluding women from studies and generalizing from men to women (as happened in life-span research, moral reasoning studies and many other topics); and, as previously noted, the devaluing of women's "differences" that did turn up in the research.

But I am concerned about the current fashion for replacing one set of stereotypes with another. The woman-is-better school, like the woman-is-deficient school, assumes an *essential* opposition between the sexes, and there is no more evidence for one view than for the other. Thinking in opposites leads to what philosophers call "the law of the excluded middle," which is where most men and women fall in terms of their psychological qualities, beliefs, abilities, traits and values.

For example, after the initial excitement about Gilligan's (1982) provocative

argument that women and men use different (but equally valuable) criteria in making moral decisions, subsequent research has found little evidence to support this hypothesis. Most researchers report no average differences in the kind of reasoning that men and women use in evaluating moral dilemmas, whether it is care-based or justice-based. Gilligan based her argument on her observations of how schoolchildren make moral decisions. She took excerpts from her interviews to argue that in resolving a conflict between desire and duty, for example, boys think in "hierarchical" terms (what goes first), whereas girls think in "network" terms (who is left out, who is hurt). But when Faye Crosby (1991) took the children's comments out of Gilligan's context and asked her students to tell her which were said by boys and which by girls, it turned out not to be so easy. Consider these responses to the question: "What does responsibility mean?"

It means pretty much thinking of others when I do something . . . [not doing something just for yourself], because you have to live with other people and live with your community, and if you do something that hurts them all, a lot of people will end up suffering, and that is sort of the wrong thing to do.

That other people are counting on you to do something, and you can't just decide, "Well, I'd rather do this or that." [There is also responsibility] to yourself. If something looks really fun but you might hurt yourself doing it because you don't really know how to do it and your friends say, "Well, come on, you can do it, don't worry," if you're really scared to do it, it's your responsibility to yourself [not to do it] . . . because you have to take care of yourself.

Gilligan sees the boy as operating from "a premise of separation but recognizing that you have to live with other people," whereas the girl is operating "contextually." But it is just as plausible to say that the boy *and* the girl recognize that they have a responsibility to themselves *and* to others. (The boy's comment is first.)

Or consider the research on empathy and intuition. Many people think that women have the empathic advantage, so in studies of self-reports, women tend to score higher than men. Yet when studies measure physiological signs of empathy (physical responses to another person's suffering or unhappiness) or behavioral signs of empathy (doing something to help another person in distress), gender differences vanish. Men and women will be helpful in different ways, of course, but the impetus to help is present in both genders. Similarly, in reviews of studies of ability to feel compassion, to behave altruistically or to help in emergencies, few studies find behavioral differences of any magnitude.

Perhaps the most basic male-female dichotomy is that men are the warlike, dominating, planet-destroying sex and women are the peacemaking, non-aggressive, planet-saving sex. Of course, no one disputes the fact that men are far and away more violent than women. Men and women alike fear the violence of men.

But it does not follow from this very real difference in behavior that women are "naturally" more pacifistic or earth-loving. In the family and other intimate relations, women are just as verbally abusive, hostile and vindictive as men. As Campbell (1993) argues, although women's aggression often has different *meanings* and *causes* than men's, and although men often regard women's acts of ag-

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Throughout history women have been just as militant in wartime as men, participating as their societies permitted: as combatants, as defenders, as laborers in the work force to produce war materials, as supporters of their warrior husbands and sons, as resistance fighters themselves. We think of war as a male activity and value, but war also gives women a route out of domestic confinement, a public identity and a chance to play a heroic role, usually denied them in their private lives.

Quite apart from what men and women do in wartime, bellicose and genocidal attitudes are by no means a male preserve. The same propaganda and ideology that motivate male members of a society ensnare its female citizens too. Iranian women joined Iranian men in chanting "Death to America"; German women joined German men to support Hitler's dreams of world conquest; American women have joined American men in supporting virtually every one of their wars. Women, for all their reputed empathic skills, have been as willing and able as men to regard the enemy as beasts or demons to be exterminated rather than as fellow human beings. In America, white women have supported the Ku Klux Klan and its bloody outrages every bit as much as their men did.

