1

Invisible Masculinity

American men have no history. Sure, we have stacks of biographies of the heroic and famous, and historical accounts of events in which men took part, like wars, strikes, or political campaigns. And we have group portraits of athletes, soldiers, and the men who run unions and political parties. There are probably thousands of histories of institutions that were organized, staffed, and run by men.

So how is it that men have no history? Until the intervention of women's studies, it was women who had no history, who were invisible, the "other." Still today, virtually every history book is a history of men. If a book does not have the word "women" in its title, it is a good bet that the book is about men. But these books feel strangely empty at their centers, where the discussion of men should be. Books about men are not about men as men. These books do not explore how the experience of being a man structured the men's lives, or the organizations and institutions they created, the events in which they participated. American men have no history as gendered selves; no work describes historical events in terms of what these events meant to the men who participated in them as men.

What does it mean, then, to write of men as men? We must examine the ways in which the experience of manhood has structured the course and the meanings of the activities of American men—great or small. We must chart the ways in which meanings of manhood have changed over the course of American history. And we must explore the ways in which the pursuit of that elusive ideal of manhood, and our relentless efforts to prove it, have animated many of the central events in American history.

This is not to say that simply looking at the idea of manhood, or injecting gender into the standard historical approach, will suddenly, magically, illuminate the American historical pageant. We cannot understand manhood without understanding American history—that is without locating the changing definitions of manhood within the larger context of the economic, political, and social events that characterize American history. By the same token,

American history cannot be fully understood without an understanding of American men's ceaseless quest for manhood in the evolution of those economic, political, social, and cultural experiences and events.

Such a perspective should shed new light on the events that dot our history and the lives of the men who made them. Composer Charles Ives insisted that Impressionistic music was "sissy" and that he wanted to use traditional tough guy sounds to build a more popular and virile music. Architect Louis Sullivan, the inventor of the skyscraper, described his ambition to create "masculine forms"—strong, solid, tall, commanding respect. Political figures, like the endless parade of presidential hopefuls, have found it necessary both to proclaim their own manhood and to raise questions about their opponents' manhood.

Think about the 1840 presidential campaign, when William Henry Harrison's supporters chastised Martin Van Buren as "Little Vanny," and a "used up man." Andrew Jackson vented his manly rage at "effete" bankers and "infantilized" Indians. Theodore Roosevelt thundered about the strenuous life while he prepared invasions of Panama and the Philippines. Then there was Lyndon Johnson's vainglorious claim during the Tet offensive of the Vietnam War that he did not just "screw" Ho Chi Minh, but "cut his pecker off!" After the vice-presidential debate with Geraldine Ferraro in 1984, George Bush boasted that he had "kicked a little ass." Then he squared off with television commentator Dan Rather in 1988 to dispel his wimp image. From the founding of the Republic, presidents have demonstrated their manhood in the political arena and have sent millions of America's young men to die to prove it.

If the pursuit of manhood has been a dominant theme in American history, at least rhetorically and metaphorically, why do American men still have no history? In part because they do not even know what questions to ask.

In the past 25 years, the pioneering work of feminist scholars, both in traditional disciplines and in women's studies, has made us increasingly aware of the centrality of gender in shaping social life. In the past, social scientists would have only listed class and race as the master statuses that defined and proscribed social life. But today, gender has joined race and class as one of the axes around which social life is organized, and through which we can gain an understanding of our own experiences. Feminist scholars rightfully focused their attention on women—on what Catharine Stimpson calls the "omissions, distortions, and trivializations" of women's experiences—and the spheres to which women have historically been consigned, like private life and the family.

Women's history has sought to rescue from obscurity the lives of significant women who had been ignored or whose work had been minimized by traditional androcentric scholarship. It also has examined the lives of ordinary women of the past, the struggles of laundresses, factory workers, pioneer homesteaders, or housewives in carving out lives of meaning and dignity in a world controlled by men. Whether the focus is on the exemplary or the ordinary, feminist scholarship has made clear that gender is central to women's lives.

Now, we need to go further. We need to include men. Historian Natalie Zemon Davis urges us to be "interested in the history of both women and men." She says, "We should not be working on the subjected sex any more than a historian of class can focus exclusively on peasants. Our goal is to understand the significance of the sexes, of gender groups in the historical past."

