

Reevaluating Gender and IR Scholarship: Moving beyond Reiter's Dichotomies toward Effective Synergies

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Abstract

We seek a more accurate review of, and reflection on the gender and international relations (IR) literature than that offered by Reiter. Our evaluation corrects misunderstandings related to key dichotomies (mis)used in analyzing scholarship: sex/gender, positivism/nonpositivism, and epistemology/ontology. It also underscores the comparative strengths and weaknesses of different types of research in order to identify more fruitful possibilities for synthesis. We make the pluralist case that gender and IR research is at its best when it is multimethod, epistemologically pluralist, multisited, and carefully navigates the differences between feminist analyses and large-n statistical studies. The potential payoff of careful, synergistic engagement is worth any risks.

Keywords

gender, conflict, rebellion, war

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Dan Reiter (2015, 2) aims “to overturn . . . (mis)perceptions . . . about the past and future of the positivist study of gender and IR” in his literature review for *JCR* readers. While Reiter’s survey of “positivist gender/international relations (IR) scholarship” thoroughly summarizes large-n, statistical analyses relating sex or gender and various aspects of global politics, it falls short of its goal of overturning misperceptions. Instead, Reiter’s portrayal of much gender and IR research is problematically dichotomized between what he calls “positivist” and “nonpositivist” approaches. As a result, his proposed synthesis between these two bodies of work impedes intellectually productive dialogue.

We seek a more accurate picture of different approaches to gender and IR work that underscores their comparative strengths and weaknesses to identify more fruitful possibilities for synthesis. While many gender and IR scholars see synergistic conversations as dangerous (e.g., Sylvester 2013; Brown 1988), we believe the potential payoff of careful, complex engagement is worth any risks. Thus, we defend a pluralist approach to (gender and) IR rather than critiquing one side or the other in divides constructed between positivism and postpositivism.¹ Gender and IR research is at its best when it is multimethod, epistemologically pluralist, multisited, and carefully navigates these differences (Ackerly, Stern, and True 2006). We develop this argument below and conclude by analyzing how such an approach changes Reiter’s claims concerning research in gender and IR.

Seeing Gender and IR Scholarship

Reiter’s account of the disciplinary history and sociology of gender and IR scholarship characterizes “nonpositivist” work as fading from its dominant position beginning around 2000 (p. 1), with only “several scholars” (p. 4) continuing to do nonpositivist work in the new millennium. The research Reiter labels “nonpositivist gender/IR” frequently self-identifies as *feminist* IR—a substantively important distinction. While (largely postpositivist) feminist IR was founded in the late 1980s (e.g., Cohn 1987; Tickner 1988; Brown 1988; Whitworth 1989; Peterson 1992; Tickner 1992), and entered its second generation of in-depth case study research in the 1990s (e.g., Moon 1997; Hooper 2001; Chin 1998; see Tickner and Sjoberg’s 2011 discussion), its trajectory since has been exponential growth rather than abatement. Membership in the International Studies Association’s Feminist Theory and Gender Studies section, for example, rose from barely 100 members in 2005 to almost 500 in 2015. Third generation feminist IR, both theoretically and empirically rich, suggests gender constitutes war and conflict (Cockburn 2010; Sjoberg 2013), structures socialization of male and female soldiers (Belkin 2012; Enloe 2010), constructs security narratives (Wibben 2010; MacKenzie 2009), makes militarization possible (Kronsell 2012; Alexander 2010; Eichler 2012), influences militaries’ selections of strategies and tactics (Sjoberg and Peet 2011; Sjoberg 2013), weighs heavily in participation in political violence (Parashar 2014; Gentry and Sjoberg

2015; Verchère Merle 2014), and affects how war is lived and experienced (Cohn 2012; Pain 2015).

While Reiter effectively documents the proliferation of positivist gender and IR scholarship post-2000, he erroneously suggests that this work has followed or replaced feminist IR when, in fact, the two have progressed alongside or sometimes even in dialogue with one another. Recognizing this parallel and interwoven lineage of ideas provides both historical and substantive correctives for understanding the state of the field. Reiter suggests that feminist IR research influenced positivist gender and IR work because it “provided new theoretical ideas that help explain phenomena that positivist IR scholars see as important” (Reiter 2015, 4). As an example, Reiter, without documentation, suggests that Boyer and his colleagues (2009) used Gilligan’s (1982) work on gender and interpersonal conflict to formulate their theory of gender and negotiation, but they never reference her work. He also contends that feminist IR such as Enloe’s (1989 and 2000) books “helped develop . . . questions and puzzles that scholars can explore using positivist methods” (Reiter 2015, 4) without citing positivists who took up those puzzles, or considering that the literature has moved past some of these earlier contributions. Neglecting these complexities produces decontextualized and inaccurate understandings of the work presented, and vague assertions that would be difficult to defend (e.g., labeling Eriksson Baaz and Stern’s [2013, 8-9] “methodology of unease” as positivist, despite the fact that their “narrative analysis” uses “eclectic” methods, including “discourse analysis,” “literature overview and analysis,” and presentation of fieldwork data on “events, processes, and consequences” in service of “postcolonial theory”).

Reiter’s reliance on a number of disciplinary and disciplining dichotomies to distinguish between feminist IR and “positivist” research yields additional problematic characterizations of the literature on gender and IR. We will cover three dichotomies, which Reiter explicitly or implicitly relies on, including sex/gender, positivist/nonpositivist, and ontology/epistemology.

