Editor’s Note: R. Charli Carpenter’s (2002) essay review titled “Gender Theory in World Politics: Contributions of a Non-Feminist Standpoint?” in a recent issue of the International Studies Review (ISR) was bound to spark debate. The title was well chosen and instantly provocative. Many readers would assume that gender is a synonym for women, that those concerned with gender would be women, and that they would perforce be feminists. How, then, could there be a “non-feminist” view of gender and, from such a perspective, what could gender possibly be? Moreover, feminism in international relations (IR)—whether or not coincident with “feminist IR”—has itself been controversial from the beginning. The intense mix of political, methodological, and substantive debates that has resulted has led to productive relationships between IR and other disciplines, inward migrations into IR of scholars anxious to engage with international politics, and intellectually exciting rethinking within IR and its subfields.

The ISR editors have kindly provided space, not for replies and responses to Carpenter’s piece as such, but for a Forum that examines the issues that her essay review raised “out there” in the readership. Carpenter herself has been very engaged in debating the issues since publication and deserves an opportunity to report back about what she has heard and what she thinks now. Indeed, the ISR editors encouraged contributors to the Forum to circulate drafts among themselves, and readers will find that the contributors have taken the opportunity to agree and disagree with each other in ways that further deepen the discussion.

To frame the agenda for the Forum, contributors were given a set of questions to consider. These issues helped us get started; beyond that, we have all been free to take our thoughts where we like and where we variously think that readers should go. The questions are listed below. We urge readers to think about what their own views are and to reflect on the answers offered here and elsewhere as well as in their own work.

1. What is the relationship between conceptualizations of gender and different forms of feminist and non-feminist IR?
2. What influence does methodological choice have on conceptualizations of gender?
3. What are the available methodologies and what rightly influences a researcher’s choice?
4. What understandings of sex and sexuality go into different conceptualizations of gender, and which ones are particularly relevant in IR?
Gender/Feminism/IR

TERRELL CARVER

Department of Politics, University of Bristol

Using Gender

Gender is not going to be “an explanatory framework” (Carpenter 2002:154). Rather, it is going to figure into the explanatory frameworks that people already have, and into the ones that international relations (IR) theorists think that they should have. Gender is not either explanandum (the thing to be explained) or explanans (whatever does the explaining). It could be either or both, on its own or in conjunction with other factors. Clearly some researchers are going to need persuading that gender matters at all in what they study. Typically gender is going to be in both explanandum and explanans, rather as cause and effect are linked, and, indeed, that linkage is likely to play a part in what convinces us that the explanation is a good one. For example, voting Republican or Conservative (an effect) is probably going to have something to do with having Republican or Conservative values or beliefs (a cause), but of course it could also be explanatorily linked with income and wealth as well as with parental voting (Republican or Conservative), with geographical residence (where there are lots of Republicans or Conservatives), and so on. Gender can function within a framework, but it is not the framework itself. Putting gender into the explanandum or explanans, or having it figure in some different way in both, may be said “to gender” a study and “to gender” an explanatory framework.

The above is intended to explain some shorthand usage and to help clarify situations in which researchers talk past one another (Carver forthcoming). It does not, of course, describe the only situation in which researchers talk past one another. Consider another. For some researchers the fact-value dichotomy is central and a cornerstone of science and objectivity whereas for others the dichotomy is not only nonexistent but an illusion with an ideological function. Communication across this divide is notoriously difficult. Few philosophers of social science today hold to anything like the Humean orthodoxy that “you cannot derive values from facts” and that “true facts are value-neutral.” Such would require facts to be established by researchers who are (through some means or procedure) objective and detached in their professional roles. Weaker senses of objectivity rely on disclosure of values, concepts of balance, and a belief that literal language can exclude values sufficiently to offer a universality of truth to any and all who are rational and open-minded. This position obviously relies on views about language (that it can be literal and therefore value-free) and consciousness (that it can be detachedly objective apart from privately held views) that are well understood in theory but controversial in principle and in practice. The opposite view—that no literal language is possible and that value-free consciousness as a scientist is not only impossible but perniciously ideological—relies on philosophical positions that are rather more recent (post-“linguistic turn”), overtly critical rather than disengaged, and even more controversial to defend intellectually and politically. The debates continue, and the divide persists.

