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## Feminist Responses to International Security Studies

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J. Ann Tickner

In his book, *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics*, sociologist Anthony Giddens asks what we should make of the fact that “propagation of military violence has always been a resolutely male affair.” While acknowledging that there is a relation between war, military power, and masculinity, Giddens claims that war is not a manifestation of male aggression; rather, it is associated with the rise of the state. In a rather different book, *War and Gender*, international relations scholar Joshua Goldstein asks why we have not been more curious about the fact that, while virtually all societies throughout history have engaged in war, overwhelmingly they have been fought by men. Although Goldstein reaches a conclusion somewhat similar to Giddens, that war is not due to males’ inherent aggression, he devotes his entire book to examining evidence about the association of war with men and masculinity.

In this essay, I will first discuss the gendering of war, the state, and citizenship in the context of the discipline of international relations (IR). Then I will say something about gender studies and its silences with respect to war and international security. I will suggest some reasons why these two disciplines, or transdisciplines—IR and gender studies—have a hard time communicating with each other. I will then describe some of the recent feminist scholarship in IR that has begun to bridge this divide and some contributions IR feminists have made to our understanding of war, peace, and international security. Most IR feminists are closer to what in IR is called “critical security studies” than they are to more conventional IR security scholarship. In the end, I want to offer some thoughts on possible convergences between IR feminist scholarship and critical security studies.

Giddens is undoubtedly correct in faulting the state system rather than the individual for international wars. Most IR scholars have criticized reductionist arguments that attribute warfare to male aggression. But, to paraphrase Goldstein, should we not also be more curious about the fact that state decision makers charged with constructing and implementing military and security policies have generally been men? In today’s world of about 190 states, less than 1 percent of presidents or prime ministers are women. The Greek model of the heroic citizen-warrior, which equated manliness with citizenship, has been replicated in many polities since. To die for one’s country in battle is a patriotic duty that, until very recently and in only a very few states, has been denied to virtually all women. In the U.S., military service has been a mark of first class

citizenship and was an important rationale for the National Organization for Women's support for allowing women into combat positions in the military.

But it is not only state decision making and militaries that have been mostly populated by men. The discipline of international relations, which was founded at the beginning of the twentieth century by scholars searching for explanations for the causes of war, has also been a field largely populated by men—although this is changing somewhat today. In the last twenty years, in the U.S. at least, IR has been heavily influenced by rational choice theory, which is modeled on the behavior of individuals in the market, behavior that, historically, is more typical of men than women. Power, autonomy, self-reliance, and rationality are all attributes that realism—the approach in IR that has had the most influence on security studies—deems desirable for state behavior if states are going to survive and prosper in a dangerous “anarchical” international system. All of these attributes are ones we associate with a socially constructed “ideal-type” masculinity.

The goal of theory building for conventional IR, which includes most realists, has been to generate propositions that are testable and that can help explain the security-seeking behavior of states in the international system. Neorealism, the devolution of realism committed to scientific methods, believes that theory should be explanatory and separated, to the greatest extent possible, from norms and political practice. While to feminists this view of theory appears thoroughly gendered—and gendered masculine—most international theorists would deny that their theories have anything to do with gender, since gender is usually assumed to be synonymous with women.

Conversely, and in spite of the presence of some women in foreign and defense policy leadership positions, the term “woman” is still antithetical to our stereotypical image of a “national security specialist.” War and national security are areas where it has been presumed that women have little important to say. And it may also be that women are complicit in perpetuating this stereotype. According to feminist political scientist Judith Stiehm, since men (and she is talking specifically about the United States) have been given a near monopoly on the application of state violence, and most women have been exempt from first-hand experience of war, women tend to exhibit what Stiehm calls “a civilian mind,” a certain ostrich-like obliviousness when it comes to matters of national security and war. This can also be said for gender studies in the United States. I have sometimes found that in women's studies departments, audiences tend to be small when military or national security matters are on the agenda.