The problem with such advice is that, to men at least, gender often remains invisible. Strange as it may sound, men are the "invisible" gender. Ubiquitous in positions of power everywhere, men are invisible to themselves. Courses on gender in the universities are populated largely by women, as if the term only applied to them. "Woman alone seems to have 'gender' since the category itself is defined as that aspect of social relations based on difference between the sexes in which the standard has always been man," writes historian Thomas Lacquer. As the Chinese proverb has it, the fish are the last to discover the ocean.

This fact was made clear to me in a seminar on feminism I attended in the late 1970s. There, in a discussion between two women, I first confronted this invisibility of gender to men. The two women, one white, the other black, were discussing whether all women were, by definition, "sisters," because they all had essentially the same experiences and because all women faced oppression by men. The white woman asserted that the fact that they were both women bonded them, in spite of racial differences. The black woman disagreed.

"When you wake up in the morning and look in the mirror, what do you see?" she asked.

"I see a woman," replied the white woman.

"That's precisely the problem," responded the black woman. "I see a black woman. To me, race is visible every day, because race is how I am not privileged in our culture. Race is invisible to you, because it's how you are privileged. It's why there will always be differences in our experience."

This startling exchange made me groan—more audibly, perhaps, than I intended. Being the only man in the room, someone asked what my response had meant.

"Well," I said, "when I look in the mirror, I see a human being. I'm universally generalizable. As a middle-class white man, I have no class, no race, no gender. I'm the generic person!"

Sometimes, I like to think that it was on that day that I became a middle-class white man. Sure, I had been all this before, but it had not meant much to me. Since then, I have begun to understand that race, class, and gender do not refer only to people marginalized by race, class, or gender. Those terms also describe me. I enjoy the privilege of invisibility. The very processes that confer privilege to one group and not to another group are often invisible to those upon whom that privilege is conferred. What makes us marginal or powerless are the processes we see, partly because others keep reminding us of them.

American men have come to think of themselves as genderless, in part because they can afford the luxury of ignoring the centrality of gender. So military, political, scientific, or literary figures are treated as if their gender, their masculinity, had nothing to do with their military exploits, policy decisions, scientific experiments, or writing styles and subjects. And the disenfranchised and oppressed are those whose manhood is not considered to be equal. It is impossible to speak of historical reconstruction of gender without speaking about power.

By contrast, the quest for manhood—the effort to achieve, to demonstrate, to prove their masculinity—is one of the animating experiences in the lives of American men. That men remain unaware of the centrality of gender in their lives perpetuates the inequalities based on gender in our society, and keeps in place the power of men over women, and the power some men hold over other men, which are among the central mechanisms of power in society.

Invisibility reproduces inequality. And the invisibility of gender to those privileged by it reproduces the inequalities that are circumscribed by gender. The centrality of gender and the process by which it has come to be seen as central are political processes that involve both power and resistance to power. It was feminism and gay liberation, and feminism's academic sister, women's studies, that brought gender into public discourse, making femininity and masculinity problematic, and demanding a transformation of existing gender relations. It was feminist-inspired research that made social and cultural analysts aware of the ubiquitous yet subtle way in which the gender factor permeates the social fabric.

To speak and write about gender is to enter a political discourse, to become engaged with power and resistance. It is about the resources that maintain power, the symbolic props that extend power, and the ideological apparatuses that develop to sustain and legitimate power. The historical construction of gender is a process through which various forms of power are reproduced and power becomes indelibly inscribed onto everyday life. It is impossible to speak of the historical construction of gender without speaking about power. In fact, power is so central to the historical construction of masculinities that it has been invisible to most social scientists who have studied it. Thus social theory and social science have done exactly what cannot be done: analyze masculinity without discussing power.

The historical construction of masculinities, the reproduction of gendered power relations, involves two separate dimensions, each of which was rendered invisible—first by classical social theory, and more recently by the academic discourse that made "sex roles" appear as historically invariant, fixed, static, and normal. Masculinities are constructed in a field of power: 1) the power of men over women; 2) the power of some men over other men.

Men's power over women is relatively straightforward. It is the aggregate power of men as a group to determine the distribution of rewards in soci-

ety. Men's power over other men concerns the distribution of those rewards among men by differential access to class, race, ethnic privileges, or privileges based on sexual orientation—that is, the power of upper- and middle-class men over working-class men; the power of white and native born men over nonwhite and/or non-native born men; and the power of straight men over gay men. The constituent elements of "hegemonic" masculinity, the stuff of the construction, are sexism, racism, and homophobia. Masculinities are constructed by racism, sexism, and homophobia, and social science has been ever complicit.