None of this means that at any given moment in a society, men and women will be precisely alike in their attitudes and values. Much has been made, for instance, of the American "gender gap" in support for militarism. But when Zur and Morrison (1989) examined surveys conducted in the last 40 years, they noticed a bias in the phrasing of questions. For example, one Roper Poll asked respondents, "Would you be willing to fight in case a foreign power tried to seize land in Central America?" Standing tall lest they be mistaken for wimps, men were far more likely than women to say yes. So, on polls like these, men consistently appear to be more militaristic than women. However, when women are asked whether they would endorse a war for reasons that reflect other motives, such as saving the lives of loved ones or promoting group cohesion, women turn out to be more militaristic than men. Women agree more often than men do with statements such as "Any country which violates the rights of innocent children should be invaded." Well, that should keep everyone's armies occupied for a while.

The point is that "gender gaps" widen or narrow with changing times, motives and conditions, and they cannot be accounted for by an *intrinsic* female pacifism; ideology (religious and political) and economics always override gender in the voting booth. We have been dazzled and deceived by the archetypes of Man as Noble Warrior and Woman as Sweet Pacifist. These archetypes compliment both sexes. But they are ultimately belied by a more complex reality that includes ample illustrations of female bellicosity and male pacifism.

An alternative to thinking in archetypal opposites was proposed by a women's group in Nottingham—Women Oppose the Nuclear Threat (WONT)—in the early 1980s. "We don't think that women have a special role in the peace movement because we are naturally more peaceful, more protective, or more vulnerable than men," they wrote, "nor do we look to women as the Earth Mother who will save the planet from male aggression."

Rather, we believe that it is this very role division that makes the horrors of war possible. The so-called masculine, manly qualities of toughness, dominance, not showing emotion or admitting dependence can be seen as the driving force behind war; but they depend on women playing the opposite (but not equal) role, in which the caring qualities are associated with inferiority and powerlessness. (Quoted in Anderson and Zinsser, 1988, Vol. II: 430)

Ecofeminists are right to worry about the planet. But it is the *philosophy* of domination and exploitation that must be challenged, in whichever sex supports it, as well as the economic circumstances that make such a philosophy expedient.

The opposing qualities associated with masculinity and femininity, like those of "heterosexuality" and "homosexuality," are caricatures; all sets of polar characteristics overlook the complex realities of people's lives. Yet today we are witnessing a resurgence of the maximalist view that male and female *psyches, nature, brains and biology* create unbridgable chasms between the sexes. The idea tends to recur with renewed vigor whenever women begin to enter the public sphere in greater numbers, as happened with entry into higher education (19th century), professional training (the 1920s) and traditional male occupations (the late 1960s to the present). Invariably, we start hearing about the brain, and how women and men have "different" ones.

The belief that men's and women's brains differ in fundamental ways has a long and inglorious history. Typically, as Stephanie Shields (1975) and Anne Harrington (1987) have documented, when scientists did not find the anatomical differences they were seeking, they did not abandon the goal or their belief that such differences exist; they just moved to another part of the brain. Today, just like the 19th-century researchers who kept changing their minds about which *lobe* of the brain accounted for male superiority, researchers keep changing their minds about which *hemisphere* of the brain accounts for male superiority. Originally, the left hemisphere was considered the repository of intellect and reason. The right hemisphere was the sick, bad, crazy side, the side of passion, instincts, criminality and irrationality. Guess which sex was thought to have left-brain intellectual superiority? (Answer: males.) In the 1960s and 1970s, however, the right brain was rediscovered. Scientists began to suspect that it was the source of genius and inspiration, creativity and imagination, mysticism and mathematical brilliance. Guess which sex was now thought to have "right-brain specialization"? (Answer: males.)