Sex/Gender

The most important, yet fuzziest concept in Reiter’s article is *gender*. Although the word appears more than 200 times in the text, it is only defined by implication. Yet, the meaning of the word *gender* is key to the differences that Reiter misses between “positivist gender/IR” and feminist IR. Meaningful dialogue between these approaches should recognize that authors often use the same word very differently.

Much of the work Reiter counts as “positivist” uses *gender* interchangeably with *sex*. By contrast, much of the work he characterizes as “nonpositivist” distinguishes between sex and gender, and theorizes the relationship between the two. Yet Reiter treats the word *gender* used in both contexts as having the same meaning, even though it does not. And the sex/gender distinction matters for the content of the work. Even the earliest feminist work in IR distinguished sex (a bodily trait of

biological maleness and femaleness) and gender (a social construction of masculine and feminine behavioral expectations related to the perception of biological maleness and femaleness). Here, gender is related to, but does not map directly onto, perceptions of sex. Someone's sex and gender might match (cissexual or cisgender) or be mismatched in some way (trans*, intersex, or genderqueer).

In this view, gender can be seen as a noun (identity), a verb (action), and "a logic which is product/productive of performances of violence and security" (Shepherd 2010, 5). As a noun, gender is identifiers attributed to people—they are labeled male, female, masculine, feminine, butch, femme, and so on. As a verb, gender is something that *happens*; people, ideas, data, research, and places are *gendered* by discourses, structures, and positions in the global political arena. As a logic, gender can be deployed in narratives that justify dominance, violence, hierarchy, and devalorization in global politics. Accordingly, gender is not attached to corporeality, although it finds its evidence in materialities (Wilcox 2015).

Being assigned a gender, being gendered, or being subject to gender hierarchy does not happen only to people understood as women. Instead, masculinities and femininities are sometimes tied to people understood to be of the opposite sex, or to objects or actors with no clear sex. For example, societies sometimes *feminize* men—from unsuccessful male soldiers in war (Eichler 2012) to men in informal economies (Peterson 2010). Interstate relationships can also masculinize and feminize acts and patterns—feminist scholars have written about gendered interstate relationships as diverse as those between the United States, Cuba, and Haiti (Weber 1999), India and Pakistan (Banerjee 2012), and the United States and Iraq (Sjoberg 2006). In these cases, gender is not any less real in global politics because it is a social construction rather than an essential characteristic related to sex. Instead, a variety of international actors live genders everyday, and those genders are constituted and reified across global politics. Social genders are not only a matter of difference but also of inequality between the (valorized) masculine and the (subordinate) feminine.

Newer feminist work, however, also problematizes the tendency to fully separate sex and gender and assume the *naturalness* of sex and the *socialness* of gender. Such work intervenes in the presumed naturalness of sex by arguing that not all people are biologically male or female, and sex is not a dichotomy (Fausto-Sterling 2005). Portraying sex as dichotomous excludes those people who fall outside the male/female categories (Heyes 2003). Furthermore, some feminist scholars reason that sex, like gender, is socially constructed and performative. As Judith Butler (1993, xii) argues, sex is a regulatory ideal whose materialization is forced, where "what constitutes the fixity of the body, its movements, will be fully material, but the materiality will be rethought as effect of power." In this view, the sex/gender dichotomy produces the misnomer of prediscursive sex where, in actuality, sex is not "a bodily given on which the construct of gender is artificially imposed, but . . . a *cultural* norm which governs the materialization of bodies" (Butler 1993, 2-3).

In short, feminist work in IR conceptualizes *gender* as social, performative, or both, while a significant amount of the work that Reiter identifies as positivist

conceptualizes gender as sex. Is this observation merely semantic? No. When Reiter tries to construct a dialogue without incorporating these differences in meanings assigned to the key concept (gender), he produces, perhaps inadvertently, artificial comparisons which neglect some core issues necessary to explore for an effective synthesis across knowledge types in the study of gender and global politics.

Take, for example, the question of gender and political leadership, which Reiter (2015, 12) ventures is “perhaps the most direct way that gender might affect IR.” Reiter (with much of the work he cites) frames this as a question of whether biologically female leaders behave differently than biologically male leaders. He then implies that *gender* means *sex*: “if women view conflict differently than men, then gender diversity among political leadership . . . might cause differences in national policy” (Reiter 2015, 12). Reiter’s next few paragraphs cite work that analyzes how female leaders are selected, how they behave, perceptions of female political leaders’ capabilities, and female leaders’ conflict decision-making. In this account of “gender and political leadership,” male leaders do not have a gender and female leaders produce “gender diversity”—so the study of gender and leadership is about properties of female leaders (Reiter 2015, 14).