These dimensions of power were embedded within academic discourses by a sleight of hand. A version of white, middle-class, heterosexual masculinity emerged as normative, the standard against which both men and women were measured, and through which success and failure were evaluated. This normative version—enforced, coercive, laden with power—academic social science declared to be the "normal" version.

Making the normative into the normal has been the discursive mechanism by which hegemonic masculinity was constituted. As anthropologist Maurice Bloch writes, "It is precisely through the process of making a power situation appear as a fact in the nature of things that traditional authority works." It has been the task of academic social science to make this power situation appear as "a fact in the nature of things."

This process has not been a single, linear process, but a series of empirical specifications of the traits, attitudes, and behaviors that define vague social science concepts like "identity," "self," or "deviance." These, in turn rest on a series of theoretical inversions and appropriations whose origins lie at the center of what we commonly call classical social theory. From Thomas Hobbes and John Locke through Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, and Sigmund Freud several currents run consistently. All proclaim "man" as his own maker; the phrase "homo faber" is more than a metaphor, it is about men's reproductive capacity, men's ability to give birth to themselves. This man exists originally outside society—hence the axiomatic centrality of the problematic relationship between the individual and society—and he has to be brought into society through socialization. This passage—from the state of nature into civil society—is a gendered creation myth. It is about men's power to give birth to society.

The myth goes something like this: Originally, there was chaos, but men created society to get out of this chaos. As political theorist Carole Pateman writes, "The conventional understanding of the 'political' is built upon the rejection of physical birth in favor of the masculine creation of (giving birth to) social and political order." Just as John Locke made a distinction in his *Second Treatise on Government* between "the labor of our body and the work of our hands," so too did social theorists claim a difference between labor that produces no lasting product because its possessor is

dependent, and labor that transforms nature into something of value, the work, which is independent of the producer's survival needs and may outlast him. Labor, as in women's work, as in "going into labor" does not count; what counts is work.

This process of self-creation is fraught with anxiety and tension. If we are a nation, as Henry Clay coined the term in 1832, of "self-made men," then the process of self-making, of identity formation, is a public enactment, performed before the valuative eyes of other men. Nineteenth-century masculinity was a masculinity defined, tried, and tested in the marketplace. This was potentially terrifying, since the market is unstable, and it is potentially a "site of humiliation" as Henry David Thoreau called it just before he tried to escape to Walden Pond. A definition of manhood based on self-creation in the marketplace is a masculinity specific to an industrial capitalist marketplace. The generic man turns out to be a very specific construction: he is a white middle-class entrepreneur.

It is this man's chronic anxiety that forms the backbone of the canon of classical sociological theory. Consider this passage from Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1835):

> An American will build a house in which to pass his old age and sell it before the roof is on; he will plant a garden and rent it just as the trees are coming into bearing; he will clear a field and leave others to reap the harvest; he will take up a profession and leave it, settle in one place and soon go off elsewhere with his changing desires . . . At first sight there is something astonishing in this spectacle of so many lucky men restless in the midst of abundance.

> What a lucky man, indeed—chronically restless, temperamentally anxious, a man in constant motion to prove what ultimately cannot be proved: that he is a real man and that this identity is unthreatened by the actions of other men.

Now consider three more passages from the same canon. Marx and Engels writing in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848):

> The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones.

And Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905):

> Where the fulfillment of the calling cannot directly be related to the highest spiritual and cultural values, or when, on the other hand, it need not be felt simply as economic compulsion, the individual generally abandons the attempt to justify it at all. In the field of its highest development, in the United States, the pursuit of wealth, stripped of its religious and ethical meaning, tends to become associated with purely mundane passions, which often actually give it the character of sport.

And finally, Freud in his essay "The Dissection of the Psychical Personality" (1933):

> We are warned by a proverb against serving two masters at the same time. The poor ego has things even worse: it serves three severe masters and does what it can to bring their claims and demands into harmony with one another. These claims are always divergent and often seem incompatible. No wonder that the ego so often fails in its task. Its three tyrannical masters are the external world, the super ego and the id . . . Thus the ego, driven by the id, confined by the super ego, repulsed by reality, struggles to master its economic task of bringing about harmony among the forces and influences working in and upon it; and we can understand how it is that so often we cannot suppress a cry: 'Life is not easy!'