Today's researchers are still determined to find sex differences. Two widely accepted hypotheses are that the left and right hemispheres develop differently in boys and girls, and that the corpus callosum, the bundle of fibers connecting the hemispheres, also differs. As a result, males are said to process visual-spatial information predominantly with the right hemisphere, whereas females use both hemispheres more symmetrically. This sex difference is alleged to originate during fetal development, when testosterone in male fetuses selectively attacks the left hemisphere, briefly slowing its development and resulting in right-hemisphere dominance in men, which in turn explains why men excel in art, music and mathematics. This theory has had tremendous scientific and popular appeal;

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Science, the magazine of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, published a report on it with the headline "Math Genius May Have Hormonal Basis."

The late neuroscientist Ruth Bleier (1987, 1988) tried valiantly to get her criticisms of this general line of research published in *Science*. She found numerous scholarly problems in the published articles, such as sample selection and interpretation of data, and argued that it was an "unsupported conceptual leap" to generalize from male rat cortices to greater spatial orientation in rats, let alone from rats to humans. *Science* did not publish Bleier's critical paper or even her letter to the Editor, on the grounds, as one reviewer put it, that Bleier "tends to err in the opposite direction from the researchers whose results and conclusions she criticizes" and because she "argues very strongly for the predominant role of environmental influences" (Bleier, 1988). Apparently, said Bleier, one is allowed to err in only one direction if one wishes to be published in *Science*.

Another study achieved fame when it reported first evidence of gender differences in the corpus callosum (de Lacoste Utamsing and Holloway, 1982). The researchers speculated that "the female brain is less well lateralized—that is, manifests less hemispheric specialization—than the male brain for visuospatial functions." (Notice that the female brain is not said to be *more integrated*. Specialization, in the brain as in academia, is the order of the day.) This article, which also achieved acclaim, had a number of major flaws in sample size and selection. Bleier duly wrote to *Science*, delineating these criticisms and also citing four studies that failed to find gender differences in the corpus callosum. *Science* failed to publish this criticism, as it has failed to publish the studies that find no gender differences in the brain.

The irony is that the very characteristics that brain lateralization theories are attempting to account for—gender differences in cognitive abilities—keep changing. In the last 30 years, gender differences in mathematics scores have declined sharply. Hyde and Linn (1988), having done a meta-analysis of 165 studies of verbal ability (i.e. skills in vocabulary, writing, anagrams, reading comprehension and speaking fluency), concluded that there are no gender differences in verbal ability at this time in America. And in a meta-analysis of 100 studies of mathematics performance representing the testing of 3,985,682 students, Hyde et al. (1990) found that gender differences were smallest and favored *females* in samples of the general population, and grew larger, favoring males, only in selected samples of highly precocious individuals.

Is everybody's brain changing? I think not. To explain why gender differences or similarities in cognitive abilities change so rapidly, let alone why women moved as rapidly as they did into the fields of law, insurance and bar-tending, we do better to look at changes in education, motivation and opportunity, not "innate" differences between male and female brains.

My point is not that there are no sex differences in the brain. Some studies have found differences; more may turn up where no one is yet looking. The situation is analogous to the search for brain differences between "homosexuals" and "heterosexuals." There are three points to keep in mind about all such research:

1. The studies are small and inconclusive, and weak data have been used to support unwarranted speculations.
2. The meanings of terms like "verbal" and "spatial" abilities keep changing, depending on who is using them and for what purpose. For example, when some speak of women's "verbal abilities," they mean women's interest and skill in talking about relationships and feelings. But in everyday life, men interrupt women more than vice versa, dominate the conversation, talk more and are more successful at introducing new topics and having their comments remembered in group discussions. What does this mean for the biological origin of "verbal ability"? Likewise, there are many sexualities, which do not divide up neatly into heterosexuality and homosexuality; what does this mean for the biological origin of "sexual orientation"?
3. The far more convincing evidence for sex *similarity* is rarely published. Jeanette McGlone (1980), whose work is often quoted as supporting sex differences in brain hemispheres, actually concluded: "Thus, one must not overlook perhaps the most obvious conclusion, which is that basic patterns of male and female brain asymmetry seem to be more similar than they are different." Everyone of course promptly overlooked it.

