

REVIEWS

META-THEORETICAL ANALYSES OF CLASSIC RESEARCH ISSUES AND QUESTIONS

Feminist Visions of Gender Similarities and Differences, MEREDITH KIMBALL.
New York: Harrington Park Press, 1995. 227 pp., \$15.95 (paper), \$34.95
(cloth), ISBN: 1-56023-870-4.

The Gendered Lens: Gendered Situations, Gendered Selves, JUDITH A. HOW-
ARD AND JOCELYN HOLLANDER. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996. 209 pp.,
\$19.95 (paper), \$47.50 (cloth), ISBN: 0-8039-5604-5.

Kimball's book provides an excellent overview of similarity and difference approaches to studying gender. After outlining the basic distinctions between these two approaches, she provides two wonderful historical chapters on how early feminists (Leta Stetter Hollingworth and Karen Horney) framed their own work in terms of these distinctions. By personalizing the perspectives and putting them within their historical/cultural framework, Kimball both brings the debate to life and makes it impossible to dismiss either perspective as nonfeminist. Kimball then applies the distinction to currently popular research topics (gender and math; the moralities of care and justice and of dominance and resistance). In both cases, her analysis is compelling and informative.

I especially enjoyed the chapter on "Partial Visions: Changing from Within and Without," in which she discusses how the difference versus the similarity perspective has influenced the stance feminists have taken toward changing the culture of science. In her view, the similarity perspective has stimulated a focus on discriminatory practices in recruitment, training, hiring, and promotion. Kimball paints a vivid picture of the impact of such practices on specific women scientists. The difference perspective has focused attention on the masculine nature of the culture of science. Again Kimball provides vivid examples of how the way science is sometimes conducted restricts both the type of science done and the kinds of individuals likely to flourish professionally in these fields.

Kimball's chapter on "Care and the Paradox of Resistance" provides a heart-wrenching analysis of the relation between the politics of caring and the politics of dominance and submission. Her analysis of why caring is such a difficult feminist issue is quite compelling.

In summary, I found this entire book fascinating. Kimball writes beautifully and includes material from both the social sciences and the humanities. She also provides

a sympathetic, balanced account of both perspectives and their relevance to research and policy debates. As Matlin concluded in her prepublication review, "Kimball is one of the few psychologists who is bilingual, able to talk knowingly and fairly from both a similarities perspective and a differences perspective. No other book accomplishes this task so effectively." I agree.

The Howard and Hollander book provides a comprehensive review of the major social psychological and structural approaches on gender, ranging from the essentialist position to social constructionist and structural approaches. Three chapters focus on social exchange and related theories, social cognition, and symbolic interactionism, respectively. The book concludes with a discussion of how each of these theoretical approaches has been used and might be better used to understand the "gendered dynamics of helping and harming others." The final chapter provides an excellent discussion of how these various theories, taken together, can enrich our understanding of gendered situations and gendered selves.

Throughout the book, Howard and Hollander provide both interesting speculations about the origins of the "blind spots" in each of the collective bodies of research and thoughtful suggestions for future research that would benefit from the insights and approaches of all these theoretical perspectives. They also discuss how each of the theoretical perspectives could be better used to study gendered phenomena. Finally, the authors provide very interesting discussions of the intersection of race, class, and gender.

These authors draw much more heavily on the sociological traditions than on the psychological traditions for social psychology. Consequently, as a psychologist, I learned a great deal from this book and would highly recommend its use in social psychology courses taught in psychology departments. Psychology undergraduate and graduate students would benefit from exposure to these sociological perspectives and theories.

The two books share several stylistic features. First, the authors of both books adopt a compare and contrast mode of analysis to explore classic issues in feminist psychology. Second, both books begin with a series of chapters summarizing the basic issues; these chapters are followed with an application of the issues to contemporary research problems. Using this juxtaposition, the authors provide the reader with a comprehensive understanding of the issues as well as how these issues relate to ways in which specific research topics have been theoretically analyzed and empirically researched. Third, both books provide a comprehensive history of science overview on the topics addressed. In each case, the reader is provided with the sociohistorical context in which the theories and empirical work emerged. Finally, both books use potent examples drawn from literature and real life to illustrate how the various theoretical perspectives both improve and limit our understanding of gender.

These books are intended as advanced interdisciplinary primers suitable for both students and professional scholars. By and large, the authors succeed quite well in this goal. Both books are well written, carefully researched, and thorough. Readers will come away with a very good understanding of the issues underlying the theoretical and methodological debates in the respective domains. Both books are quite appropriate for advanced undergraduate courses and core introductory graduate level courses in women's studies, psychology, and sociology. Students will not only gain a good understanding of the various positions summarized and critiqued, but also be exposed to excellent examples of how to do a thoughtful analysis of fundamental issues in both women's studies and the disciplines of psychology and sociology.

But, having chosen the compare and contrast mode of discourse, the authors do at times fall victim to the main problem of this style—oversimplification in the service of making sharp distinctions. Although exaggerating differences between perspectives is an effective way to illustrate key points, it can lead to an oversimplified view of each perspective. Even though both books avoid this problem quite well most of the time, there are a few serious examples of this problem scattered throughout. An instructor will want to compensate some for this tendency, explaining why the authors might adopt this strategy to highlight key points but also asking the students to look into each of the theoretical positions themselves in order to get a more nuanced view.

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