The methodological divide sketched above is a major one in IR and directly affects the gender question precisely because raising gender as an issue has been regarded as a major challenge to the discipline as such. Any discipline has boundaries setting out its self-definition. Arguably IR has been substantively defined at such a level of generality and abstraction that gender (as human sexual
difference, we might say for the moment) could simply be ruled out altogether. Conversely those arguing that gender should be substantively included in explanandum or explanans (indeed that all previous IR content should be "gendered") have been perceived as radical challengers to an agreed upon or traditional core in the field (agreed upon by whom and when are, of course, further relevant difficulties here). Indeed, some of those arguing for the necessity and sometimes the centrality of gender have adopted the role of challenger quite self-consciously. For unsurprising reasons, the "gendering" of IR has been associated with, and the project of, a number of feminists, who have generally (though not completely) fallen on the side of the methodological divide that views the fact–value dichotomy with grave suspicion and overt hostility. Conversely those inclined to defend the so-called standard substance of IR have tended (though not exclusively) to be those using a methodology founded on the fact–value distinction (see Jones 1996, 1998; Carver, Cochran, and Squires 1998). The upshot here is that the "gendering" of IR has been attacked by disciplinary guardians and by guardians of scientific objectivity, whereas "gendered" IR has generally been pursued by feminists usually avowing an intrinsic connection between their work and their values, and often arguing for a transformation of the discipline in terms of substance. "Gendering IR" is thus a project; "gendered" IR is an outcome.

Nonetheless, some brave attempts at dialogue and crossover have occurred. To some extent this space is occupied by newish methodologies (for example, constructivism), containing and maintaining ambiguities that bridge the divides of substance and methodology. These meeting places allow newish topics to accrete to IR as a discipline and, thus, to gain inclusion of a sort (which may mean marginalization). There is, in effect, a kind of practical getting-on-with-it that may not please ruthlessly logical philosophers of science (who like to emphasize unbridgeable logical differences) or stern guardians of the discipline (who dislike accretions, particularly that one). But as a form of liberal pressure group and transformative identity politics, it clearly has advantages. Even though this account has emphasized (and oversimplified) intellectual issues, additional generational, geographical, cultural and—dare we say—gender issues about IR as a profession have considerable salience in the story (Carver 1998:351).

What Is Gender? What Is Sex?

Recent debates about what gender is have complicated matters still further, particularly among feminists, who started the debates (Connell 2002). Joan Scott (1999) has argued that as a term "gender" tends to signal our desire to show that some aspects of our bodily and behavioral selves are malleable and, therefore, cultural products, whereas other aspects belong to "the natural," which is taken to be fixed. Sex as male–female differences and sexuality as desire and practices generally cover the bodily features and behavioral forms to which we call attention when "gendering" anything, and within which we commonly deploy the natural–cultural boundary line. Hardly anyone wants to claim that everything about sex and sexuality is cultural and therefore malleable, and almost no one regards everything in sex and sexuality as completely fixed biologically by nature.

While working to center "woman" as a valid object of study and to validate women as "knowers" and "speakers" generally, feminists have understandably developed a view of men (distinguishing here between a generic human "man" and man-as-male) that sees them benefiting from the masculine codings of so many of the resources and activities in society in a power-hierarchy over women. Gender researchers in men's studies and masculinities have contributed a theoretical and descriptive understanding of the gender categories (in terms of bodily stereotyping
and sexuality policing) of advantage and disadvantage among men. Some of this work has occurred within a frame described as feminist or feminist-friendly (see Carver forthcoming). With reference to IR, these latter issues concerning men have recently surfaced in discussions about how to “gender” IR. Feminist and so-called non-feminist researchers in the field have approached the issue by tracking the distinctions described above (see Jones forthcoming). Given the number of dichotomies involved, the output matrix of possible positions is highly complex!

Gender is “marked” on women and on “woman” as female. It is often difficult to persuade men that they have any gender or that gender is of any relevance or interest, other than as something that women do, about women (or “woman”). Bringing men-as-men into gender studies and into a “gendered” IR is, therefore, quite tricky for two reasons. First, feminism is an ongoing political project about gender oppression that must be noticed and not lightly dismissed or marginalized, say, on methodological grounds, such as occurs in the push to be value-neutral. Second, notions that “gendering” IR must involve “balance” or “equality” are gendered notions in themselves, and gendered masculine, because they erase the hierarchy that exists within the binary and simple duality of “sex” (as male versus female) and the history of female oppression (Jones 2000; Carver 2002).

Knowing Gender

Feminist theory, feminist values, and feminist scholarship, although understandably focusing on women, have in no way resisted the consideration of men-as-men and masculinities as features of world politics, nor have they argued that feminists make gender into a synonym for women such that men-as-men get erased (see Jones 1996, 2000, 2002). The author’s (Carver 1996) critical barb in his book title, Gender Is Not a Synonym for Women, was directed at men! Mainstreaming a feminist-informed concept of “gender” in any area or methodology in IR would hardly undermine the feminist agenda, and if any feminists think so, it is up to them to say rather than for anyone to presume that this process will ipso facto be a problem for nonfeminist IR (Carpenter 2002:154). Moreover, nonfeminist IR had better know what it is talking about when it “genders” its research!