Feminist work addresses this topic very differently, drawing on a broader, less essentialist notion of gender that is not about women’s sex but about political masculinities and femininities. This literature asks how characteristics associated with masculinities and femininities are valued in leader selection and displayed in leadership practice. This inquiry accounts for sex but cannot be reduced to it. Early feminist IR literature interrogated “the belief, widely held . . . by both men and women, that military and foreign policy are the arenas of policy-making least appropriate for women” (Tickner 1992, 3). To account for this belief, Tickner (1992, 3) argued that those who select leaders value “strength, power, autonomy, independence, and rationality, all typically associated with men and masculinity” and perceive women as associated with femininity and therefore “too emotional or too weak for life and death decisions” (p. 3). In other words, *masculinity* is associated with good leadership.² Feminist scholars have built on this claim by exploring the associations between leadership and militarized masculinity (Enloe 2000), the gendered nature of leadership theorizing (Gill 2006), and the masculinist nature of leadership behavior (Hooper 2001). This literature finds differences in gender expectations, gendering, and gendered behaviors between and toward those understood to be men and women, masculine and feminine subjects (D’Amico and Beckman 1994; Enloe 2000), but does so by asking questions about how leaders represent gender and respond to gendered pressures, how gendered representations of leaders are constructed, and how gendered assumptions underlie the theory and practice of political leadership.

In other words, scholarship with different understandings of gender asks different questions and gets different answers. Scholarship with such differences *can* be brought into dialogue, but we need to improve upon the missing sex/gender distinction in Reiter’s analysis. Conclusions cannot be compared directly if studies analyze

different things. Research on women leaders and investigations of gender in leadership can share insights, but they are not the same, and cannot be effectively brought into dialogue if their differences are elided. Instead, productive dialogue must recognize and navigate those differences.

Positivism/nonpositivism

Rather than considering different interpretations of gender, Reiter categorizes gender and IR work as either “positivist” or “nonpositivist.” Reiter (2015, 3) defines positivism only in the negative: “nonpositivist work often embraced at least one of the following critiques of positivism: scholars are not neutral observers; facts are not neutral; the natural science assumption that predictable patterns systematically determine phenomena may not hold for human behavior.” The reader infers that positivism’s unifying properties are that scholars and facts are neutral and that predictable patterns systematically determine human behavior. To Reiter (2015, 3), the opposite of positivism is “postmodernism.” Nowhere near all nonpositivists are postmodern—some are critical realists, others poststructuralists, still others monists (in Jackson’s [2010] terms). Even assuming a simple dichotomy between positivisms and their constitutive others, Reiter’s dichotomy remains unclear. As King, Keohane, and Verba (1994) and Jackson (2010) argue, it is not the *method* that is used, but *how* it is used that determines a study’s epistemological and methodological purposes. Reiter’s “positivist” category is problematic because it is populated almost exclusively by large-n statistical studies. He distinguishes the work by *method*, when it has differences in methodology, epistemology, and even ontology. Three analytic issues with Reiter’s positivist/nonpositivist dichotomy arise.

First, Reiter’s narrow understanding of positivism leads to a specific approach to synergizing gender and IR research programs. Given that Reiter’s *JCR* audience engages “social scientific theory and research on human conflict,” (*JCR*’s “Aims and Scope” 2015) it comes as no surprise that his characterization of positivist and nonpositivist synergies focuses on the ways in which postpositivist work can supply theoretical ideas, questions and puzzles, and hypothesis testing tools to positivist work (Reiter 2015, 4-5). These synergies adhere closely to a methodology aimed at testing whether X causes Y, as do corresponding examples of synergistic research. Reiter’s X-leads-to-Y depiction of the nexus of the two approaches, though intended to be favorable, limits synergies to those that can be evaluated using positivist criteria: does the theory generate new hypotheses, are the independent and dependent variables correlated, and so on. Postpositivist work is therefore judged by its ability to contribute to the production of positivist research, producing a dialogue, but not one among equals.

This asymmetric dialogue causes substantive, rather than just political, problems. For example, Reiter’s (2015) analysis of IPE research on gender and IR both limits positivism to large-N statistical work and undervalues the range of contribution of feminist work. Briefly discussing only four studies, he argues that there is little

positivist work in the subfield. But this characterization privileges large-n quantitative work as the agenda setter and arbiter of knowledge production. In so doing, he misses both small-n positivist studies of women and political economy (e.g., Karim 2011; Kabeer, Milward, and Sudarshan 2013), and the complicated causal and constitutive connections that feminist work offers for understanding gendered global and local economies (Peterson 2003; Rai 2013; True 2012). For example, Reiter's review overlooks work like Sara Meger's (2015) analysis of the shadow economies that emerge around resource control and how their perpetuation through systematic rape of women demonstrates an intersection of hierarchical economic structures, which suggests the interdependence of global political economy and global security (e.g., True 2015; Elias and Rai 2015).

Reiter's positivist criteria also obscure the depth and nuance of feminist IR theories. For example, Reiter (2015, 9) features Cohen's (2013) work as an example of how empirical observations of women perpetrators in gang rapes during wartime can question "a simple, essentialist view that gendered violence during wartime is exclusively men assaulting women," which he implicitly attributes to postpositivist work. But very little (if any) feminist IR scholarship suggests that women are the only victims of gendered violence in war. Feminist scholarship analyzes women's political violence (e.g., Sjoberg and Gentry 2007; Alison 2009; Parashar 2009, 2014; MacKenzie 2009, 2012; Ortals and Poloni-Staudinger 2014) and men's victimization in political violence (e.g., Grey and Shepherd 2013; Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2013; Zarkov 2001). Further, Cohen's primary theoretical contribution is not debunking an already-defunct essentialism, but the nuanced analysis of wartime rape as a tool for military socialization focused on the gender (not sex) of perpetrators and victims.