To question the belief that men and women differ in profound and basic ways—their brains, capacities and abilities—is not to deny that men and women differ at all. Of course they do. They differ in power and resources, life experiences and reproductive processes. To say that men and women are equally capable of sexual pleasure, for example, does not mean that heterosexual men and women come to bed equally advantaged, that there are no differences between them in, as Leonore Tiefer (1992) says, communication, sensual experience, worries about commitment and attractiveness, sexual knowledge, safety, respect or feelings about their bodies, pregnancy, contraception or aging. Similarly, to say that both sexes are equally capable of advancing in mathematics, politics and science does not mean that society encourages both sexes equally to pursue these paths. That is why another problem in studying gender has been to overlook the real differences in women's and men's lives and generalize from men—a narrow band of white, middle-class men at that—to all humanity.

This error is particularly egregious and dangerous in the realms of medicine and law, two fields based on the normalcy of men and the applicability of male experience and even the male body to women. Until very recently in American medicine, clinical trials of new drugs were typically conducted only on men. (After the tragedy of Thalidomide, the exclusion of all child-bearing-aged women from clinical trials of new drugs became a Federal guideline for subsequent research.) The results are then applied to women, without consideration of the ways in which the menstrual cycle or birth control pills might affect the drug's efficacy. The male norm has also perpetuated the view of the normal female reproductive system as one that is abnormal and in constant need of medical fixing.

American law likewise is based on the standard of the "reasonable man" and on the normalcy of male experience. Modern jurisprudence, like medicine, is

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"masculine" rather than "human": the values, dangers, fears and other actual experiences of women's lives are not, as Robin West (1988) says, "reflected at any level whatsoever in contracts, torts, constitutional law, or any other field of legal doctrine." The Rule of Law does not value intimacy, for example, but autonomy:

Nurturant, intimate labor is neither valued by liberal legalism nor compensated by the market economy. It is not compensated in the home and it is not compensated in the workplace—wherever intimacy is, there is no compensation. Similarly, separation of the individual from his or her family, community, or children is not understood to be a harm, and we are not protected against it. (West, 1988)

The law, Robin West argues, does not reflect the female experience: "Women are absent from jurisprudence because women *as human beings* are absent from the law's protection."

There is, however, one domain in which women set the standard of normalcy, and have defined men as the "opposite" and "deficient" sex: the domain of love, intimacy and emotional expression. Most psychologists—who, after all, are good talkers!—define intimacy as being able to talk about feelings. But many men define intimacy in terms of shared activities, doing things together. Similarly, many women and psychotherapists define "love" as an emotional state; many men define love and nurturance as doing things, being there for their loved ones. Thus the way that many men express their deepest feelings is seen as "deficient," or, worse, as a sign that they lack such feelings altogether.

Likewise, traditional ways of measuring distress and grief are based on typically female responses such as crying, sadness and eating disorders. Men tend to express grief by doing things that are stereotypically masculine, that they have a vocabulary for, that they can reveal without conflict or shame—"frantic work," heavy drinking, driving too fast, singing sentimental songs. The result of this real difference between women and men is that many men are excluded from the very languages of love and distress, leading to incorrect inferences that men suffer less than women when relationships are in trouble, or that men are "incapable" of love.

So, of course, women and men "differ." If we look closely at what men and women do, as a result of their roles, statuses and obligations, we find a wealth of differences. For instance, research has found that women have more than the two basic roles of home and work. Women have many jobs. They do the "interaction work" in conversations, making sure feelings are not hurt and keeping the ball rolling (Fishman, 1983). They do the invisible but time-consuming "kin work" of managing extended family relationships, such as organizing celebrations, sending holiday and birthday cards, making phone calls to keep in touch (di Leonardo, 1987). They do the "emotion work" in close relations, monitoring the course of the relationship and participants' feelings, and are more likely to be in occupations that require the display of cheerful emotion (Hochschild, 1983). And they work fully an extra month of 24-hour-days per year in comparison to husbands, doing a "second shift" of childcare and housekeeping (Hochschild, 1989)—some studies suggest even more: Croghan (1991).

