

UC Santa Barbara

UC Santa Barbara Previously Published Works

Title

Analyzing Gender: A Handbook of Social Science Research.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3g04m1d4>

Journal

Contemporary Sociology A Journal of Reviews, 17(6)

ISSN

0094-3061

Authors

Bielby, Denise D
Hess, Beth B
Ferree, Myra Marx

Publication Date

1988-11-01

DOI

10.2307/2073556

Peer reviewed



Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Analyzing Gender: A Handbook of Social Science Research*. by Beth B. Hess and Myra Marx Ferree

Review by: Denise D. Bielby

Source: *Contemporary Sociology*, Nov., 1988, Vol. 17, No. 6 (Nov., 1988), pp. 744-745

Published by: American Sociological Association

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2073556>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



American Sociological Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Contemporary Sociology*

JSTOR

cal factors in the construction of and wartime challenges to the gender system. As a result, this collection makes a major contribution to the literature on women and war by synthesizing and serving as an introduction to existing research, presenting new research, and suggesting ways to reconceptualize the central question of war's impact on women.

Analyzing Gender: A Handbook of Social Science Research, edited by BETH B. HESS and MYRA MARX FERREE. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1987. 580 pp. \$39.95 cloth.

DENISE D. BIELBY

University of California, Santa Barbara

Analyzing *Analyzing Gender* has been an enlightening task. The editors' objective in this collection of invited chapters is "an attempt to provide an overview of feminist perspectives in the social sciences today" (p. 10). The diverse contributions to this volume cover an exceptionally broad range of topics, filling five sections on gender and ideology, social control of female sexuality, gender stratification, gendered worlds, and gender and the state. Chapter subjects range from evolutionary perspectives on gender hierarchy (Gailey), popular culture and the portrayal of women (Cantor), to gender and the GNP (Ciancanelli and Berch), reproduction (Rothman), and gender and political life (Ackelsberg and Diamond).

Some chapters stand out as exceptionally thorough and incisive, revealing among them feminist reconsiderations and decomposition of issues within the family (Glenn), in paid employment (England), and legal strategies (Baron). All of the chapters articulate "what we know and what we need to know about the significance of gender in social organization" (p. 10). Although chapter contributors represent nearly every social science, they share a focus and perspective loosely called "structural." Thus, despite the diversity of topics, this volume is tailored for sociologists. The editors identify their focus as one where "attention is directed outward from the individual to the social structures that shape experience and meaning, that give people a location in the social world, and that define and allocate economic rewards." Individual-

ity itself becomes a social product to be examined and explained.

One of the most interesting chapters is the introduction by Hess and Ferree. The authors articulate the perspective of "doing feminist research" as consisting of: (1) the fundamental rejection of the ideal of value-free research in favor of a conscious partiality, recognizing that even so-called neutral, value-free science is in fact based on male-defined, male-centered interests; (2) a methodology that rejects the positivist division between theory and practice, between the researcher and the "object of research"—thereby discrediting the image of the uninvolved spectator as the ideal social scientist; and (3) a methodology that is profoundly antifunctionalist, preferring to accommodate a holistic view of social structural arrangements as one where individuals as agents of change are faced with defined and defining situations and limited and limiting ranges of actions. The editors state that the structural perspective of feminist research represented in this volume is less deterministic than commonly found, concentrating instead on subject matter that begins from and remains true to personal experience. The authors study resistance, ambivalence, and conflict, and, most centrally, the distinction between "what is and what ought to be" (p. 14).

Not every chapter succeeds in fulfilling the editors' objectives. Rather than focusing on explanations of gendered reality, some chapters rely heavily on description and compilations of previous research. However, readers want more than a volume of empirical findings and empirical possibilities. Except in the introduction and Sayer's chapter on science's (mis)uses of sexual difference, notably absent is any extended treatment of issues and agendas in construction of feminist theory itself. For some time, feminist sociologists have been decrying our lack of contribution to this enterprise.

Also missing is an extended discussion of feminist perspectives on epistemology, an examination of issues in methodology, and the philosophy of science. The feminist perspective deals with the subjective and how the subjective is constructed. Interpretation lies at the center of the meaning derived from subjective experience. But how are feminist sociologists to reconcile epistemological strategies assimilated from interpretive paradigms

within our essentially positivist discipline? That is, how are sociologists to fit interpretation with structure? Feminist sociologists have had to borrow heavily from colleagues in philosophy, political science, history, and even biology for inspiration. Although many chapters do succeed in revealing issues along that boundary between interpretation and structure, readers certainly want more on this topic. We want to know where to go from here, not just where we have been. Despite these shortcomings, this volume introduces new terrain and provides a benchmark for feminist sociology.

Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind, by MARY FIELD BELENKY, BLYTHE MCVICKER CLINCHY, NANCY RULE GOLDBERGER, and JILL MATTUCK TARULE. New York: Basic Books, 1986. 256 pp. \$10.95 paper.

SUSAN A. OSTRANDER
Tufts University

This is a hot book. It's been well reviewed in the right places and is the recipient of an award from the Association of Women in Psychology. Claiming that models of intellectual development have been based entirely on male experience, the authors set out to correct this problem by introducing the female experience, based on interviews with 135 women (mostly college students) who are diverse in class, race, and ethnicity. The method is phenomenological. The researchers listened to what was important to their subjects.

In Part 1, the authors come up with five categories for how women assess truth and reality. First is silence, where women are blindly obedient to authority, powerless, and dependent. Women who listen to others in order to learn are in a category of received knowledge. When women develop their own private, personal voice, they have subjective knowledge. Procedural knowledge develops when women learn and know either by the canons of objective positivism in what is called separate knowledge, or by the experiential logic of phenomenology in what is called connective knowledge. Women are said to have an affinity for connected knowledge, which arises from relationships

and whose goal is to understand rather than to prove a point. The final and most advanced way of knowing is constructed knowledge, which is contextual and in which women are active creators and value both internal and external cues.

While I could easily identify with certain aspects of these ways of knowing (such as a shared frustration with a "male" orientation to know through adversarial debate and criticism), I am troubled by this book. In a number of ways it does not stray very far from the "male" canons it seeks to challenge. It does not seem to meet the authors' own standards for constructed knowledge, where basic assumptions are questioned and problems recast. In spite of disclaimers to the contrary, for example, what the authors present does not seem inconsistent with the hierarchical stages that characterize mainstream developmental theory. Too little attention is paid to why these women might learn and know in the ways that they do. Isn't silence, for example, sometimes not at all the "simplest" epistemological category (as the authors describe it) but rather a complex and essential survival tactic for any oppressed group? The book is also tied to "male" canons by the use of a prominent male theorist (William Perry) as a foil for building an alternative "women's" theory. This locks the authors in to a particular way of presenting and analyzing their data that a less oppositional approach deriving from their own category of constructed knowledge would have avoided.

The premises of the book rest on acceptance of an essentialist and ahistorical approach to sex differences. The argument that women may see the world differently from men because women occupy different and unequal positions in a stratified gender structure (as advocates of a feminist standpoint do) is entirely different from the perspective taken here, where women are seen "naturally" or as a consequence of mothering to have qualities other than those of men. And to suggest that the qualities of these ways of knowing are characteristics that women have in common subsumes analytic categories other than gender, even when the sample is diverse in race, class, and ethnicity.

The final chapters of this book (Part 2) look at what happens to women in families and in schools. How—and whether—a young girl is