Second, Reiter's "positivist" and "nonpositivist" categories mask differences *within* traditions. Some positivist gender and IR scholarship identifies as feminist (e.g., Hudson 2011; Caprioli 2000), while other positivist work explicitly rejects feminism (Carpenter 2003; Jones 2008). Some nonpositivist gender and IR work is theoretically constructivist, while other work draws from critical, poststructural, or postcolonial theory—all with different theoretical assumptions, methodological strategies, and sometimes, different politics (see, e.g., Tickner and Sjoberg 2012). Reiter groups many studies under the "nonpositivist" label despite significant differences. For example, Sjoberg (2013) problematizes Elshstain's (1987) essentialism and Sjoberg and Tickner's work is neither the sum total nor representative of the diversity of feminist IR this decade (see, e.g., Parashar 2013b; Shepherd 2013; Teaiwa and Slatter 2013; D'Costa and Lee-Koo 2013). This matters because understanding debates *among* work in either or both traditions of gender and IR makes dialogue more productive and synthesis more likely to be accurate—accuracy that both has intellectual payoff and descriptive/explanatory leverage about global politics.³

Third, by dividing gender and IR research into "positivist" and "nonpositivist" categories, Reiter prioritizes epistemology in categorizing research approaches. If the key distinctions were indeed epistemological, then Reiter's sequential listing of

the insights of one and then the other tradition would work, and synergistic dialogue would be straightforward. But the core differences are ontological, which manifest in second-order epistemological differences. That leads us to Reiter's third dichotomy.

Epistemology/Ontology

The core distinctions between the research programs that Reiter examines are ontological, based on what *gender* is understood to be. The positivist/postpositivist distinction Reiter makes allows him to elide these differences, characterizing them as epistemological instead. As a result, his assessment cannot fully account for the stakes in gender and IR research. If *gender* is a dichotomy between maleness and femaleness, and there are essential social characteristics that map onto maleness and femaleness, then it makes sense to study gender objectively, by correlating being male or female with political behaviors. If *gender* is, on the other hand, social and performative, derived from perceptions about, but in the end removed from, sex, then we should think about discursive structures of gender, relationships of gendered power, and gendered signification as political and as monist—meaning that research results are always constituted by the subjectivities of both the researcher and the researched. Treating ontological differences over how feminists and large-n quantitative scholars see gender and its role in global politics as solely epistemological deceptively makes dialogue between and about the two approaches seem easy. Appreciating the distinct ontological underpinnings that generate different types of questions requires more careful engagement, but can more meaningfully reveal the origins of gender and its relationships to IR.

Assessing the Contributions to Dialogues about Gender and IR

Productive dialogues across perspectives on gender and IR rely on understanding the relationships between their various contributions. Setting aside differences in the conceptualization of gender, holding postpositivist work to positivist standards, and inaccurately mapping the literature hinder effective dialogue while making that dialogue appear enticingly simple. A more nuanced engagement generates reflective integration and debate by considering the strengths and weakness, and different aims, of scholarship traditions.

Consider, for example, the diverse research on women's political violence in the international arena. As Reiter (2015) documents, positivist gender and IR work does, and can, address questions about where women are and what they do by measuring sex and political violence and estimating their statistical relationships with each other and related factors (e.g., women's political rights) or controls (e.g., economic development). Some studies examine the ways in which sex predicts perpetration of political violence (e.g., Bloom 2005; Dalton and Asal 2011; Vogel, Porter, and

Keibell 2014). Others examine how politically violent organizations structure rules about the sex of participants and the resulting roles that male and female participants are assigned (e.g., Dearing 2010; Davis 2013). They generate data about female combatants in armed groups (e.g., Wood and Thomas Forthcoming), how they are positioned within those organizations (e.g., Thomas and Bond 2015), and how such organizations differentiate (or not) between men and women (e.g., Dalton and Asal 2011; Davis 2013).

“Nonpositivist” researchers are also interested in whether and how women participate in violent extremism, however, they ask different kinds of questions and substantiate or explore their claims using a variety of nonquantitative approaches. This work addresses questions about the ways in which relationships and representations are gendered; the gendered nature and experience of war, terrorism, and conflict; and the ways that gender analysis can show links between everyday (domestic) and international (traditional security) violence. Feminist work also analyzes the ways in which governments, nongovernmental organizations, and media outlets receive male and female fighters, stigmatizing, dramatizing, and stereotyping violent women based on preconceptions about sex, gender, and violence (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007; Gentry and Sjoberg 2015). Feminist research also analyzes the ways that fighters striving for masculinity influence the strategy, tactics, and staffing decisions of violent extremist organizations (Sjoberg and Gentry 2008; Sjoberg 2013). It considers gendered experiences of female combatants in extremist organizations and disarmament campaigns from Sierra Leone (MacKenzie 2009, 2012) to Kashmir (Parashar 2009, 2014) and Sri Lanka (Alison 2009) and Northern Ireland (McEvoy 2009). In addition to these questions, feminist work on women’s political violence addresses the complexity of feminization when it happens *to a man* either *by a man* (Belkin 2012) or *by a woman* (Sjoberg 2007). This work explores how women’s violence is sexualized (Sjoberg and Gentry 2008) and the overcoverage of women’s engagement in terrorism and the undercoverage of domestic, or intimate, terrorism that happens in the private sphere (Pain 2014; Gentry 2015; Zalewski and Runyan 2015). Feminist IR studies’ data collection efforts often pay more empirical and theoretical attention to women, both as individuals and as members of organizations. This emphasis is a *political* decision to pay attention to the margins in global politics (e.g., Brown 1988), which is productive of an epistemological interest in individuals’ narratives, situated knowledge, and personal experience (Ackerly, Stern, and True 2006).