Rhoda Unger (1990) has noted that research on sex differences has rarely concerned itself with behaviors in which the rate is "virtually zero for one sex"—such as rape. Traditional studies of sex differences have focused on those that are the least significant and the most variable. But violence against women—in dating relationships, in marriage, by strangers—permeates the lives of women in ways that it does not permeate the lives of men.

New Directions

If women are not worse than men, better than men or the same as men, how shall we think about gender? The first way I will suggest looks *outward at gender in context*, seeking a renewed emphasis on the external factors and contexts that shape our lives. The second looks *inward at gender as narrative*, focusing on the ways that women and men perceive, interpret and respond to events that befall them.

In the context approach, researchers no longer regard men and women as having a set of fixed "masculine" or "feminine" or even "androgynous" traits; the qualities and behaviors expected of women and men vary across settings and interactions. The behavior that we link to "gender" depends more on what an individual is doing than on biological sex.

For example, Barbara Risman (1987) compared the "parenting" skills and personality traits of single fathers, single mothers and married parents. She found that having responsibility for childcare was as strongly related to "feminine" traits, such as nurturance and sympathy, as being female was. The single men who were caring for children were more like mothers than like married fathers. These men were not an atypical group of nurturant men, either; they had custody of their children through circumstances beyond their control—widowhood, the wife's desertion or the wife's lack of interest in shared custody.

Here is another example, from the child development field, of the importance of context. Studies used to report that little girls were "passive" and boys "active." Eleanor Maccoby (1990), re-analyzing these studies, showed that boys and girls do not differ in "passivity" or "activity" in some consistent, trait-like way; *their behavior depends on the gender of the child they are playing with*. Among children as young as three, for example, girls are seldom passive with each other; however, when paired with boys, girls typically stand on the side-lines and let the boys monopolize the toys. This gender segregation, Maccoby found, is "essentially unrelated to the individual attributes of the children who make up all-girl or all-boy groups." When a boy and girl compete for a shared toy, the boy dominates, unless there is an adult in the room. Girls in mixed classrooms stay nearer to the teacher not because they are "dependent" as a personality trait, but because they want a chance at the toys! Girls play just as independently as boys when they are in all-girl groups.

Such research suggests that gender, like culture, organizes for its members different influence strategies, ways of communicating and ways of perceiving the world. The behavior of men and women often depends more on the gender they are interacting with than on anything intrinsic about the gender they are—a process that West and Zimmerman (1987) call "doing gender."

But there is an important qualification to the "two cultures" approach to gen-

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der differences, because the two cultures of gender are not equal in power, resources or status. Indeed, a major aspect of the contexts of people's lives turns out to be the power they have, or lack, in influencing others and in determining their own lives. This is why women are more likely to become "bilingual" than men are—better able to "read" men and "speak" male-speak than men are at "reading" women and "speaking" female-speak. Men are often charmed and amused by what they regard as the "mysterious" behavior of women, but they typically feel no need to decipher it; whereas women learn that for their own safety they had better try to understand and predict the behavior of men.

Many behaviors and personality traits thought to be typical of women are instead typical of women—and men—who lack power:

- "Women's intuition"—the ability to read non-verbal cues—is a function of powerlessness rather than gender; when men interact with a more powerful woman, they show as much "female intuition" as women do when interacting with a more powerful man (Snodgrass, 1985, 1992).
- The hesitations and uncertainties of so-called "women's speech" (pauses, hedges, questions, "sort ofs," and the like) are a function of powerlessness and social position, not of gender per se (Carli, 1990; O'Barr, 1983).
- A major literature review of studies of gender differences in power found that women, more than men, typified a "psychological cycle of powerlessness," blaming themselves, losing confidence and limiting their ambitions (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989). But these symptoms proved to be *results* of powerlessness, not causes. "The path to power for women resembles an obstacle course," they concluded, and powerlessness perpetuates powerlessness.

