

Positionings in Gendered Relations: From Constructivism to Constructionism

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ABSTRACT

The paper contrasts the constructivist and constructionist approaches to understanding "gender", "sexual orientation", and "social activity." Many psychologists hold that personal identity, sexual orientation, and ways of relating socially as gendered beings depend upon a system of personal constructs. In contrast to this constructivist view, a social constructionist approach emphasizes the development and use of languaging activities in the processes of sustaining the self, as gendered, in social activity.

Constructionist feminists concern themselves with the social processes by which certain language patterns enable the maintenance of gendered selves and social activity. The social constructionist approach, which supports a relational theory of meaning and action, suggests that people are maintained in their social identities through their interactions with others. Without the supplements of others, within historically bounded contexts, actions would be chaotic, maladaptive and senseless.

I. Introduction For the cognitive psychologist, theoretical interest is primarily centered on how automatic processes in the brain produce human knowledge and subsequent bodily activity in the social realm. For these theorists, the metaphor of the information processor, or computer, is most appropriate for understanding the functioning of the human brain. Cognitivists generally agree that the basic building block in the production of mental life is the schema. An individual's mental apparatus contains a variety of schemas, each helping to structure information into categories that are relevant to the person.

My particular interest in this paper is in the theoretical frameworks by which cognitive psychologists discuss the particular categories or schemas of sex and gender. I wish to pursue the question of how the defining of gender categories as personal schemas, used to evaluate and assimilate new information, to create a sense of self and subjectivity, and to guide social behaviors, creates a distinctly different view of how humans function from a social constructionist position, in which other linguistically-based formulations of how gendered identities and activities are produced.

In order to address this question I shall first describe several efforts of psychologists to explore gender differences from a constructivist standpoint, by which I mean a theoretical position that emphasizes the importance of internalized cognitive categories to perceive, understand, and interpret events, and oneself, and to organize social action. Second I will offer some ideas about the limits of this approach. Then I will describe the social constructionist position as an alternative manner of theorizing about gender differences, and lastly, I will draw some implications from these different approaches to gender study.

The Constructivist Approach to the Categories of Sex/Gender

From the constructivist standpoint, gender schemas organize one's sense of personal identity, interpersonal behaviors, and social perceptions. Being classified as male or female is the critical first step in the categorization of a human after birth, and given the present state of technology, even months before. This category remains the prime distinguishing mark of our identity throughout life. By puberty, sexual orientation, whether we are heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual, is also regarded as a significant aspect of gender schemata critical to our social lives and interpersonal behaviors. These schemata - self, gender and sexual orientation - are of special relevance to psychologists who study gender issues, especially, feminist psychologists, who are interested in the political aspects of gender studies as well as the more traditional scientific concerns regarding theoretical orientations and empirical findings.

Enumerating the immense variety of theories and empirical research at the intersection of cognitive theories and gender is beyond the scope of this review. Two theoretical orientations that are of particular interest to this audience are those cognitive psychologists who would identify themselves as social constructivists of the Berger and Luckmann school (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), and those who are influenced by George Kelly's Personal Construct Theory (Kelly, 1955). To varying degrees both of these perspectives has been influential in the development of a feminist psychology in the last two decades. However, most of the work in gender studies, while relying on the constructivist notions of constructs or schemas and the centrality of cognitive processes in the development of gendered self conceptions and social behaviors, has not directly acknowledged the contributions of Kelly or Berger and Luckmann to their theorizing or research.

The theoretical positions I have selected as prototypes of constructivist theories are well-formed exemplars, although not all are necessarily the most influential theoretical frameworks in gender studies. Their purpose is to illustrate how a constructivist framework is used in the understanding of gender.

Anne Constantinople's model of sex/gender schemas emphasizes the physiological basis of differentiation. She suggests that the acquisition of gender roles, as a cognitive capacity, is similar to the process of pattern recognition in areas of vision and speech (1979). She argues that the ability to generate gender-role categories grows out of an interaction between the child's built-in ability to generalize, discriminate, and form categories of all kinds and the specific sex-related associations that pervade the environment. The process of acquiring gender categories is motivated by children's needs for structure in the environment and by their desires to gain rewards and avoid punishments. In line with cognitive theories of pattern recognition, she suggests that gender-related schemas are developed through two types of information processing: data-driven, in which categories are formed through stimulus generalization and discrimination, and concept-driven, where incoming information is guided by an already formed expectancy. Cognitive categories are revised, stabilized, and refined as the child grows. Constantinople's position is representative of cognitive-developmental theories that emphasize the universality of schema acquisition based on general laws of human behavior.