Doing the “gendering” well would mean a thorough acquaintance with feminist literatures on gender beyond what is summarized in feminist IR, and a similarly thorough appreciation of how feminist thinking has created contemporary gender studies by fostering diversity and critique. “Nonfeminist gender studies” is virtually an oxymoron. Does nonfeminist IR have a concept of gender derivative of some “nonfeminist” conceptions that would stand up to scrutiny today in social scientific or theoretical circles? Even though it might be possible to adapt feminist-informed concepts of gender to political agendas that are feminist or even feminist-friendly, it is difficult to visualize an IR that is nonfeminist and credible in the sense of writing off feminist-informed concepts of gender as politically biased in favor of some nonfeminist concepts that are not. In sum, the urge to create a nonfeminist IR marks an interesting strategy of “othering” feminist IR yet again. What exactly has IR got to lose? Does feminist IR like its ghetto? Surely IR is broad enough to encompass feminist-informed and feminist-friendly concepts of gender on both sides of any ideological or political divides.
MARYSIA ZALEWSKI  

Centre for Women’s Studies, Queen’s University, Belfast

The more that “feminism” has become a publicly visible term, the less sense both its practitioners and detractors have of what it is “about.” (Kavka 2001:ix)

Misha Kavka’s suggestion might not be warmly welcomed, or understood, in the discipline of International Relations (IR)—at least not among those scholars who persistently want to know exactly what feminists can usefully contribute to the discipline. The suggestion that feminism is controversially undecidable sits uneasily with unremitting requests to confirm its attendant status. Yet, questions calculated to reify an inhibiting structural position hinge on a certain precision regarding the character of contemporary feminism. Failure to secure this position occasions a tendency to impose it.

This short essay will reflect on the tendency to enforce order onto feminism within IR, engaging with the work of the other contributors to this forum as they reflect some current perspectives on feminism and gender in (or and) IR. Of particular interest will be examining what “becomes of feminism” in its depiction within the IR discipline.

What Is Feminism?

Feminism as an intellectual and political project is not finally bound to any prescribed domain of gender’s complex universe. (Wiegman 2002:128)

We know feminism is really feminisms. Its boundaries, such as they exist, are supple and pliant; its remit unbounded. Yet, two conjoined practices endure within IR: one involves the restriction of feminism’s possibilities; the other relates to its necessary abandonment. Put another way, despite the widespread acknowledgment of feminism’s unbridled diversity, the aspiration to confine it within distinct and “proper” parameters appears irresistible, evoking the ensuing logical affirmation that feminism is ultimately futile.

Despite the lively controversy within feminism regarding its relationship to and with “woman,” as Helen Kinsella notes in this forum, it is this category that draws the disciplinary attention of those who crave feminism’s containment. Feminism becomes, simply, about women. As Charli Carpenter (2002:159) comments, “feminist approaches—even though rich, diverse, and a much needed critique—are substantively narrow as their emphasis is women.” Similar references to “the” feminist project (Carpenter, this forum), or feminism’s “focus on women” (Carver, this forum), or that “feminism is an on-going political project about gender oppression” (Carver, this forum) reinforce the vision of feminism’s limitations.

A similar point might be made in relation to the research intentions and possibilities of feminist scholarship. Here, the issue of gender as a tool or an explanatory framework (Carver, this forum) is salient, as is the apparently unrelenting adherence to the idea that there is a meaningful distinction between normative and explanatory theory in IR. The swath of postfoundational theorizing (feminist and not) over the past few decades has thoroughly discredited this
spurious distinction. As such, the value awarded to supposedly “purely explanatory work” in IR versus the “merely normative” work of feminism (Carpenter, this forum) is untenable. Relatedly, the notion that feminism is political and IR is not is unsustainable and, therefore, cannot act as a basis on which to bestow favor on one (that is, IR) at the expense of the other (that is, feminism).

Despite this discussion, the appeal of representing feminism as diminutive persists. With spurious boundaries in place, feminism is criticized for its illusory narrow remit. What might we learn from the persistent anxieties provoked by feminism’s interventions into IR that are indicated by the maneuvers to diminish it? Terrell Carver is surely correct in stating that gender is “marked” on women. Indeed, with some confidence, we can say that feminism’s use of gender has an intimate relationship with women and woman. Yet, how does the ensuing remarkable idea emerge that gender and feminism’s association with women implies frailty and limited intellectual mobility? A frequently suggested remedy for these alleged weaknesses has been the move to “gender studies” or the reliance on the concept of gender, as opposed to focusing on women or feminism. There is insufficient space in this short essay to discuss the ineffectual character of the move from “women” to “gender,” most notably its failure to escape the dilemma of identity politics. Nor is there room to expose the illusion of the idea that gender implies a critical expansion over the category of woman (Wiegman 2002). However, it is pertinent to consider further the twin ideas that theorizing women is narrow and that studying gender in IR might be fruitfully served by casting it adrift from its feminist theoretical moorings.