These two broad research traditions talk about similar subjects but in different ways. Postpositivists problematize, while maintaining an interest in, questions of where and how women participate in political violence. Likewise, the best positivist analyses of where and how women participate in political violence are theoretically informed by complex understandings of gender and gender relations. Yet, these two groups of scholars’ adherence to their own intellectual traditions limit their ability to produce synergistic understandings of gender and violence. Because many feminist researchers reject positivists’ tendency to use dichotomized understandings that

reduce gender to sex in order to formulate testable hypotheses, they find it difficult to directly engage those hypotheses and the associated statistical results. Yet feminist scholars are well situated, for example, to provide deeper sociological interpretations of the findings of positivist data analysis and to use the results of that data analysis to tell more complicated stories.

Positivists' tools, on the other hand, are poorly suited to addressing the questions with which feminist research is most concerned. First, positivists' implicit assumptions that sex categories are stable, dichotomous, and contain essential characteristics that can be read onto people hamper their ability to account for gender differences as constitutive of sex differences in political violence. In other words, it impedes their ability to recognize statistical problems with which they are otherwise quite familiar: correlations (between sex and violence) may be spurious (with gender as the underlying cause) and correlations can be produced by unseen or difficult to measure intervening variables (Kadera and Mitchell 2005). Second, standard regression analyses are constrained by the difficulty of detecting coconstitution and the challenges of directly testing relationships between quantifiable and unquantifiable phenomena.⁴

Neither research program is above reproach on its own terms either. Large-n statistical work on women's political violence encounters difficulties other large-n statistical work does not: it is, for example, limited by difficulties in obtaining data, including criminalization of most political violence, the fact that politically violent women commit (and often hide) transgressions of gender norms, secrecy of politically violent groups, personal security risks in conflict zones, and political interests of both researchers and their funders. Feminist work, even as it seeks to resist sensationalization and stereotyping, can struggle with sex, race, and cultural essentialism as it tries to make sense of performance, presentation, and policy surrounding women's violence in global politics.⁵

The two research approaches cannot—and do not aim to—analyze identical subjects. Furthermore, neither can provide sufficient leverage on all forms of relevant questions related to women's political violence to warrant excluding or superseding the other. A deeper, more engaged dialogue that accepts these differences (and sometimes incommensurabilities) would provide significant intellectual purchase. In order to build effective positivist–feminist bridges, we must recognize what each piece of research analyzes and evaluates, and its analytical strengths and weaknesses. Dialogues can then address and engage the knowledge parameters that limit the generalization of particular claims, resulting in richer conversations about both extant work and trajectories for future research.

Seeing Effective Synergies

The syntheses we envision, then, do not equate or compare apples and oranges or create a hierarchy among approaches. Instead, they leverage difference as a source of complementarity and differences as a source of dialogue. Recognizing the rich

nuances of a variety of work in gender and IR, rather than dichotomizing understandings, produces more effective engagement. Below, we provide three examples from the literatures on conflict sexual violence, international norms and Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and terrorism and political violence, of actual and potential dialogues.

Women's Conflict Sexual Violence

Consider a potential dialogue between Cohen's (2013; positivist) work and female perpetrators of conflict sexual violence in Sierra Leone alongside Sjoberg's (2016; postpositivist) work on the invisibility of the female wartime rapist offers an example of more direct dialogue between the two traditions. Cohen (2013) and Sjoberg's (2016) conversation succeed perhaps precisely because they address related but not identical questions. Cohen (2013, 386) aims to *explain* women's gender-transgressive wartime sexual violence. She posits that male and female fighters have no essential differences ("women fighters face similar social pressures within armed groups that men do, and . . . are likely to commit similar forms of violence") and that participation in gang rape creates cohesion for groups of fighters, women included (Cohen 2013, 386-87). Cohen (2013, 386), however, combines empirical observations about wartime sexual violence with insights from feminist theorizing: "that women perpetrate wartime atrocities is surprising only because of the gendered assumptions that scholars and policymakers often make about women's capacity to commit violence." When accounting for women's sexual violence, Cohen (2013, 399) argues carefully men and women both committing atrocities is not evidence of gender's irrelevance—instead, "gendered norms are still powerful in these settings, but not in the manner anticipated." In conclusion, Cohen cautions that (positivist) "researchers should be aware of gendered assumptions—often deeply embedded in the conventional wisdom—when they set out to design surveys, interview protocols, and data-collection tools" (Cohen 2013, 411). Cohen's positivist gender and IR work takes seriously, and benefit theoretically from engaging, feminist work.

Sjoberg's (feminist IR) research also addresses women's perpetration of conflict sexual violence but toward a different end. She asks *how* the gendered norms that Cohen studies constitute the sexually violent woman as discursively impossible. Observing that "women who commit conflict sexual violence are often ignored, underplayed, stereotyped, sensationalized, or otherwise treated differently," Sjoberg (2016, 250) analyzes the discursive reliance of male chivalrous fighters' war justifications on a portrayal of women as innocent and in need of protection. This, Sjoberg argues, makes the invisibility of women wartime rapists overdetermined. Sjoberg then works carefully on a way to break these gendered narratives to make visible sexually violent women, in scholarship, in media outlets, and in law. In so doing, Sjoberg (2016, 74, 105) highlights Cohen's work as an exemplar of the ability to move past the discursive impossibility of female perpetrators in research, and engages an account of Cohen's causal story about group pressure based on

militarized masculinities, which Cohen (2013, 388, note 22) suggests but does not explore. Sjoberg's work takes seriously, and benefits theoretically from engaging, the empirical results of positivist gender and IR work.