More well-known than Constantinople's pattern recognition approach to most cognitively-oriented gender psychologists is the work of Lawrence Kohlberg, who, by applying Piaget's theory of cognitive development, offered a counterpoint to the prevailing view of social learning theory, which based gender identity formation on principles of modeling and reinforcement. Kohlberg's theory (1979) posits that the process of gender identity formation occurs in three stages of awareness, when a child is between 3-5. In the first stage, the child first acquires "gender constancy", that is, an understanding that a person's gender is fixed and cannot be altered by changing external cues such as hairstyle, dress or name. Once a child has reached this stage, values are attached to gender-based behaviors, with higher values given to gender appropriate behaviors and lower values given to gender inappropriate behaviors. Children strive to enact strict versions of appropriate sex-role behaviors as a form of rule-following. Television programs, peer reactions, and other forms of cultural artifacts, such as toy designs, provide information and reinforcements for guiding appropriate gendered behaviors. In

Kohlberg's theoretical system, gender is acquired as is any other conceptual category, according to stages of intellectual development.

Among the more well-known feminist works indebted to the Kohlbergian tradition - if radically different in some respects - are those of Carol Gilligan and her colleagues, who, in their studies of girlhood, have emphasized the growing girl as one who develops certain conceptions of her self and her capacities as a child, but who later, in puberty, is "brainwashed" of her earlier self-conceptions because they do not fit into the gender role expectations appropriate for an adolescent girl in a male-dominated world. For Gilligan and those inspired by her work, (e.g. Belenky et al, 1986; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan, Lyons, & Hanmer, 1990; Jack, 1991), the internal, silenced voice of the woman, that is schemas of the self, is often described as authentic, autonomously derived, and separate from the social order, and yet suppressed by authority figures. These authors argue that the internalized cognitive capacities persist, despite the apparent disappearance of these alternative voices from social life.

These two cognitive models, Kohlberg's derivation from Piaget's genetic epistemological theory, and Gilligan and her colleagues models are seated primarily in the developmentalist and therapeutic literature within gender psychology. Other feminist psychologists in social psychology offer other models of gender identity, which are framed in the language of social cognition. An excellent example of an elaborate cognitive model involving gender schemas is Kay Deaux and Brenda Major's interaction model of gender-related behavior (1987). This model, which has been fashioned from their empirical research, combines a variety of cognitive functions in order to understand gender-based behaviors. In keeping with their orientations to the descriptions of social behaviors, the focus of their model is on the display of behaviors rather than their acquisition.

According to Deaux and Major, behaviors in a social interaction are influenced by what others expect, what the individual believes about herself or himself, and situational cues. The process involved in this confluence of these various elements are expectancy confirmation (both "seeing" only what one expects to see, and self-fulfilling prophecy), and the individual's strategies to both confirm her self-view and present an acceptable image to others. As they suggest, within any particular context two people, called a perceiver and a target, approach an interaction with individualistic beliefs about the target. The perceiver's beliefs about the target are based on the gender category of the target as well as on personal

experience with that person. Beliefs related to the gender category of the target can be activated, or made especially salient, by certain occurrences or environmental conditions. These beliefs influence the perceiver's actions toward the target. The target, on the other hand, enters the situation with a set of beliefs about the self, particular aspects of which may be emphasized by the situation or by recent occurrences. The target interprets the actions of the perceiver, weighs possible alternatives, then takes actions that may either confirm or disconfirm the expectations of the perceiver. The course of the entire interaction is affected by certain modifying conditions: the social desirability of the behavior the perceiver expects from the target, the certainty with which that expectation is held and communicated, and the relative balance between the target's concerns with sustaining her or his self-concept and presenting a positive image. One may note that the predominant influence on behavior is in the information processing realm of the "perceiver" - who is also "the actor."

For all the cognitive models thus far presented, there is the tendency to posit a similarity in the developmental process by which gender schemas are produced. There are also cognitive approaches that emphasize differences in the development of gender-related constructs. For example, in the theoretical approach of Sandra Bem, differences among people in the elaboration and strength of their gender schemas are posited (1983, 1993).