Forsaking Feminism?

It is not uncommon to assume that theorizing about women lacks the depth and strength of other kinds of scholarly analyses, especially those favored by the mainstream. The perception seems to be that feminist inquiries about women are simply reports of facts about women with the intention of having this information used in support of emancipatory politics. Although it may be the case that feminist work regularly focuses on women and that questions of equality and liberation are often significant, one can read feminist literature very differently. Feminist curiosity and scholarly inquiry evolving and revolving around questions such as Sojourner Truth’s “Ain’t I a woman?” and claims such as Simone de Beauvoir’s that “one is not born but becomes a woman” have launched copious theoretical and empirical trajectories radically undermining the ontological, epistemological, methodological, and political premises of modern and postmodern thought. Feminist problematizations of gendering and sexing splendidly illustrate the bogus distinction between theory and facts. Asking the questions “What is woman?” or “Why is woman this way?” simultaneously builds on, originates, and leads to the construction of theories about feminism, gender, and sex. These questions are not exhaustive. But to suggest that one might make scholarly inquiries about woman or man through gender that do not engage the abundance of existing theoretical analyses runs the risk of saying nothing at all. The claim here is not that gender is ceaselessly and seamlessly tethered to feminism; indeed a wide range of critical methodologies do help us work with and develop understandings of gender (for example, critical theory, queer theory, postcolonial theory, and transgender theory). But a question remains: what is the merit of dismissing the opulent archives of feminist theory in order to theorize about gender? These archives include but are not limited to work on liberal, socialist, Marxist, and radical feminisms as well as psychoanalytic explanations, social constructions, and queer deconstructions.
As implied in the above discussion, evacuating feminism from gender results in the reproduction of very meager stories about women-men-gender-and-sex in IR—and that is surely unnecessary. Fuelling the idea of eliminating feminism from gender seems to be the gratuitous desire to confine feminist scholarly work within specific contours. What feminism becomes as a consequence of this confinement is something unrecognizably inept and vacuous. Furthermore, the undertaking to “do gender without feminism,” if it does not engage cognate critical work (such as masculinity studies, postfoundational thought, and queer theory—all of which owe their development at least in part to feminist theory), suggests a rejuvenation of orthodox theoretical practices around gender. Traditionally such practices have implied that gender is not already part of the work of IR scholars or that paying serious attention to gender can be achieved without any significant impact on the theories of the discipline.

Sexing Feminist IR

Unsexed is what you become in the moment of doubt before classification. . . . Ambiguity resolves back into certainty, doubt into gendered absolutes. (Weston 2002:28)

Kinsella’s gesture to Judith Butler’s (1995) “For a Careful Reading” affords a generous appraisal of the maneuvers to “sex feminist IR” to resolve ambiguity back into certainty. Yet, Butler’s persuasive account of “the unspeakable” structuring of the terms through which debate is carried out and the breathtaking morbidity of the “refusal to learn” owes some allegiance to a less munificent source. Invoking Nietzschean wisdom, Butler (1995:127) insinuates that “the pursuit of the reasonable is . . . the site and instrument of other kinds of investments, ones which are difficult, if not impossible, to uncover, much less to change.” More caustic than careful, Nietzschean acumen further informs us: “The worst readers are those who behave like plundering troops: they take away a few things they can use, dirty and confound the remainder, and revile the whole” (Nietzsche 1977: 15–16).

Kinsella perceptively suggests that the contributors to this forum will disagree as to “what is to be done” about the neglect of sex and gender within IR. Caution, however, is advised. “Reasonable” accounts of feminism’s certain inadequacies, though proffered as evidence of careful readings, are amenable to exposure as vapid attempts to tame feminist “excess.” However meticulously feminism’s ambiguity is articulated, the silent vociferousness of the impulse to contain, constrain, and cauterize invites the “eternal return” of critiques of feminism in IR that Kinsella laments. This eternal return (reinventing the wheel) is predictable, given the “endless attempts to lay discomfort to rest through a rush to classification” (Weston 2002:32). The fuel sourcing the inclination to inflect order onto feminism within IR has demonstrated a compelling competence. Yet, given Butler’s sage words specifically and the more generic guidance generated by contemporary feminism in the context of the “will to classify,” the determined attempt among feminist scholars to persuade and cajole the mainstream seems incongruous if not injudicious.

More than a heavy trace of faith marks the progressivist promise that is evident in feminist scholars’ confidence in both the veracity of work that tries to evacuate feminism from gender and the conviction that someday a new mainstream IR will listen, hear, and act. But the discipline’s failures surely demonstrate their discomforting encounters with the troubled condition of modernity, inducing a “wash of insecurity, anxiety, and hopelessness across a political landscape formerly
kept dry by the floodgates of foundationalism and metaphysics” (Brown 2001:5). Rather than eternally reinvent the wheels of feminisms, scholars might instead focus on oiling the wheels of feminist reinvention. As Weston (2002:9) forewarns, “so long as opposition regularly reinvents itself as hegemony, theorists, like activists, have to keep moving.”

