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

Fiona Jenkins a, Helen Keane b, Claire Donovan c,⁎

a School of Philosophy, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, Canberra, ACT 2600, Australia
b School of Sociology, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, Canberra, ACT 2600, Australia
c Division of Health Sciences, Department of Clinical Sciences, Brunel University London, Uxbridge, UB8 3PH, Middlesex, United Kingdom

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

At a conference held at the Australian National University in 2016, 1 we sought to elaborate instances of gendered innovations in the social sciences that would both serve as elucidations of the importance of feminist and gender research to those as yet unfamiliar with or unconvinced of this; and to reflect upon the extent to which recognition of the value of this work had been concealed by mainstreams that all too often remain heavily male dominated. The work forms part of ongoing investigations conducted under the auspices of an Australian Research Council grant into ‘Gendered Excellence in the Social Sciences’ (GESS). 2 The aim of our conference was at once to consider how feminist and gender research sharpen and reforms disciplinary approaches, showing how our understanding of fundamental social science questions is improved by using a gendered analysis; and to compile evidence of the extent to which that promise of progress in knowledge is being realized - or not - through the uptake represented by disciplinary engagement and transformation.

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

Gendered innovations in social sciences have arisen from forms of inquiry that pay attention to multiple differences, modes of inequality, and potentials of human existence that were systemically overlooked or discounted by the androcentric paradigms that have dominated social inquiry. This has meant scholarship that is more adequate to understanding society, the story is a very mixed one. There appear to be large variations in the extent to which disciplines have become conscious of the importance of gender, with sociology a clear leader in this respect. In this special issue we thus place an overview of empirical research findings about the status and influence of feminist and gender research, based on analysis of citation patterns and other indicators, alongside three ‘case studies’ of gendered innovations in some of the most problematic disciplines: economics, philosophy and political science. 3

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

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2018.04.006
Received 17 April 2018; Accepted 19 April 2018
Available online 24 May 2018
0277-5395/ © 2018 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/BY/4.0/).
attention to sex and gender differences, while much more extensive formulations of the importance and impact of gender in social worlds shape interpretative and explanatory approaches in many contexts. Yet the idea of what constitutes innovative or excellent research in the academy remains in multiple respects gendered, and often excludes or diminishes feminist research (Jenkins and Keane, 2014). The innovations that feminist scholars have brought to key academic disciplines have in many cases gone unrecognised and ignored in their implications. It is therefore of value to consider and highlight the extent and nature of the impact of this work, both within and beyond specific disciplines.

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

To briefly enumerate some of these, whereas in the Stanford Gendered Innovations examples a positivist account of knowledge supports an additive and corrective model of improvement in research, much feminist scholarship has advocated for post-positivist commitments (Jenkins, 2018). Critical and transformative work is necessary to challenge entrenched androcentric models and basic conceptions of sex and gender, and feminist research: political science, economics, and philosophy. Pearse et al. (this volume) make an excursion into the sociology of disciplines whose core work comprises accounts of society, the economy and politics? Where and how does gender as a category of analysis appear to matter in social science research? Who does this research?

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

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

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

5 For further details see the GESS project website, http://genderinstitute.anu.edu.au/gess-home.
proportions of gender-related research than the other disciplines, and
evidence points to sociology’s interdisciplinary nature allowing feminist
knowledge to be more readily absorbed. On a sliding scale, sociology
and history are revealed as disciplines where the reception of feminist
ideas and research is ‘strong’, international relations and political science
‘modest’, and economics and philosophy ‘minimal’. The more re-
sistant disciplines are to absorbing feminist knowledge, then the less is
the likelihood of gendered innovations and disciplinary transformation.

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

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

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

A National Party member of the New Zealand Government from
1975 to 84, Waring championed women’s issues, such as affordable
childcare. When appointed chair of the Public Expenditure Select
Committee in 1978, she first encountered the United Nations System of
National Accounts (UNSDA), which was being adopted as the standard
for New Zealand’s National Income and Expenditure Accounts. She
found that, in UNSDA terms, women engaged in household labour were
labelled as ‘non-producers’ and domestic work was invisible within
economic policy, which then rendered affordable childcare economi-
cally unnecessary. After leaving parliament, Waring made a study of the
UNSDA, and found that, for example, women’s agricultural work in
developing countries was excluded if it supplied their household and
was not for sale on the market, although this labour provided food for
millions of people. In her book she argued that the patriarchal as-
sumptions underpinning the UNSDA ‘enshrines the invisibility and en-
slavement of women in the economic process as “of little or no im-
portance”’ (add page number when known). Rejecting patriarchal
applications of economic theory to practice, she proposed an alternative
theoretical framework starting with practice, and incorporating wo-
men’s household work within measures of economic activity. This
mission-led research, argue Dalziel and Saunders, stands in stark relief
to the Popper-Kuhn-Lakatos model of scientific discovery, a double-
 inversion at the heart of Waring’s radical and transformative approach
to economics.