These two studies directly exchange theoretical ideas and empirical observations and could dialogue even more than they do. A discussion about feminist research methods (Ackerly, Stern, and True 2006) and gendered structures of militarism (Enloe 2010) might help Cohen's research design respond to gendered assumptions both in IR research designs and in people's behavior in global politics. Accounting for gender as embodied (e.g., Wilcox 2015) would make Cohen's theory of wartime sexual violence more complex and open up possibilities for thinking about the materialization of gender in the commission of acts of conflict sexual violence. Cohen's in-depth case study work could be a template for making women's conflict sexual violence visible *but not sensationalized*, helping to break down gendered assumptions about violent women (Gentry and Sjoberg 2015).

A continued, productive dialogue, though, requires recognition that the two studies and the traditions they come from have different aims, address different research questions, and provide different sorts of information, even as they address similar subject matter and are based on much more similar interpretations of *sex* and *gender* than most studies separated by Reiter's "positivist/nonpositivist" divide. Cohen's interest in what happened and why it happened and Sjoberg's interest in the constitution and discursive treatment of the research subject are (in Reiter's terms) complementary. They are not (as Reiter suggests) a sequential analytic development where postpositivist work provides information used by positivists to form hypotheses, which can then be tested to validate postpositivist ideas. Instead, both studies have strengths. Cohen's careful causal story wields impressively detailed field research; Sjoberg's discourse analysis provides information about the constitution of the subject of the wartime rapist as male. Both have limitations as well. Cohen's choice to set aside gendered assumptions that generate surprise about women's violence makes her account oversimplified. Sjoberg's work cannot directly provide information about why women perpetrate conflict sexual violence on the individual or group level.

Norms of Sex Equality and CEDAW

Another potential dialogue can be seen between Wade Cole's (2013) *International Studies Quarterly* article on the influence of CEDAW on government respect for women's rights and Laura Shepherd's (2008a) *International Studies Quarterly* article on the production of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSC) 1325. Both examine how structures and practices of international governance could (or could not) impact the ways that gender subordination is practiced in daily life. Yet, they draw on very different literatures and take very different approaches. Cole (2013, 233) takes a quantitative, large-n approach; he measures "gendered rights" with "women's rights outcomes," and results from his two-stage least squares

regression models demonstrate that “CEDAW has a strong positive effect on women’s political rights, no effect on economic rights, and a partially negative effect on social rights.” Cole (2013, 243) is interested in the direct causal effects of signing CEDAW on women’s political rights and argues that the impacts are mediated by democracy, religion, and preexisting women’s education but still statistically significant.

Shepherd (2008a) explores a different international institution in UNSC 1325, but one also directed at improving the situation of women in the world. Shepherd (2008a, 383) advocates for “paying attention to the discursive terrain of international institutions” to see the ways that their notions of gender are “product/productive of a particular configuration of political authority and legitimacy that can, and should, be challenged.” In other words, Shepherd (2008a, 2008b) argues that not all legislation promoting women’s rights constitutes progress toward gender equality, in part *because* such legislation itself configures power/authority in gendered ways. Shepherd (2008a) contends that particular discourses of gender and of institutional authority actually constitute and reconstitute both feminized subjects and governmental structures entitled to interfere with them.⁶

At first glance, a dialogue between these perspectives seems difficult if possible. Shepherd’s article existed in the public sphere for Cole to cite or discuss, and predecessors to Cole’s work (e.g., Melander 2005) existed for Shepherd to engage. Shepherd’s article seems to critique Cole’s perspective, where Cole’s methodology appears to exclude the possibility of discussing the sort of endogeneity of gender inequality that Shepherd implies. A dialogical juxtaposition of these perspectives need not ignore, nor even minimize, these differences. At the same time, Cole’s data provide potential support for Shepherd’s argument, and Shepherd’s analysis provides both explanatory leverage and methodological critique for Cole’s research and its findings.

Cole (2013, 247) gives a procedural explanation for his finding that CEDAW passage increases women’s political rights while having a neutral effect on economic rights and a slightly negative effect on social rights: “some rights, it would seem, are simply easier to implement than others.” Likewise, Cole optimistically frames his finding that CEDAW’s intended effects are seen in increased percentages of female legislators but not in legal quotas to ensure that representation: “ratification of an international treaty produced positive outcomes *without* an intervening change in formal domestic policies.”⁷ Shepherd’s (2008a, 2008b, 390) analysis suggests an alternative explanation: that a particular account of what women are underlies policy-making—an account which casts women as passive, provides only for a benign notion of women’s agency when such agency is imagined as possible, and assumes the “translatability of women to gender.” Extrapolating Shepherd’s gender theorizing to Cole’s sex data suggests that women’s political representation progresses because objects of women/gender/governance like CEDAW and UNSC 1325 present an idealized, positive, feminized understanding of women which make their involvement in governance appealing, while women’s economic rights do not

improve and their social situation suffers because that idealized image makes invisible the complexities, difficulties, and faults of individual women and the gendered political contexts in which they attempt to navigate their experience. In other words, Shepherd's (2008a) article can be read to *predict* Cole's (2013) results, and provide a contextualized account of them. Taking Shepherd's argument seriously would enrich Cole's conclusions, and Shepherd's argument could leverage Cole's data as an example of the result of gendered representation in global politics.