For a Careful Reading: The Conservativism of Gender Constructivism

HELEN KINSELLA
Department of Political Science, University of Minnesota

Feminism Beside Itself

The primary debate within feminist theorizing during the last decade has been whether it is possible or desirable to posit a category such as “woman” upon which feminism is predicated and to which it responds (see Elam and Wiegman 1995). These debates, diverse and contentious, draw within their ambit questions of sex, sexuality, masculinity, femininity, identity, power, class, race, ethnicity, and the inevitable “and so on.” The impulse to categorize this range of feminist theorizing to a simple substantive claim that there is an essential subject (woman) and a primary goal (ending oppression) reduces a productive cacophonous counterpoint to a single note. Indeed, the ultimate irony may be that if feminist theorizing can be characterized, it would result from its very preoccupation with the question of what, exactly, is the “crucial conceptual coordinate” of its claims (Dietz 2003). Evidence for this statement is visible, for example, within the work of international relations scholars who focus on the intersectionality among the above markers in the production of political identities and political practices (see, for example, Towns 2002; Berman 2003; Peterson 2003).

Whether one can identify specific authors in the discipline as undertaking this work is not necessarily the point as Adam Jones (1998) mistakes in his reply to Terrell Carver and his associates (1998). Rather, the point is that the subjects and goals of feminism are already in dispute and, correspondingly, so are the concepts that inform them. Therefore, the meaning and designation of all three—subject, goals, and concepts—is intrinsically political and historically fluid. It becomes difficult to acknowledge the previous statement if one insists upon, as Marysia Zalewski notes in this forum, establishing the proper parameters of feminism. What, then, would happen if we did recognize the intrinsic temporality and historicity of the subjects, goals, and, in turn, the very concepts by which feminism attempts to define itself? In other words, what would be the result if we refused to accept a single definition of feminism as the starting point for this exchange? What follows is this author’s answers to these questions.

Add Gender and Stir?

Most immediately, such a recognition of the fluidity of feminisms would lead us to be skeptical of the seemingly “eternal return” of certain critiques of feminism in international relations. These critiques include substituting the study of women for that of gender, insufficiently addressing the multidimensionality of masculinity and
of the roles of men in the practice and production of international relations, and allowing political commitments to contaminate methodological approaches (see Jones 1996; Keohane 1998; Carpenter 2002). The veracity of these critiques is not the subject. Instead, it is their disengagement from the historical volatility of feminist ontological, epistemological, and methodological claims over the last three decades that address and debate these points. This lack of engagement cannot be attributed to the comportment of feminists themselves and their guarding of a “monopoly of feminist IR on gender studies” (Carpenter 2002:158). After all, is a call for a conversation not an invitation to interact (see Tickner 1997)? Furthermore, this analysis, like that of Jones (1996), attributes a degree of power to feminist theorizing and theorists that has yet to be effectively demonstrated. It is certainly difficult to understand how feminists have “kept non-feminists out” (Carpenter 2002: 156), when disciplinary marginalization is clearly not only a risk, but often a consequence of feminist theorizing.

Additionally, this studied disengagement with the diverse range of feminist theorizing ignores the contributions already made by feminist scholars in the areas now highlighted by conventional constructivists. Surely, the self-reflexivity now emphasized by Stefano Guzzini (2000) as a hallmark of constructivism is recognizable in Sandra Harding’s (1986) exploration of thin objectivity and Donna Haraway’s (1991) development of situated knowledges. Ted Hopf’s (1998) lament that constructivism lacks a theory of identity formation ignores the laborious work of feminist scholars on just such a question. Yet, if one were simply to read exchanges within the discipline of international relations, feminism would appear to be in a state of suspended animation even if it can be argued that the work of scholars such as Kathy Moon (1997), Jan Jindy Pettman (1996), Marysia Zalewski (1996), and Spike Peterson (1997) betrays this depiction. What is most striking, however, is that this representation of feminism makes possible something as intrinsically tautological as “gender constructivism.”