Following her original publications that outlined a personality theory of masculinity, femininity, and androgyny, Bem (1974) shifted her views in a cognitive direction and produced a theory on the impact of gender schemas on behavior (Bem, 1983). Bem has tried to demonstrate empirically that individual differences in gender schemata and their relative impact on one's life can be determined. For example, someone who is "gender schematic" is more likely to process information about the self and others in terms of gender than someone who is "gender aschematic". A highly gender schematic person would be more likely to notice the genders of individual actors, make more confident decisions about people according to their genders, and to think in terms of genders when recalling past interactions. Bem (1993) suggests that highly masculine or feminine individuals may differ from others not in their ability to organize information on the basis of gender but in their threshold for doing so spontaneously. She also suggests that people are also more likely to activate gender schemas to judge others than selves. That is, gender schemas are used less often for understanding one's own actions than those of others.

While Bem takes a somewhat negative view of people being highly gender schematic, she hews a biological essentialist line when it comes to the definition of male and female (Gergen, 1994a). She has urged that gender schemas be reduced to a minor role in explicating social life, applied to the biological-reproductive sphere primarily, so that other schemas can be emphasized over gendered ones. These additional schemas would, ideally, be undifferentiated as to sex. Bem argues that as children are taught to delimit gender schemas, the significance of gender as a social trait used to segregate people and to restrict their social opportunities would decline.

Bem's theoretical framework is congenial in important respects with a Kellyian framework in which individual's develop a unique configuration of personal constructs throughout their development. The prominence of constructs differentiating sex/gender categories, sexual orientations, sex roles, sex-typed behaviors, and other gendered activities and symbolic systems are regulated in accord with other constraining and affording aspects of one's life. As with Bem's views, some people's mental worlds are highly shaped in terms of gendered boundaries, while others are less so.

George Kelly (1955) presented two types of constructs that were interrelated and organized into a hierarchical system of meaning. A higher order construct, or superordinate construct, contained other constructs within its range of meaning. The male-female distinction could be thought of as a superordinate construct, with diverse secondary traits within it (Bannister and Mair, 1968) Using people known to subjects, Bannister and Mair were able to develop the contents of sex stereotypes using the Role Construct Repertory Test, or Rep test. Through nonparametric statistics, for example cluster analysis, as developed by Fransella and Bannister (1977), the interrelationship of constructs and their hierarchical structures could be obtained. Original work by Kelly on the differentiation of personal constructs in various individuals related to gender was carried on by Seymour Rosenberg,(1976) who demonstrated the effectiveness of cluster analysis in deriving individual's construct clusters related to the sex of a stimulus person. This work did not rely on the Rep Test grid, but on a free response method.

In extending this work Susan Volentine and Stanley Brodsky (1989) looked at the differences between sex as a subject variable and as a stimulus variable in terms of personal construct theory. They investigated the perceptions of actual men and women by male and female subjects. They expanded the construct realm of research by Ryle and Lunghi (1972), who had examined male and female differences

in instrumentality and expressiveness. In the Volentine and Brodsky study subjects developed their own constructs rather than being given them. Researchers found complex relationships between men and women in how they judged other men and women on a variety of traits. Using factor analysis, researchers concluded, among other findings, that expressiveness was a very important trait, especially for men rating women, and that women were more confident in giving negative evaluations than men, especially to intelligent women. These authors and others (e.g. Tunnell, 1981) suggest that personal construct theory and methods are very useful in studying differences between men and women in how they construct their mental worlds, which has implications for how they anticipate, understand, and act in the world.

Feminist Standpoint Theorists and Gender Differences

At the fringes of cognitive psychology are important feminist theorists from other specialties and disciplines, who have developed women-centered models of knowledge, which stress the cognitive aspects of sexual difference and personal experience. Representative of these many theorists are Jean Baker Miller, (1976), a psychologist, and Nancy Hartsock, (1983) and Dorothy Smith (1987), who are socialist feminists. These Feminist Standpoint theorists, as they have been called by philosopher Sandra Harding, (1986), posit that the differentiated daily lives of men and women create differences in their cognitive development. Hartsock, for example, argues that women's roles as homemakers and mothers, across a variety of cultural settings, affect the development of their epistemological competencies. Through their personal experiences - rearing children, gathering food, and doing housework - women develop more refined cognitive capacities that yield more accurate depictions of the world than men acquire, with their distant relationship to daily material things (Hartsock, 1983).