The second promising direction in gender studies has been the examination of the ways women and men perceive and interpret events that befall them—the stories they tell about their lives. Theodore Sarbin (1986) has proposed that the life story is the key metaphor in understanding human behavior: our plans, our memories, our love affairs and hatreds are guided by narrative plots. It is here, in the narrative plots that men and women tell about their lives, that we find great divergence between them.

New approaches to gender lead us to ask: where do narratives come from? What function do they serve for the storyteller? Why do so many women today feel safer telling stories that place their fate in the stars, or in PMS, than stories that place their fate in their own hands—or society's? What are the psychological results of scientific "stories" of menstruation and menopause that are almost uniformly told in a language of loss, pathology and deterioration? If a woman wishes to believe that her problem is PMS rather than an abusive or simply unresponsive husband, how does she benefit? How does she lose?

The feminist rallying cry of the 1970s, "the personal is political," meant that personal experience can be used to illuminate the darker corners of society's closets. Today that slogan has been reversed: the political is personal, and only personal. There is an immense appeal to personal, psychological narratives about social problems; there is a danger, too, as the case of sexual abuse indicates.

In the late 1970s, when incest was first in the news, public horror and outrage focused on the perpetrator, the father or other adult relative. Louise Armstrong (1978/1987), in her sequel to *Kiss Daddy Goodnight*—an account of her own experience of incest—describes the next phase: “the onslaught of experts” announcing that incest was a “disease” and shifting attention from the perpetrator, the man, to the “enabler,” the wife. This change in narrative was, in turn, part of the larger cultural shift, in the Reagan–Bush era, away from collective political action to an individualizing mental-health movement. Each battered or raped woman, each molested or raped child, was regarded as an instance of rare and bizarre family pathology. Nancy Matthews (1989), who traced the evolution of the anti-rape movement in Los Angeles, documented the ways in which the “feminist political agenda of relating violence against women to women’s oppression was marginalized, ridiculed, and suppressed.” Funding agencies began to redefine rape as an individual problem rather than, as Matthews says, “a personal experience with political implications.”

Lloyd de Mause (1984), who analyzed the content of themes in political speeches and the media in the 1980s, argues that the public focus on individual horror stories of abusers and survivors deflected attention from the real story: how the massive cutbacks in funding for children’s programs, child-abuse programs, prenatal care, job training programs and “dozens of other government activities directly affecting the welfare and lives of children” led to the maltreatment, neglect, abuse or deaths of thousands of children. Along the way, the original feminist analysis of the sexual abuse of children, that it is not merely a problem of a few disturbed individuals, was coopted and defused.

No one wishes to disparage survivor groups and therapies that help abused women to feel better and stronger about themselves. The problem is, as Armstrong (1987) says, that “where you have systematic power abuse, the exclusive reliance on individual solutions defuses the possibility of a strong collective voice, and of action for change. Exclusively personal solutions do nothing to defy the ongoing tacit permission for abuse” (emphasis added).

This is why our stories matter. But stories change, and how and why they do is the heart of psychology and of politics.

CONCLUSIONS

“Show me a woman who doesn’t feel guilt,” says my friend and colleague Rachel Hare-Mustin, “and I’ll show you a man.” The mismeasure of woman is responsible for the guilt-inducing analyses that leave women feeling that they lack the right stuff and are not doing the right thing. It has made sicknesses and syndromes of women’s normal bodily processes. And it has polarized the discourse between men and women, relegating to men’s “inherent abilities” the *human* capacities of reason, achievement, art and politics, and to women’s “special nature” the *human* qualities of feeling, attachment, connection and care. Future research can, however, begin to erode the familiar concepts of “normal” men and “different” women (or “normal”

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whites and people of "different" colors and ethnicities, or "normal" heterosexuals and "different" lesbians and gays, or any other human dichotomy):