The distance and lack of understanding between international theory and feminist theory is something about which I have become increasingly concerned in my efforts to introduce a feminist perspective into international relations. I am convinced that the difficulties these two bodies of knowledge have in conversing with one another stem as much from epistemological differences as they do from the incompatibility of subject matter. Whereas international theory builds on an ontology of inter-state relations that sees states as unitary rational actors operating in an asocial international environment, feminist theory is sociological. It comes out of an ontology of social relations, particularly gender relations, which starts at the level of the individual embedded in hierarchical social, political, and economic structures.

Feminist theory seeks to better understand women's subordination in order to prescribe strategies for ending it. Unlike IR theory, feminist theory is explicitly normative and often emancipatory. Believing that claims of objectivity and universality that rest on knowledge primarily about men must be questioned, feminists seek to develop what they call "practical knowledge" or knowledge developed out of the everyday practices of peoples' lives. Preferring bottom-up rather than top-down knowledge, feminists believe that theory cannot be separated from political practice.

Feminist IR, an approach that dates back to the late 1980s, has attempted to bring feminist theory into the discipline of international relations. It has questioned IR's assumptions and concepts and asked new questions, such as the questions about states and citizens that I mentioned earlier. While much of this work has been in areas such as the global economy, development, and human rights, there is also an emergent literature on gender, war, and international security. Whereas conventional security studies have generally looked at conflict from a top-down or structural perspective, feminists have generally taken a bottom-up approach analyzing the impact of war at the micro level. Feminists have been particularly concerned with what goes on during wars, especially the impact of war on women and civilians more generally. They have challenged the myth that wars are fought to protect women, children, and others stereotypically viewed as "vulnerable."

Feminist scholar Carol Cohn has analyzed the strategic language of national security planners involved in planning high-tech warfare. High-tech weapons that kill from great distances increase the impersonality of warfare and decrease the sense of personal responsibility among soldiers—this is one way the military deals with the problem that most men do not like to kill. On the other hand, we are also seeing patterns of increased intimacy of war being especially prevalent in ethno-national conflicts. The targeting of victims' identity is an integral part of this type of war; the destruction of viable economies and civil societies, and the suffering this inflicts on entire populations, defies the rationalist explanations typical of IR theory. Feminism, with its focus on identity and social relations, has been shedding new light on today's ethno-national wars.

For example, feminists have shown that wartime rape, as witnessed in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, is now being used as a strategy of war; it not only terrorizes women but also contributes to male humiliation when men fail to protect "their women." Feminists have brought issues such as wartime rape and military prostitution onto the security agenda. They have questioned the role of the state as a security provider, suggesting that, in many of today's wars, states may actually be threatening to their own populations, either through direct violence or through tradeoffs that tend to get made between warfare and welfare. And feminists are beginning to investigate whether there is a link between domestic violence and highly militarized societies. Feminists seek to understand how the security of individuals and groups is compromised by violence, both physical and structural, at all levels. Hierarchical social, political, and economic structures of inequality can contribute to the oppression of certain groups of people: how these structures are legitimated and maintained is also a subject of feminist research.

Feminist research on security has employed quite different methods from conventional IR security studies. Consistent with feminist approaches more generally, IR feminist Katharine Moon has used ethnographic methods to examine prostitution camps around U.S. military bases in South Korea in the 1970s. Moon links these women's life stories to U.S.–Korean security relations at the highest level. She demonstrates how the security of the South Korean state translated into insecurity for these women. Carol Cohn has used discourse analysis to help us understand the limitations placed on the ability to think fully and well about security when defense intellectuals are constrained in what they say by masculine discourse. From her ethnographic research among defense intellectuals engaged in strategic nuclear planning during the Cold War, Cohn concludes that the fear of sounding like a woman constrained the options that could be raised.