Shepherd's (2008a) argument could be used to contend that extensions of Cole's (2013) work should analyze gender-essentialist representations of women in governance documents and discourses as an intervening variable to look to understand the multidirectionality of causal relationships. Augmented in this way, Cole's (2013) analyses could be used to show how the conflation of sex/gender, and the essentialized association of women/femininity, produce mixed results for state feminist,⁸ and international feminist⁹ policy.

Sex, Gender, and Terrorism

Another possible dialogue can be found between Bradley Thayer and Valerie Hudson's (2010) *International Security* article "Sex and the Shaheed" and Caron Gentry's (2015) *Critical Studies on Terrorism* article "Epistemological Failures: Everyday Terrorism in the West." Unlike the example above, where neither author acknowledges the other, Hudson et al. (2012) other work is the subject of critique in Gentry's (2015) article—where Gentry (2015) like True (2015) puts together a criticism of *Sex and World Peace* (Hudson et al. 2012) on the basis of the raced and gendered blindnesses in its evidence suggestion. For our purposes, we leave aside that rehearsed argument for a different conversation: one concerning the relationship between terrorist violence and intimate relations. Each of these articles has an explicit engagement with that question, and we argue that their very different takes would benefit from a dialogue that makes the pieces more than a sum of their parts.

Thayer and Hudson (2010) make the argument that intimate relations *cause* (Islamic) terrorism. Particularly, they emphasize "high levels of gender differentiation, comparatively high levels of polygyny, and obstructed marriage markets" as factors that must be understood to see why (Islamic) "young adult males" engage in suicide terrorism (Thayer and Hudson 2010, 40). Gentry (2015, 1), on the other hand, argues that intimate relations *are* terrorism, where everyday domestic violence constitutes a regime of terror. Gentry observes (2015, 1-2), however, that the everyday terror of domestic violence is often recognized *by the West* in places that Westerners see as savage/outside of Western civilizations while remaining invisible *in the West to the West*. At first glance, these articles are *about* different things—Thayer and Hudson (2010) are talking about suicide bombing, while Gentry is talking about in-home violence between intimate partners. They also differ significantly ontologically, where Thayer and Hudson (2010) take a life sciences approach to suggest the naturalness of heterosexuality, sexual needs, and sex differentiation,

and Gentry (2015) takes a postcolonial feminist approach to see state and gender identities as coconstituted by intimate and international violence. Finally, they differ epistemologically, where Thayer and Hudson (2010) are interested in the causes of terrorism, and Gentry (2015) is interested in the representations of terrorisms.

Still, we think that these perspectives, which both discuss gender and terrorism in the international arena (if very differently), can be usefully brought into dialogue. In important ways, Gentry's (2015) analysis can be read as a critique of Thayer and Hudson's (2010) framework and conclusions, though Gentry does not explicitly make such a critique. Gentry's (2015) piece might critique Thayer and Hudson's (2010) in two main ways. First, Gentry's analysis of the "discursive screens" which constitute certain gendered images (e.g., the prevalence of everyday terrorism outside the West) as possible and certain gendered images (e.g., the prevalence of everyday terrorism in the West) impossible can be read into seeing the blind spots that make Thayer and Hudson's sex-driven analysis of gender and terrorism possible—particularly that of the female suicide bomber. If Thayer and Hudson (2010) argue that young Islamic men engage in suicide terrorism in part because of the unavailability of both sexual release and male adulthood in the form of marriage, their analysis renders causally impossible the significant number of women who engage in suicide terrorism. Hudson and Thayer also engage the discursive screen of the West/non-West dichotomy in gender relations (where the West is presumed to treat "their women" well and the non-West is presumed to treat "their women" poorly), such that their frame is to leverage that difference to explain other behavior, presuming such a difference exists. Gentry (2015) could be read as suggesting that this sort of analysis relies as heavily on gendered Orientalism as it does on what happens between men and women in the Islamic world.

The potential for dialogue between these pieces, though, is not limited to a one-directional critique from Gentry's (2015) work toward Thayer and Hudson's (2010).¹⁰ Thayer and Hudson (2010, 43) suggest that dominance hierarchies are "accompanied by and maintained through the use of violence" which is coconstitutive with "a concomitant feeling of empowerment." While Thayer and Hudson (2010) use this to analyze a competition among young males for heterosexual sex and omit women from dominance hierarchies,¹¹ thinking about the violent enforcement of dominance would add dimensionality to Gentry's analysis. Framing everyday terrorism as the violent enforcement of gender dominance hierarchies might augment Gentry's (2015, 18, emphasis in original) ability to understand "everyday terrorism as a security concern in *every place in the world*." If the source of the security threat of intimate/everyday terrorism is the violent enforcement of gender dominance, then it is part of the assemblage of violences that come from gender subordination, and can be contextualized as such. Framing the visibility of everyday terrorism in the non-West and the invisibility of everyday terrorism as the West *as* the violent enforcement of dominance hierarchies *among* states and cultures in the international arena might help Gentry's (2015, 18) analysis situate the impacts and

self-reifying nature of the gender/race hierarchies about everyday terrorism in a broader context of international politics.