Critiques/limits of cognitive views of gender

Common to all of these theoretical positions is the basic idea that internal cognitive mechanisms shape individual actions. One's knowledge of oneself as a man or a woman is deeply connected to these categories, which provide a strong controlling influence on other aspects of life. What are some of the limits to this form of theorizing about gendering? I would like to point up several interlocking arguments that lead to questioning the utility of this type of theoretical approach to understanding social behavior.

To begin, a strong individualism is easily detected in this approach

to understanding social behavior. Alone by virtue of the inaccessibility of others to one's private mental world, each individual abstracts from experience - often via automated mechanistic processes - the meaning of that experience within the conceptual world. While social behavior is most often conceived of as involving more than one actor, either other actors, or objects in a context, the theoretical focus tends to be entirely on the separated autonomy of the interacting units: perceiver and target. In the Deaux and Major model, for example, not only are there two separated units, they are each assigned separate functions within the model. Their two spheres of being and activity are influential as they are perceived and interpreted. There is no possibility for an emergent result, a joint action, or any truly mutual activity that could be coded outside of an individualistic formulation. The level of analysis would have to be drastically changed to take account of such phenomena (M. Gergen, 1994b, 1995).

In what I call the Wittgensteinian Critique, the issue to be faced involves the disappearance of the exterior in favor of the hidden, interior cognitive processes. Cognitive theorists avoid accounting for the ongoing situated activity in terms of social and contextual effects and interactions, in favor of explaining rational activity, calculus, expectancy, reflexivity, or interpretation, as the "really real" of the phenomenon of interest. How one perceives, encodes, stores, and retrieves, -- forms of information processing activity -- seem to be the point of interest for the theorist, and the source of the individual actor's movements. For the cognitive theorist, the mind is the real; the body is the epiphenomenon. In this sense other activities that might be of critical import in the understanding of behavior are left invisible, hypothetical, and knowable only through very indirect means.

Wittgenstein described the tendencies to look beyond the immediate. "We feel as if we had to penetrate phenomena. Our investigation, however, is directed not towards phenomena, but as one might say, towards the 'possibilities' of phenomena" (1953, no. 90). This state of affairs - looking within to decide upon the without - encourages the notion that a homunculus organizer is within us, coordinating the outcomes. As Kenneth Gergen has asked in rebuttal of this tendency: "Why should we presume that there is an originary source (a crypto-speaker or Doppelganger) lying somewhere behind and pulling the strings of public action? Not only are there no compelling grounds for this... but to go on in this way is to create a double problematic - not only that of explaining the public actions themselves, but in addition, that which presumably lies

beneath....(199? p.). In this case, beneath in two senses: beneath the action, and beneath that which originates the action.

Where does the originary source finally stop in this type of formulation?

The question of where cultural influences and more immediate social pressures and environmental constraints and opportunities affect action is diverted by the focus of attention to the interiority of single actors. Often there is a presumption that actors act in accord with their internalized summary functions, of their own free will, perhaps, and are ideally not constrained by the particulars of any given circumstance. Yet, one wonders, "How can free and unfettered deliberation ever be possible? What would a decision that is truly one's own be - beyond the influence of others? Without cultural knowledge - the languages of justice, moral worth, equality, and the like, on what grounds could one decide? If we empty the individual of culture, would we not find an empty vessel - unable even to conceptualize what it is to have a choice?" (From KJ Gergen, 1994, p.).

Another provocation to the cognitive approach to understanding human activity concerns the place of language in the description of and use within social life. Language within the cognitive realm is often regarded as a transparent medium reflecting inner thought. The problematic aspect of this view is overlooked in most psychological theorizing. The assumption that language transparently reflects what is going on, whether internally, as in reporting on personal experience, one's subjective state of mind, emotions, attitudes and opinions, ways of organizing information, and memories, or externally, as a report on events in the world, is often unquestionably accepted. Clearly, this is convenient when one is using humans as subjects in psychological inquiry. Yet, what is the relationship between context, word, and thought? This is not an easy question to answer. The social constructionist position forms a radically separate alternative from the assumption that language reflects more or less accurately the nature of the world and private experience.

In applying this problematic status of language to gender issues, one is able to question the underlying assumption that the predominance in the language of the binary pairs: male and female; masculine and feminine, homosexual and heterosexual is sufficient grounds for reifying these categories as essential and incontestable. Despite the possibility of this critical move, there is no evidence in psychology that the binary distinction of male-female has been questioned (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1990). More discussion

concerning the problematic relationship of words to worlds follows.