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

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

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

The focus on and commitment to gender equality also raises ques-
tions about the status and nature of gender itself. The GESS project is
concerned with the gender composition of academic disciplines and the
relationship between the representation of women and the valuing of
feminist knowledge. In order to demonstrate the significance of gender
in knowledge production it works with the category ‘women’, which is
defined against the category ‘men’. This follows convention in main-
stream social science literature concerned with gender differences, and
it does not imply an adherence to any form of essentialism in relation to
identity. It does, however, produce consequences that require some
reflection and elaboration. Firstly, it constructs gender as a binary,
excluding non-binary and gender fluid identities (see Pearse et al., this
volume). In the case of the citation analysis carried out by Pearse et al.,
authors are allocated to one of two gender categories according to first names. This enables insightful and important findings related to gen-
dered disciplinary practices, but should not be understood as mimetic of the complexity of social reality in which gender is experienced and expressed. Secondly, as Weldon (in press) notes (add page number when known), the focus on gender obscures hierarchies of race, class, nationaliti
ality and sexuality, which also profoundly shape patterns of knowledge production. Indeed, it can be argued that the dominance of the global north in research publication, across all disciplines, is the context for all discussions of the politics of scholarship (Connell et al., 2017).

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

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

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

Moreover, disciplinary norms shape the often uneasy, embodied experience of being a feminist academic, by constituting certain kinds of voices as authoritative and others as marginal (Lipton and Mackinlay, 2016). One of the central concerns of our project is the ef-
teffects of disciplinary knowledge norms and practices on the experiences of women and other marginalized people in higher education institu-
tions. Margaret Thornton has eloquently described ‘benchmark man’, the ideal academic who emerges in a new masculine form within the contemporary knowledge economy (2013). Thornton’s concern is with the relationship between notions of merit and the ideal academic in the context of neoliberal systems of performance measurement. Our project expands this concern to reveal how norms and ideals of authoritative knowledge act to shape the careers of academics who fall outside the mainstream due to either embodied identity, or research interests, or both. Feminist and women academics navigate promotion and leader-
ship in gendered organisations through varied forms of agency and resistance (Blackmore and Sachs, 2012; Lipton, 2017). The collective building of alternative networks and new disciplinary centres (identi-
fied in Pearse et al. in this volume as one of the key practices of feminist philosophy and feminist economics) has been a particularly productive response to marginalisation.

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

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

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

Acknowledgements

The ‘Gendered Excellence in the Social Sciences’ (GESS) project is funded by an Australian Research Council Discovery Project grant DP150104449.

References


Lipton, B., & Mackinlay, E. (2016). We only talk feminist here: feminist academics, voice and agency in the Neoliberal University. Cham: Springer.

*Dalziel, Paul and Caroline Saunders* ‘Gendered innovation in economics: Marilyn Waring’s approach to social science research’, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, (this special issue vol.?, pp. ??, DOI: 10.1016/j.wsif.2018.05.004).


According to Schiebinger, “gendered innovations” is about stimulating gender-responsible science and technology, thereby enhancing the quality of life for both women and men worldwide. Next to “fixing the number of women participating in research” and “fixing the institutions” to effect structural change for gender equality in research careers, Schiebinger argues that it is equally important to “fix the knowledge,” integrating sex and gender analysis into research content and process. It is important in the acquisition of food, mates and territory, defence against predators and for establishing social hierarchy. Aggression is genetically complex and it requires the integration of different types of sensory and physiological information to yield a context-appropriate response.

Gendered Innovations in Science, Medicine, Engineering, and Environment integrates sex and gender methods into research. See website at: genderedinnovations.eu. Structural Change in Research Institutions provides key steps for creating gender equality in universities and research centers.

genSET targets gender inequalities and biases in five key areas: scientific knowledge-making, research processes, recruitment and retention, assessment of research productivity, and measurement of scientific excellence. Establishing monitoring procedures for measuring progress towards gender equality goals. Applied gender research, in which gender experts collaborate with engineers in designing products.

If societal and political movements have managed to shed light on the glaring controversies and problems in the world of cinema, business and politics, the science sector has remained somehow silently off the radar. This is especially true in the fields of medicine and modern technology. Doing medical research based solely on men’s data regarding a gender-specific condition is misleading and could cost lives and money. As Schiebinger points out, in the late 1990s, 10 drugs were withdrawn from the U.S. market because of life-threatening health effects. Gendered innovations in the social sciences, Australian National University November 6–9, 2016.

http://genderinstitute.anu.edu.au/gendered-innovations-social-sciences. For further information see http://genderinstitute.anu.edu.au/gess-home. Further case studies appear on our GESS project website. The persuasive power such innovations exert is therefore much less easy to establish than the incontrovertible examples presented as evidence by the Stanford project. At stake in gendered innovations in the social sciences, in many important instances, is the actual transformation of gender relations, not simply the tracking of sex and gender differences.