Gender constructivism necessarily presupposes that gender is not already constructed and that constructivism is not already gendered for it to become intelligible in any form. If constructivism is a theory about the social construction of world politics, then gender is already present. Moreover, a gender constructivism that claims to broaden the focus from “women” to “political outcomes in general” or “patterns of armed conflict and political violence generally” (Carpenter 2002:160) reproduces a presumption of women as “particular” and “marginal” that is set against the study of some putative neutral “universal” or “generality.” Yet, has feminist scholarship not decisively shown that the universal is, in fact, predicated upon raced and sexed norms of masculinity and men? In other words, the continued insistence on the particularity of women is what facilitates and secures the representation of masculinity and men as universal. Ironically, this conservative methodological move of gender constructivism is best described in the terms that have come under considerable critique from feminism itself: the impulse to add women or, in this case gender, and stir. For early critical analyses of the deficiencies of such a move, see Spike Peterson (1992), Ann Tickner (1992), and Christine Sylvester (1994). What is perhaps most interesting, however, is the way in which gender constructivism relies on and replicates the silence of constructivism regarding the question and operation of disciplinary and productive power (Locher and Prugl 2001; Barnett and Duvall 2003; Kinsella 2003). It is possible to draw out the implications of this claim using the concept of gender as an example.
Gender is frequently operationalized as if it were the social construction of sex difference, that is, as if sex were a referent of gender. For instance, one recent definition involves “usefully” distinguishing sex from gender as a brute from a social fact (Carpenter 2002). Accordingly, sex exists independently of (that is, external and prior to) our representations of it whereas gender requires social (that is, collective) representation for its existence. Charli Carpenter may be said to hold, with Alexander Wendt (1999:72), that “constructivism without nature goes too far.” First, it is an increasingly difficult position to defend that sex is prior to gender. The more one searches for the brute reality of sex, the more one finds that it is gendered, that is, that the understanding of sex as a fact is itself a “cultural conceit” (Haraway 1991:197). Instead, feminist theorists argue that it is this understanding of sex and sex difference that lends plausibility to the nature–culture binary, which in turn underpins the fact–value conflict. In other words, this understanding of sex and sex difference is paradigmatic for a way of thinking about difference: as binary, as complementary, as given in nature. What is obscured as a result are the relations between power and politics that produce, distinguish, and regulate the concepts of “gender” and “sex.” As these concepts are one of the ways in which we understand and order our knowledge and experience as well as identify problems and imagine solutions, the struggle over their meanings is inextricably political. By insisting on a definition of sex and gender as if their conceptions are already settled and natural categories—indeed, empirical categories—one completely misses the politics and power of conceptual definition and the relationship of concepts to understanding. Categories and concepts are not neutral.

Lest this point be misunderstood, the reader should recognize that the determination of sex is a process of construction within a social reality that is already gendered and does not result in the rejection of the materiality of bodies. Instead, understanding this process leads to questions concerning how sex and gender operate to create the reality through which bodies materialize as sexed, as sexualized, as raced, as objects of knowledge and subjects of power (see Butler 1990, 1993; Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Moon 1997; Peterson 1997; Baard 2003). To gain a purchase on questions such as these inevitably requires a sustained examination of the complex and intersecting matrix of elements of political formation. Consider, for example, an examination of the emergence and codification of the concept of “civilian” in international relations and international law. Discourses on gender, innocence, and civilization produce the fundamental distinction between combatant and civilian (Kinsella 2003). Such an exploration employs gender as an analytical category and not, as Carpenter (2002, 2003) reduces it to: an empirical one. Using the analytical category facilitates tracing the productive power of gender even as, or even if, sexed bodies are absent.

All of us in this forum agree that mainstream international relations theory has neglected analyses of sex and gender to its own detriment. We each disagree, to varying degrees though, as to what is to be done about it and what the consequences are that follow from each approach. For the present author, the answer would not be to free gender analysis from a “feminist agenda” (if there is, indeed, such a thing), but to continue to explore what exactly it is that makes the study of gender so difficult to integrate into even a nominally constructivist
international relations. A number of us suspect that it is because gender analysis necessarily requires an exploration of disciplinary and productive power—exactly that which is considered to contaminate the fundamental and ostensibly neutral binaries of fact-value, problem solving-critical theory, and brute-social so beloved by international relations scholars and upon which claims are staked and careers are made.

Stirring Gender into the Mainstream: Constructivism, Feminism and the Uses of IR Theory

R. CHARLI CARPENTER

Department of Political Science, University of Oregon

Beyond the Gender/Feminism Nexus

The point of “Gender Theory in World Politics: Contributions of a Non-Feminist Standpoint?” (Carpenter 2002) was not to delineate new parameters for gender in IR but to kindle some dialogue about the nature of those parameters, if indeed any could be said to exist. The basic premises of the argument are: mainstream IR scholars ignore gender at the risk of inadequately understanding social reality and at least some forms of gender analysis can be incorporated into mainstream constructivism as constructivism rather than as part of an explicitly feminist project.

The comments that follow represent an ongoing rumination about these points with feminist and non-feminist colleagues. They address the following questions: (1) How is the gender-constructivism proposed in Carpenter (2002) similar to and different from IR feminism, and (2) where is the value-added of incorporating gender into conventional IR research without simultaneously claiming to be doing feminist theory?