These descriptions of the bourgeoisie under capitalism, of the fate of the Protestant work ethic under the ever rationalizing spirit of capitalism, or of the arduous task of the autonomous ego in psychological development are a common part of social science training. Does anyone ever mention that in all four cases the theorists were describing men? And not just generic mankind, but a particular type of masculinity, a definition of manhood that derives its identity from participation in the marketplace, from interaction with other men in that marketplace—a model of masculinity whose identity is based on homosocial competition?

How could men feel secure in their manhood? How could men determine that they had made the grade and were successful as real men? If the marketplace, the very arena which they had established to demonstrate manhood was now so fraught with peril and danger, where could they go?

Enter academic social science at the turn of the 20th century. Academic social science was, in part, an effort at historical restoration that would rescue a model of masculinity that structural change had rendered anachronistic and reapply it to reestablish traditional power relations between women and men and between some men and other men. Academic social science provided the

empirical measures for masculinity. If it could not be achieved in the market-place, it could be demonstrated by the display of various gender-appropriate traits, attitudes, and behaviors that have become associated with masculinity. It was social science's task to enumerate those traits and attitudes, and then generalize them as the normal traits associated with adulthood, thus problema-tizing women and "other" men—men of color, gay men, non-native born immigrant men.

This did not take place in a vacuum. The turn of the century was a time of dramatic change, in which the traditional foundations of gender identity—control over one's labor, ownership of the products of that labor, geographic and social mobility, domestic dominion over women and children—were erod-ing. Rapid industrialization, which brought changes in the scale and process of production; the closing of the frontier; challenges by women to the separation of spheres; new waves of swarthy immigrants and black migrants to the cities; and the emergence of a visible gay male subculture in the northern cities—all threatened hegemonic masculinity's sense of empowerment. Many efforts to resist proletarianization in the late 19th century—from the Knights of Labor to the Populist movement—used images of the Heroic Artisan to animate their defensive gender resistance. Everywhere, cultural critics observed mas-culinity to be in crisis.

This was as true in private life as it was in public discourse. No sooner were the structural foundations of traditional masculinity eroding than it became clear that women had taken over the "making of men." The "feminiza-tion" of culture included women's control of the chief institutions of child-hood socialization—church, school, home. Women were teaching boys to be men. Not only did classical social theory posit the primacy of production over reproduction, it set about reappropriating reproduction as well. Like the frater-nal orders of the 19th century, in which men imitated women's reproductive powers and gave symbolic birth to one another through initiation rituals, 20th-century American and European social theory marginalized women's sphere and then colonized it.

How did academic social science go about this process of propping up a threatened gender identity for American men? Most often, it meant pushing those potential threats to the margins, to reestablish the public arena as a safe space for men to be men with other men. This meant marginalizing women, and reasserting the dominance of middle-class white men over men who were nonwhite, nonheterosexual, non-native born. Immigrant men, homosexual men, and black men were all tainted with the same problem: they were not properly manly. Some were unable to exercise manly self-control over primi-tive impulses, others were overly refined and effeminate; both effeminacy and primitivism were indications of insufficient manhood.

The more explicitly racist political agenda was left to the anthropolo-gists. Just as sociology was taking on the central problem of measuring man-

hood, as a way to assure its biological possessors that they were, in fact, its social heirs, anthropology was busy measuring facial angles, brain bumps, brain weights, and other pseudoracial characteristics to demonstrate the natural superiority of whites over blacks, and making sure that those heirs were exclusively white. Not to be outdone, sociologists employed their newfound love of statistics to demonstrate that if present rates of fertility continued, white women would be committing "race suicide" if they failed in their patriotic duty to reproduce.

Much turn-of-the-century anthropological and sociological discourse sought to reimpose biological inevitability in the inequalities between women and men, and among men. Men and women were the way they were because they were biologically programmed to be that way. Prescriptive literature on child rearing and marriage manuals urged a return to traditional arrangements, often using the veneer of science or religion to make their point. Physical differences in size, weight, muscular strength, and brain weight were all used to shore up traditional hierarchical arrangements and to resist women's entry into the public sphere.

"I think the great danger of our day is forcing the intellect of woman beyond what her physical organization will possibly bear," wrote the Reverend John Todd. Let us instead, he counseled, "[g]ive woman all the advantages and all the education which her organization, so tender and delicate, will bear, but don't try to make the anemone into an oak, nor to turn the dove out to wrestle with storms and winds, under the idea that she might just as well be an eagle as a dove."