Social Constructionist approach

In contrast to this constructivist view, a social constructionist approach emphasizes the social origins of linguistic patterns related to self, knowledge, and social activity. From this position, all aspects of "reality", including personal identity - self, gender, sexual orientation, and points of view-- are constructed interpersonally, and the emphasis in social constructionist theory is on the relational aspects of construction, not on the concomitant internal mechanisms that are coordinating the bodily affairs.

This theoretical position rejects the possibility of absolute truth and scientific objectivity. Thus, ways of talking about the world, including categories such as male and female, are constructed within social groups; the origins of categories of words are not natural, necessary or inevitable, but are created to serve ever shifting social ends. Feminist theorists of the social constructionist variety contend that these predominant gender constructions are often instantiated and retained to support patriarchal interests and viewpoints, which set women as opposed and "other" to the major model of humanity - man (Gavey, 1993; Gergen, 1993; Grosz, 1994).

While standpoint position feminists have tried to reverse the direction of the polarity, claiming for women the better part of the binary (Hartsock, 1983; Miller, 1976 ; Rose, 1986; Smith, 1987), this polarizing strategy has backfired in the sense that it has legitimated the system that validated the binary in the first place. From a social constructionist standpoint, rather than sustain the binary through the glorification of womanhood, it is possible to relativize the game of difference, perhaps at times, even calling it off, as other forms of linguistic categories are imagined (Butler, 1990; 1993; Grosz, 1995; Hekman, 1990).

Relational theory as a feminist approach

A recent attempt to integrate these politically based concerns with a social constructionist emphasis on communal forms of sense-making is called relational theory (K. Gergen, 1995; Smith & Gergen, 1995). The goal of this theoretical endeavor is to move to the production of descriptive formulations that reifies processes of relatedness, that is to theorize units of meaning-making that extend beyond one actor, as an autonomous, separate entity, to relationships. Relationships can extend beyond couples, to groups, and to relations

between people and objects, or animals, or past conversations, visual displays, music and texts. By focussing on relatedness as furnishing the forestructure for the condition of our impulses to act into the onrushing demands of life, the process of mutual creations of meaning is sustained. Within this theoretical approach is the invitation to construct individual identities - the "I" who speaks - subjectivities, and personal experiences as both outgrowths of relational process, and in a reflexive manner, as the producers of relational processes. The focus on a relational view suggests that we seek understanding of social life and the models for change in the generation of interactive conversation. When the relationship becomes the object of study, the originating point of action production is shifted, as is the need for new theoretical terms.

Using the metaphor of knitting with many balls of yarn at hand, one might envision relational processes as the creation of a multicolored argyle plaid, each of us a knitter, with many needles, producing from particular resources, in synchrony with one another. Knitters coming and going, weaving an endless array of costumes... weaving up the knitted sleeve of care. We join together more or less easily, depending on our skills, our styles of doing, of the familiarity we have with the rest of the scene, and who we become within it. What we create in our illusory sweater is transformed with each moment of time, exists in our togethernesses, and from our past histories of knitting together, we know something of what we are trying to move toward. This knowing, however, is also a product of the moment and our being together.

In terms of our gendered identities, the relational approach suggests that gender comes into play as people in relation evoke the notion of sexual difference for specific purposes. Gender is significant, perhaps, when the caller begins the square dance, but becomes insignificant when lines are formed at the water fountain after a rigorous round. Sexual orientation, as well as sexual behaviors, may be important categories for reproductive purposes, but less so if one is interested in a sensual massage. By taking account of people-in-relationships the potential of describing behaviors as mutually produced is enhanced. From the social constructionist position, what happens in a social setting is more usefully or interestingly described as a dance, rather than as a field of abstract forces calling each actor from the depths of their private mental apparatuses and processes. People are responsive to each other in an ongoing, unthinking, spontaneous, yet regulated "game."

The novelty of the relational approach requires that much more be developed in order to enhance the utility of making this theoretical

move. Some basis for its inception and proliferation can be found in the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose poetic formulations suggest the possibilities of relationship as originary point for the construction of reality. Wittgenstein spoke of the "order of possibilities" available "from within our circumstances". Instead of asking how we got here, our concern should be with "now I know how to go on." This remark focuses on the interaction as the mother of social life, of one thing following from another, which is the import of recognizable rituals of activity.