With respect to the original argument, two overall points are in order before going any further. First, the view that constructivists should incorporate gender does not entail an attempt to replace gender critique with the use of gender as a “mere variable.” Second, the viewpoint that normative concerns are constitutive of IR feminism should not be read as an attempt to diminish IR feminism as “merely normative.” The distinction is between different ways of approaching subject matter—some consistent with critical theory, some consistent with conventional approaches to IR (be they quantitative or qualitative). A specifically feminist voice seems most appropriate when the researcher seeks to contribute directly to the political and transformative project of overcoming gender oppression (on uses of theory, see Zalewski 1996). Yet beyond being useful as critique or in theorizing everyday practice, gender is also an important explanatory tool in the merely “problem-solving” project of understanding and explaining the world as it is (Cox 1986). Below, this claim is expanded to make the argument that understanding gender is crucial in advancing other political projects besides that of feminism—such as the improvement of policies designed to protect civilian populations in armed conflict (Carpenter, 2003).

Gender Constructivism and IR Feminism

As Mary Caprioli (2003) demonstrates, it is neither ontology nor epistemology that sets the gender constructivism proposed in Carpenter (2002) apart from IR feminism as it has developed over the last decade. Epistemological and
methodological divides cut across both feminism and constructivism (Harding 1986). Ontologically the approaches share an understanding of political reality as a social construction and accord ideas explanatory influence (Prugl 1999). A gender constructivist approach, like IR feminism and unlike most other constructivism to date, would see beliefs about sexual difference, among others, as useful in understanding patterns of social interaction, institutional forms, and political outcomes. The key differentiation from feminism is axiological, having to do with the values that inform research. This essay clarifies and then expands upon this position.

First, it is reductive to assume that by emphasizing gender as a form of explanation we are limiting ourselves to causal or quantitative analysis, particularly in social constructivist work. With respect to the IR literature on norms with which the writer is currently engaged, constitutive explanations are used to define the parameters of a particular set of social arrangements (Wendt 1999; Ruggie 1998; Onuf 1998); causal analysis explains how such intersubjective beliefs produce variation in political discourse or behavior (Goldstein and Keohane 1993; Yee 1996). An analysis of the significance of gender can be incorporated into both kinds of explanatory framework by demonstrating that a belief regarding gender relations is socially constructed rather than biologically given; showing that socio-political outcomes are different than would be expected in the absence of that belief; and providing a convincing empirical account of the ways in which the belief operated to constrain, enable, or constitute the outcomes in question. (This process is different, however, from research on norms and identities that happens to deal with women’s issues without explicitly investigating the influence of gender as a set of ideas. For example, Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink’s (1998) study of norms relating to women’s suffrage is a constructivist analysis on an issue relevant to women, not a gender analysis per se.)

Second, it is true that such research might adopt a less critical frame than a minimalist approach to gender, which Terrell Carver (2002) has called Type 1 gender analysis. This form of analysis simply starts from the assumption that “gender is socially learnt and culturally variable behavior expressing sex” (Carver 2002:88). Despite arguments to the contrary, the sex/gender distinction, while admittedly a simplification, is appropriate and tenable for this level of analysis (for an elaboration see Carpenter forthcoming). Carver (2002:88) distinguishes this approach from more sophisticated Type 2 and 3 gender theories, which incorporate critiques of gender as a set of power relations “producing advantage and oppression in terms of sex and sexuality.” By contrast, Type 1 analysis simply recognizes that gender is socially constructed and examines the impact of such ideas on socio-political outcomes. Whereas Helen Kinsella claims in this forum that “gender analysis necessarily requires an exploration of disciplinary and productive power,” in fact this is true only for Type 2 and 3 analyses. As feminist empiricists have been well aware for many years, Type 1 gender analysis is quite amenable to conventional explanatory science (Caprioli 2003). Moreover, where gender analysis is used simply to explain variation in behavior, it need not necessarily be feminist research.

When is such work feminist? Or, to put it another way, among Type 1 scholarship, where is the line to be drawn between conventional scholarship that is feminist (that is, “feminist empiricism”) and non-feminist work incorporating gender (such as “gender constructivism”)? The position of this author is that to qualify as “feminist” a research project must be informed by feminist values (however defined by the researcher in question). Notwithstanding Kinsella’s useful reminder in this forum about the diversity within IR feminisms, an “ongoing political project about gender oppression” seems to tie these multiplicities together, as Carver (this forum) and
many IR feminists writing from different perspectives have themselves claimed (for example, Ruddick 1989:235; Whitworth 1994:2; Steans 1998:15; Cockburn 2001:16; Tickner 2001:11).