The consequences of antifeminist diatribes in the construction of masculinities were significant. Keeping women back corresponded to maintaining some men's power over other men. Harvard professor Edward Clarke's celebrated work *Sex in Education* (1873) spelled it all out clearly. If women continue to enter schools and universities and push for entry into the professions, "it requires no prophet to foretell that the wives who are to be mothers in our republic must be drawn from transatlantic homes."

Feminism implied "race suicide," which contravenes the inevitability of patriarchy. Biological models asserted that variations from the hegemonic model were themselves biological anomalies, problems inherent in the organism itself, and not subject to cultural mediation. This was extremely reassuring to parents.

The emergence of Freudian psychoanalytic theory and its popularization undermined such misplaced complacency and, together with the rise of feminism and the "invention" of homosexuality in the late 19th century, propelled parental anxiety about the acquisition of appropriate gender identity in their sons to new heights. Freud, after all, linked gender identity with sexual organization, both spatially and temporally. The moment of the resolution of the Oedipus complex allowed the boy to identify with father (gender identity) and

become symbolically capable of possessing mother (heterosexual). The boy becomes a gendered man and a heterosexual simultaneously. More central still: Gender identity and sexual organization are achieved through struggle between the individual boy and his parents.

Thus it was the parents who bore the responsibility for ensuring this passage, and the burden of blame if the child failed. And failure to acquire appropriate gender identity had serious and suddenly observable consequences: Girls could identify with father and renounce mother's passivity (feminism) and boys could fail to identify with father and thus seek sexual gratification from father-substitutes (homosexuality). Keeping women back corresponded to maintaining some men's power over other men.

Popular magazine articles, prescriptive literature, the emerging advertising industry and, of course, academic social science combined to present a solution to increasingly anxious parents. Gender identity could be measured by the acquisition of specific attitudes, behaviors, and values. If the child acquired these traits, he or she would certainly develop appropriate gender identity and hence avoid the problems of "inversion." Parents sought signs of appropriate gender identity everywhere—in foods, play activities, fantasies, and clothing. And what was defined as "appropriate" gender identity was of course the traditional, hegemonic, white middle-class heterosexual masculinity.

What history had begun to usher out, academic social science revived with a vengeance. This project lies at the core of social science; it was how social science began its quest for acceptance as a legitimate science. Social science operationalized sexism, racism, and homophobia and called it masculinity. We made power relations measurable, and hence, invisible as power relations. This reached its apotheosis in academic psychology in 1936 with the publication of Lewis Terman and Catherine Cox Miles's masterpiece *Sex and Personality*. Just a few years after he developed the Stanford-Binet IQ test, Terman and his assistant Miles developed the M-F scale, an inventory of gendered behaviors, attitudes, and information by which parents could plot their child's successful acquisition of gendered identity. The books a child reads, his or her dreams of the future, level and types of knowledge, and interpretation of inkblots were all used to assess appropriate gender identity. Science thus proved that "a spirit of adventure or independence in the subject are predominantly male; admissions of fear and of humanitarian tendencies, of care for personal appearance, or of liking for social gatherings are predominantly female."

The consequences were significant. Here are Terman and Miles on the etiology of homosexuality:

> [Too] demonstrative affection from an excessively emotional mother, especially in the case of a first, last, or only child; a father who is unsym-

pathetic, autocratic, brutal, much away from home, or deceased; treatment of the child as a girl, coupled with lack of encouragement or opportunity to associate with boys and to take part in the rougher masculine activities; overemphasis of neatness, niceness, and spirituality; lack of vigilance against the danger of seduction by older homosexual males.

It became firmly established that gender identity was a fundamental component of identity since it determined sexual organization, and that gender identity was learned through the successful mastery of a variety of props. Freudian assumptions grounded what Joseph Pleck called the "male sex role identity" model of masculinity, that static, ahistorical container of attitudes, behaviors, and values that are appropriate to men and define masculine behavior.

The acquisition of gender appropriate behavior, the mastery of the male sex role, was a central theme in academic social science, especially with the emergence of structural functionalism immediately after the Second World War. Parsons took Freudian assumptions about the necessity of identification with father and generated an entire theory of male aggression. In his essay "Certain Primary Sources and Patterns of Aggression in the Social Structure of the Western World" (1947), Parsons argues that the need for the boy to repudiate maternal nurture to achieve a healthy masculine identity means that "when he revolts against identification with his mother in the name of masculinity," he unconsciously associates "goodness" with femininity, so that becoming a "bad boy" becomes a positive goal. The social consequences of masculinity as a reaction formation are critical among Western men who are peculiarly susceptible to the appeal of adolescent assertiveness as masculine behavior.