1. *We can avoid the "snapshot" problem in the study of abilities, traits and qualities.* A study is a snapshot of behavior at that moment in time, but a snapshot is not a blueprint; on the contrary, human behavior is a moving picture. Most gender "differences" are momentary and changeable, suggesting that they are rooted less in biology, personality and intrapsychic dynamics (which appear to be permanent) than in life experiences, contexts, resources and power (which change culturally and historically).
2. *We can avoid polarizing traits into opposites and therefore deficiencies.* Connection and autonomy, dependence and independence, modesty and self-confidence, reason and intuition, qualitative and quantitative methods: all have their place in human life. In the range of human psychological talents and qualities—including our capacity for stupidity, self-delusion and general dorkiness—neither sex has the lead.

For some women, definition lies in opposition to the male way. Are men political? Then women must be spiritual. Are men overly rational? Then women must be "intuitive." Is modern medicine patriarchal and overly technological? Then women must choose natural healing and cure themselves exclusively with fasting and yoga, health food and herbal teas, a laying on of hands and a channeling of energy. Is society hopelessly male-dominated? Then women must find or invent societies in which women dominate. Forcing choices between such exaggerated extremes, I believe, is fruitless and self-defeating. It creates animosities rather than alliances across gender lines. The short-run benefit—feeling better about womanhood—has long-run disadvantages because it keeps women out of the realms of power where decisions about what kind of society we will have, and what qualities we will value as a society, are made.

3. *We can observe how qualities, skills and behaviors change over the life span, and identify the factors and contexts that produce or retard change.* The exaggerated attitudes and sex-typed rules of children and the sex games of adolescence are not a blueprint for life. People develop, learn, and have adventures and new experiences; gender rules are not frozen at one moment in time, whether the time is said to be infancy, childhood or adolescence.
4. *We can open our perceptions to the stories people tell as well as to the stories we expect them to tell.* By setting aside predetermined categories, we have learned that there is no one right way to have a love relationship, a baby, a career; no one right way to be lesbian, straight or gay; no one right way to be.
5. *We can develop a model of equality that is not based on sameness, but on acceptance of differences.* Women do not need to be "the same as" men in order to strive for a world in which both sexes have equal opportunities to develop their abilities, to feel safe, to share power.

For example, pregnancy is an experience unique to women, but not all women. The "woman as problem" view regards pregnancy as a debilitating condition that makes women weaker than men; therefore pregnant women need to be "protected." (Legislation based on this principle has protected women right out of high-paying jobs.) The "woman as solution" view regards pregnancy as a mystical condition linking women to the secrets of life and the universe. This sentimental inversion of protection theory restores the familiar pro-natal pressures on women who cannot or choose not to have children; it makes women who have a difficult time with childbirth feel guilty that they have pain or might be helped by "male" medicine. Finally, the view that "women are the same as men" regards pregnancy as a temporary disability, something comparable to a male experience, such as a hernia.

An alternative to these inadequate analyses of pregnancy is to say: there is nothing universal in how women will react to pregnancy; the experience will vary from woman to woman, culture to culture, historical epoch to historical epoch. For one woman, pregnancy will be wished-for; for another, or for the same woman on another occasion, a disaster. New views would direct us to ask, instead, *who gets to decide* what pregnancy means to a woman—the woman or the state? What are the social and practical *consequences* of pregnancy for a woman? Her experience needn't be the same as a man's in order to create policies in which women *do not pay economically or in status or in security* by becoming pregnant or taking time off to care for children, as they now do in many cultures.

6. *We can keep our eyes on the prize*, that is, creating the social arrangements that enhance the power, safety, pleasure and possibilities of both sexes, all sexual orientations, all races, all ages, all classes. Those in power will try to tell us we have already won. Or that our brains are not suited to winning. Or that we really do not want to win anyway. Or that we should cultivate our own sweet qualities. All of these narratives deflect us from the vision that one day must become reality: the only way for Man to no longer be the center of the defining universe is for Woman to be in the center ring with him.

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