Defining feminism in terms of its values does not mean that IR feminists are not also engaged in explanation; it does mean that what constitutes feminist research, regardless of methodology or epistemology, is its normative orientation or, as Caprioli (2003) puts it, the political agenda to which the work is meant to contribute. What enables Caprioli (2003:1) to make a strong argument that feminist empiricism is feminist is precisely the fact that it “focuses on issues of social justice particularly as relates to women.” If this commitment to transforming gender inequality is constitutive of IR feminist research, then non-feminist gender research would be that which incorporates gender analytically but either lacks any overt political agenda or seeks to serve an agenda other than overcoming gender oppression.

Though the writer is less certain than before about the possibility of “purely” explanatory research, the distinction between value-laden and value-neutral research still seems useful. It is, for example, a benchmark by which many of us evaluate undergraduates’ research papers. But aspiring to value-neutrality does not mean pretending the researcher has no normative commitments. Rather, it means a willingness to separate the production of facts from the promulgation of an agenda regarding how to use those facts politically. Conventional constructivists aim at this when they claim to be studying the effects of ideas in world politics rather than promoting those ideas themselves (Wendt 1995:74). Whether or not this stance is epistemologically defensible is currently a point of debate (see Jackson, 2000; Reus-Smit, 2002). But to the extent it is, the key argument in Carpenter (2002) is that such research is impoverished if it fails to account for the explanatory power of gender ideas on political processes.

Let us go one step further. For argument’s sake, suppose we take the position that there is no such thing as purely “explanatory” theory. Suppose we concur with Robert Cox (1986:207) that “theory is always for someone and for some purpose.” Must gender as a category of analysis be relevant only for the “purpose” of overcoming gender oppression? No. Gender analysis is very relevant to other research agendas as well. Franke Wilmer’s (2002) work on ethnic politics in the former Yugoslavia is one example of research that incorporates elements of gender theory to understand ethnic war, but operates in a social constructivist rather than explicitly feminist frame. Her analysis is clearly driven by values, but they involve the desire to understand and reduce ethnic bloodshed rather than gender oppression per se.

Similarly, the present author’s current research on the protection of war-affected civilians demonstrates that beliefs about sexual difference can produce political outcomes one would not expect in their absence (Carpenter 2003). However, this analysis stops short of critiquing the gender hierarchies on which the political outcomes are based, or connecting them to women’s subordination more generally (but see Gardam and Jervis 2001; Kinsella 2003). It also stops with the claim that certain configurations of gender ideas are problematic for the humanitarian agenda as conventionally understood (a project consistent with mainstream IR), rather than critiquing this agenda for its failures at gender equity (a feminist project on which much has already been written; see, for example, Mertus 2000; Cockburn and Zarkov 2002). In that respect, this project is closer to what Cox would call “problem-solving” than “critical” theory. Gender, however, remains central to the analysis.

In sum, though mainstream researchers should incorporate gender into their projects, simply adopting gender as a category of analysis need not necessarily mean one is speaking in a feminist voice. Adopting this distinction can assist in
mainstreaming “gender” in the discipline without the risk of co-opting “feminism” itself (see also Smith 1998:62).

But What’s the Point?

Still, some will ask: why do gender as a “non-feminist”? First, for this author, it is not only substantively important to examine what role gender plays when asking broader questions than those often emphasized by IR feminists, but also politically important to maintain the emphasis on problematizing gender hierarchies when claiming to write as a feminist. For example, one might, as an IR neo-feminist (Caprioli 2003), investigate the way in which gender essentialisms in the civilian protection network affect efforts to promote gender equity in international institutions. The aim of this project is simply to understand the effects of gender ideologies on patterns of humanitarian action and the extent to which these patterns promote or inhibit the protection of civilians (a category not coterminous with women).

Second, many IR feminists have expressed an interest in explicitly provoking a dialogue with mainstream social constructivists and beyond that IR scholars in general. If the goal is to add gender to their frame of reference and demonstrate why they cannot do without it, we need to speak within that frame in order to be heard. As long as gender and feminist theory are conflated within the discipline of IR, it will remain all too easy for social constructivists and other mainstream scholars to brush aside questions of gender if their work does not explicitly involve women or feminist concerns. The work on humanitarian action described above, which can be legitimately criticized by feminists for adopting an intentionally narrow frame, uses such a frame to demonstrate that even in such “conventional” projects, gender analysis is indispensable for understanding the world. Insofar as working within conventional constructivism means stepping outside of IR feminism, engaging in that intellectual exercise seems worthwhile if the end result is to better mainstream gender in the discipline.

Some will see this proposal as a dangerous step toward stripping gender analysis of its feminist components, and perhaps ten years ago this author would have shared that concern. But feminism is now well established in IR. The next important step is to increase mainstream scholars’ interest and literacy in gender analysis. The way to accomplish such a result is by demonstrating that gender is relevant to their work. Only by so doing can IR neo-/feminists hope to engage the mainstream on issues of power and emancipation.

References