Parsons conceptualized a social phenomenon—male aggression—as the aggregate of individual psychologies. His academic anxiety over its consequences informed a generation of social psychologists who explained everything from juvenile delinquency, teenage gang behavior, and playground bullies, to southern racism and political authoritarianism.

In his classic study of juvenile delinquency, *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang* (1955), Albert K. Cohen applies a Parsonian model, arguing that the sources of delinquency are to be found in "sex role anxieties and the masculine protest." Goodness represents the mother against which the young boy is rebelling and "engaging in bad behavior acquires the function of denying his femininity and therefore asserting his masculinity." This, Cohen writes, is the motivation to juvenile delinquency.

What Cohen observed for delinquents, Theodor Adorno and his collaborators observed for racists, Nazis, and others with an "authoritarian personality." Hypermasculinity was actually a compensatory mechanism to mask insecure gender identity. The authors of *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950) thus speculate:

> One might expect [authoritarian] men to think of themselves as very masculine, and that this claim would be the more insistent the greater the underlying feelings of weakness . . . There seems to be, in the high scoring men, more of what may be called pseudo-masculinity—as defined by boastfulness about such traits as determination, energy, industry, independence, decisiveness, and will power—and less admission of passivity.

"In the end," Adorno wrote later, "the tough guys are the truly effeminate ones, who need the weaklings as their victims in order not to admit that they are like them . . . the opposites of the strong man and compliant youth merge in an order which asserts unalloyed the male principle of domination."

These brief citations are moments in the social scientific construction of masculinity. Like vacation snapshots, they are pale proof that the events took place, that we were really there, but they cannot convey the visceral sensations of the traveler's immersion in another culture. Legitimating white middle-class heterosexual masculinity, that is, maintaining men's power over women and some men's power over other men, was a central project of early 20th-century social science.

Classical theorists noticed that identity had become destabilized, but without a gender perspective, they were unable to understand the dynamics of that destabilization and attributed it to capitalism, rationality, democracy, or the quest for autonomy. Empirical social science was equally blind to gender, but social scientists knew the crisis of masculinity demanded resolution. And they believed they could help.

Many social scientists still till the same barren empirical or theoretical earth. Social scientists often appear to enjoy humiliating themselves by declaring the biological bases for human action, thus, in effect, putting themselves out of work. Similarly, many psychological models of moral development, identity construction, or developmental stages have used hegemonic masculinity as the template against which both women and potentially competing masculinities would be judged. And forms of masculinity that vary from the hegemonic norm are declared problematic and deviant by social scientists who have studied working-class men, black men, or gay men.

Old patterns die hard, especially when they reinforce existing power relations. What, after all, are we to make of the theme of the 1992 American Sociological Association convention, which asked participants to give serious consideration to the question of whether all action is the result of rational choice—this after two decades of feminism, of recognizing motivational, ethical, cognitive, affective difference between women and men?

In another era, the genderedness of rational choice theory might have slipped quietly, uncontested, into the canon. Happily, however, efforts to sustain hegemonic power encounter resistance. Even at its inception, academic

social science met with resistance from those who saw its political and politicizing project. Jane Addams and her mentors at Chicago, for example, saw through the separation of spheres as natural or inherent. Social scientists like George Herbert Mead and W. I. Thomas were strong supporters of women's equality. Lester Ward's theory of gynocracy, which Charlotte Perkins Gilman called the "greatest contribution to human learning since Darwin," and Thorstein Veblen's essays about the economic function of women's appearance also saw through the "masculinizing" project. In anthropology, the cross-cultural claims of Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead challenged the biological determinist notion that men's power is inevitable.

Of course, it was the women's movement that launched the most sustained critique of academic social science and challenged it to make gender visible and thus to decenter hegemonic masculinity from its place of privilege within academic discourse, that is, to render it problematic. It has been, by definition, a political project, because it seeks to transform the hegemonic into a pluralistic set of variations, to challenge the mechanisms by which hegemony has been constituted. It is a project that seeks to deconstruct masculinity as a singular, monolithic category capable of being used against marginal groups, and to reconstruct masculinities as a set of possible gendered identities, each different, and all equal.

Suggested Readings

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