These methods, ethnography and discourse analysis, are ones not often used in conventional security studies. Feminists' focus on issues such as prostitution is sometimes dismissed as not relevant or important to the "real business" of national security and war. And there is always the fear, linked to the question of male aggression, that feminists are raising the specter of good women and bad men. Yet, most feminists are very reluctant to embrace essentialist and reductive notions of peaceful women and aggressive men. Many believe that the unproblematic association of women with an idealized and passive definition of peace has worked to devalue both women and peace.

Different questions, different assumptions, and threats to gender identity are all issues that contribute to the gulf between conventional IR and feminist approaches to peace and security. But the deeper divides are epistemological. International relations theorists expect that research programs will generate testable hypotheses about war and international security. Feminists counter that their research comes out of very different epistemological positions, which question claims about human intention built on models from the natural sciences and the claim to universality of a knowledge tradition built largely on the experiences of men, usually elite men. The judging of quite different epistemological traditions according to the scientific standards of one body of literature, in this case the dominant one, is problematic. It becomes even more so when issues of power are involved. Therefore, bridging this divide may prove difficult. But feminism and critical security studies—an approach that is gaining increasing influence in IR—have more in common.

Like feminists, critical security studies scholars have suggested that issues they consider important for understanding security cannot be raised within a rationalist framework that depends on an ontology based on rational actors in a state-centric world. Their belief that state and other actors cannot be understood without examining their identities as well as the identities they attribute to others demands more interpretive modes of analysis that can investigate how these identities, which may lead to conflict, are constructed and maintained. Similarly, feminist theorists investigate how oppressive gender hierarchies that, they believe, decrease the security of individuals are constructed and maintained. More radical versions of critical security studies claim that when knowledge about security is constructed in terms of the binary metaphysics of Western culture—

such as inside versus outside, us versus them, and community versus anarchy—security can be understood only within the confines of a domestic community whose identity is constructed in antithesis to external threat. Feminists have pointed to similar binaries that, they claim, are gendered; frequently, those living on the outside of one's own state's boundaries are seen as feminized, less rational, and more unpredictable than those on the inside.

Critical security studies is also emancipatory. For example, critical security scholar Ken Booth has defined security as freeing individuals and groups from the social, physical, economic, and political constraints that prevent them from carrying out what they would freely choose to do. Perspectives on security that begin with the security of the individual provide an entry point for feminist theorizing. Claiming, as they do, that gender hierarchies are socially constructed allows feminists, like critical security scholars, to pursue an emancipatory agenda and postulate a world that could be otherwise.

Let me end with some examples. Joshua Goldstein concludes his study by suggesting that the socialization practices of boys and girls motivates men's participation in combat and women's exclusion from it. And practices can be changed. Feminist IR scholar Charlotte Hooper sees in the West some softening of what she terms "hegemonic masculinity," as we move away from warrior heroes to a masculinity linked to processes of globalization and capitalist restructuring. (I would argue, however, that this shift has been somewhat compromised by the post-9/11 security agenda.) The 1990s emphasis on the caring humanitarian side of military duties, found in certain peacekeeping operations, and the increasing visibility of women and gay men in American and European militaries lend support to the idea that the military may be becoming detached from hegemonic masculinity.

Recent research has also suggested that those who oppose military solutions to conflict, women and men, are among those most likely to support feminist goals. Mark Tessler and Ina Warriner's 1997 article in *World Politics*, which described a study of Israeli, Egyptian, Palestinian, and Kuwaiti attitudes toward the Arab/Israeli conflict, reported that men and women in these societies did not have significantly different attitudes toward the conflict and there was no evidence of women being less militaristic than men. There was a strong positive correlation, however, between those who supported equality of women and those who supported diplomacy and compromise.

If women become warriors, it reinforces the war system. If women are seen only as peacemakers, it reinforces both militarized masculinity and women's marginality with respect to the national security functions of the state. Since the way we construct knowledge cannot be separated from the way we act in the world, perhaps these feminist attempts to try to get beyond gendered dichotomies that support militarism and war can help us all to construct more robust definitions of peace and security.

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