John Shotter has provided a theoretical option for filling out the relational sphere in his description of a third kind of knowledge, that is "a kind of knowledge one has from within a social situation, a group, an institution, or a society, and which exists only in that situation. We might call it a "knowing-from-within " (1994, p. 2) -- meaning not within the person, or cognitively, but from within the situation. In this view, people as much 'act into' a set of future possibilities as 'out of' a set of past actualities, and in doing so, find their actions influenced just as much by the actions of the others around them as by any prior interests or desires. Thus in joint activity of this kind,... novel possibilities for action are created beyond those available to any individual acting alone. Hence when diverse peoples come into contact with one another, there is always a possibility that through their differences, they might be able to fulfill in each other what singly they lack.

Of particular interest to feminists involved in the psychology of gender is how social constructionism and relational theory can have an impact upon feminist interests, and vice versa. Let us look at three topics of note in this regard:

1. Issue of personal identity, subjectivity, self

Rather than a personal property, personal identity, from the social constructionist position, is an application to self that is constructed within the social sphere, both in the present and in the past. Although our culture tends to teach us that "to know oneself" is the basic rule of maturity as a human being, from a social constructionist position, it is a futile goal. As Carole-Anne Tyler (1994) has said, "The wish for one's own terms and one's proper identity, perhaps the most deeply private property of all, is an impossible desire since both are held in common with others in the community as an effect of the symbolic."

And, as Janis Bohan has said: "The social construction of gender is often confused with the socialization of gender.... Gender ... is not

resident in the person but exists in those interactions that are socially construed as gendered....Relationality... is a quality of interactions not of individuals, and it is not essentially connected with sex. What it means to term a transaction feminine or masculine is socially agreed upon and is reproduced by the very process of participating in that transaction." (1993, p.8).

An important aspect of one's sense of self is that of one's subjectivity. Yet, "Subjectivity is produced through discourses that are multiple, possibly contradictory, and unstable. This is to say that whatever we experience of our own internal states psychologically is refracted through the social scenes in which we are participating (Henriques, et al, 1984). To explore the relationship of this stance to gender issues, one cannot know in the depth of one's being that one is a male or female prior to being fitted into the existing societally determined codes of being. Male and female are two common integers that have dominated the spectrum of potentials for a long time and over vast territories of space.

2. Issue of sexual orientation

The same form of argument can be advanced for sexual orientation. The idea that sexuality is contained in a cognitive category related to self, as well as to others, is taken away by the social constructionist position. Sexuality, or perhaps more precisely sexual behaviors including interior dialogues, fantasies and images are regulated in the social domain as are other behaviors. Contrary to most common sense descriptions, how one constructs oneself and others as sexual beings, and with respect to one's desires, is not a private or privileged matter (Kitzinger, 1987; Tiefer, 1994). Categories of sexual orientation - Lesbian, Bisexual, Heterosexual, Gay - are categories of social ordering, and may be seen as ways of controlling or "disciplining" human bodies, as Michel Foucault has described the process (1979; 1980).

The social constructionist position and the ways in which we talk about issue of social action and feminist politics

The social constructionist position does not presume that the ways that things are construed in any situation are final. This condition applies across the spectrum of discourses, without exemption, to physics and economics, as well as to other parts of social life. Because the nature of language is not to reflect the world, but to construct it, we are encouraged to imagine alternative ways to theorize things (Burr, 1995). One of the challenges to feminist psychologists is to imagine that the sex and gender division, between

the biological and the socialized, could be erased, altered or enhanced. Questions of various sorts can be asked: How else could we consider humankind? Why do we hold to this binary? What does it do and not do for us? Can we destabilize these terms without necessarily banishing them? How can this be done? What is lost if we do deconstruct gender? Is it worth the loss? Despite the liberatory tone of these questions, we are not free to do just anything, and what we may do depends upon the willingness of interlocutors to agree. Judith Butler, a feminist, poststructural philosopher, has striven to deconstruct gendered lines, sex differences, and sexual orientations in her theorizing. She writes, "The radical instability of the category [of Woman] sets into question the foundational restrictions on feminist political theorizing and opens up other configurations, not only of genders and bodies, but of politics itself." (1990; p. 142). She urges the question of what a feminist position means if sexual boundaries are compromised.

As we enter dialogues in different contexts with changing conversational partners, our "selves" are altered, and we become renewed. These selves join with others in the creation of different strategies, means, constructions of the real, the important, the good, and the beautiful, as well as different selves. Even within our own voice, speaking of various topics, we are not committed to consistency. Elizabeth Grosz, speaks of her writing style in *Volatile Bodies*: "This text presents a series of disparate, indeed kaleidoscopic and possibly contradictory, thoughts, theories, perspectives, interacting, maybe clashing or maybe coalescing, always in uneasy tension, straining against each other and against any overall unity and homogeneity. This text does not have a single point or moral but is about the creating of shifting frameworks and models of understanding, about the opening up of thought to what is new, different, and hitherto unthought." (1994, p. xiv).

Because of the multiplicities, partial, fragmented, and temporary aspects of contextual and situated conversations, of constructions that depend upon the community of interlocutors to exist, nothing so simple as complete and permanent alliances or misalliances can be anticipated within the politics of feminist psychology. Overlaps of interest, of cooperation, and of difference can play a part in all. The multiplicities of voices can speak partially to partial others, and find companions as well as critics. Linda Nicholson has referred to this approach to politics as internal coalition strategies. These strategies do not demand that the subject of woman be singular. From this feminist position, one does not claim to speak on behalf of all woman or even on behalf of one's self, as a totalized, unified

subjectivity. Feminist politics becomes the coming together of those who want to work around the needs of women where such a concept is not understood as necessarily singular in meaning or commonly agreed upon" (Nicholson, 1994, p. 103). The diverse needs of any constituency are allowed to be potentially incompatible.

A feminist postmodern position, one that takes a social constructionist approach seriously, concentrates on the invention of new metaphors for exploring human life and action. The work of Elizabeth Grosz is illustrative in that she has created a notion of subjectivity within a metaphor of the Mobius strip. In her writings she simultaneously presents and constructions a new relational positioning for the old adversarial binary coupling of mind and body. She writes: "Bodies and minds are not two distinct substances or two kinds of attributes of a single substance but somewhere in between these two alternatives. The Mobius strip has the advantage of showing the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, the ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes another. This model ... provides a way of problematizing and rethinking the relations between the inside and the outside of the subject, its psychical interior and its corporeal exterior, by showing not their fundamental identity or reducibility but the torsion of the one into the other, the passage, vector, or uncontrollable drift of the inside into the outside and the outside into the inside." (1994 p. xii). This metaphor brings new possibilities of relationships into a conversational space. Neither true nor false, the metaphor can be found attracting, nor not, according to those who fall into conversation.

Concluding Contrasts:

The contrast between the discursive world of the social constructionist and the personal construct world of the constructivist is strong on several dimensions. For the constructivist, gender is represented in a series of schemas that have been installed via biological maturation and various environmental influences from conception, onwards. They become a major filter by which the world and one's self are perceived and experienced. They are relatively fixed, contain stable dispositional characteristics, and are highly influential in directing one's behaviors, thoughts and feelings. Aspects of sexual identity, sexuality, and gendered behaviors are theorized within this type of theoretical system. Many constructivists take an interactive position, in that there is "room" in the equation, as in the gender schemas, for a balance of social and biological influences on

behavior. However, once established, sexual orientation is extremely stable. Personal opinions, as well, are the external manifestations of internal cognitive processing and the verbal equivalents of cognitive schemas. Although they can be modified by the exigencies of the occasion, this is an aftereffect, and involves transmission and presentational goals, not primarily shifts in internal belief structure. One's actions can be flexible; one's mental structures are stable.

From a socially constructed approach that emphasizes relationality, one more or less plays one's gender identity, sexual orientation and opinions in action. The social structures of which one is a part are responsive and reactive as well as influential in the manner in which one experiences and becomes into the context. Personal identity arises through embodied relational activity, while simultaneously helping to produce that relational reality. The stability of one's gender, sexual orientation and opinions is maintained through the repetitive, highly regulated and ethically charged activities involved in what it means to be a man or a woman, straight or gay, a believer or a non-believer in various social institutions and interactive processes.

The social constructionist position does not deny the workings of the body in the maintenance of personhoods, but the body does not control or regulate one's identity, critical attributes, or place in the production of social activities, nor is the body uninscribed culturally. Rather the body itself is created from within social contexts of meaning-making. Without the support of other players, in historically relevant contexts, embodied activities would verge on the chaotic, maladaptive and senseless. One cannot act as a female human outside socially identifiable constraints. An individualistic approach to social life denies the most important generative core of a gendered identity.

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