This dialogue is less literal than the others—we are arguing that Gentry's (2015) work shows omissions in Thayer and Hudson's (2010) gender analysis that render their conclusions problematic, and that Thayer and Hudson's (2010) work on dominance hierarchies could be used to provide an additional layer of explanation for Gentry's (2015) reading of the reasons for and impacts of particular exclusive representations of everyday terrorisms. While the ideas in the articles serve as correctives to each other, they each do so indirectly. Where the other dialogues that we have presented are places where the work would benefit from citing and engaging with the other piece, this is one where each piece might be revised by taking account of the substance of the other, making each stronger for what it could directly borrow from the other.

Envisioning Dialogues

The complementarity of this work, then, is neither straightforward (where the work can be cleanly paired) nor chronologically linear (where positivist gender and IR research is the next step after postpositivist gender and IR research). Instead, it relies on understanding epistemological and ontological differences, and the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Moving away from a standard that judges postpositivist work only by its utility to generate positivist work broadens our understanding of gender and IR. For example, postcolonial feminists (Chowdhry and Nair 2002; Marchand and Runyan 2011; Agathangelou and Ling 2004) highlight the intersection of race and gender in global politics as a unique *kind* of discrimination rather than an additive relationship between sex discrimination and race discrimination. Feminist scholarship on marginalized identities (D'Costa 2006; Lee-Koo and D'Costa 2008; Teaiwa 2001) examines the ways that the identity *difference* between the researched and the researcher shapes the ways the researcher understands the subject. Some ethnographic field researchers in conflict zones analyze content of privileged knowledge derived from feeling safe and outside of war as compared to the experience of people whose lives are constantly endangered, especially in gendered ways (Sylvester and Parashar 2009; Parashar 2013a; Park-Kang 2015). Other feminist scholars explore (in)security as felt, smelled, tasted, and experienced (e.g., Alexander 2010). Still others extend gender analysis to include sexuality analysis, advocating queer theorizing for questions of global politics and security (e.g., Weber 1999, 2016; Sjoberg and Weber 2014; Picq and Thiel 2015; Wilkinson and Langlois 2014). A broader, more careful approach to synthesis can explore these more nuanced causal and constitutive connections between sex, gender, and global social and political relations.

Dialogue among “positivist” and “nonpositivist” research should cross not only methodological and epistemological differences but also ontological and political

ones. We object to Reiter's reduction of scholarship to a positivist/nonpositivist dichotomy because it misses the most important substantive distinctions in gender/IR research. The tradition Reiter calls "nonpositivist" is explicitly *feminist*, bringing ontological and political commitments that shape its epistemological approaches. Any complementarity across gender and IR research cannot be based merely on agreement or similarity. It must acknowledge contributions, dialogue across disagreements, and recognize the ability of different types of work to provide different types of information. Such synergies ultimately provide a fuller understanding of gender and IR.

Looking Forward for Gender and IR

We resist the temptation to make predictions or recommend future directions for gender and IR research for several reasons. First, feminist inquiry is by nature collective and organic rather than led (e.g., Ackerly, Stern, and True 2006; Tickner 2005). Second, the complexity of dialogue among the approaches Reiter calls "positivist" and "nonpositivist" means that productive discussions are at the level of particular research subjects and questions, rather than about sweeping claims regarding gender and IR. Third, because feminist scholars have carefully thought about the privilege of authorial voice¹²—neither we nor anyone else should arbitrate the legitimacy of different sorts of work on gender and IR.

Instead, we recommend that dialogues between different approaches to gender and IR pay attention to both substantive and representational diversity in agenda-setting, field-mapping, research topic choice, and selection of methods. Such a dialogue has the potential to escape the disciplining dichotomies of sex/gender, positivist/postpositivist, and epistemology/ontology to learn more about *gender and politics*, avoiding false equation, unnecessary differentiation, and the construction of gendered dichotomies among scholars and scholarship. General IR scholarship and conflict scholarship specifically are just beginning to tap the potential of gender analysis, even with three decades of rich feminist IR work and the recent exponential growth of scholarship addressing both sex and gender. We hope that we have encouraged more careful and more productive dialogue and look forward to being a part of that evolving conversation.

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Notes

1. We use the term *postpositivist* (rather than nonpositivist), because it describes a particular methodological approach and is how scholars in this group commonly self-identify.
2. Leadership studies scholarship supports Tickner's claim (see Sjoberg 2014).
3. See, for example, Kinsella's (2011) gender analysis of the evolution of the norm of civilian protection.
4. Further potential for dialogue can be found in more advanced statistical and formal modeling devices, such as Granger causality, latent variable analysis, simultaneous equations, systems of differential equations, and network analysis, which represent features of the social and political world that feminist theorists typically find interesting, such as the effects of unobservable variables, coconstitution and evolution, and hidden structures. However, none independently manages the fullness of these often complex and interrelated aspects of gender and international relations (IR), and to our knowledge, they are rarely, if ever, used in the extant literature. Barkin and Sjoberg's (2016) edited collection of essays serves as a guide for those interested in quantitative methods for critical theory.
5. See, for example, Sjoberg (2011) and critique in Shepherd (2013).
6. Shepherd (2008b) provides more detailed explanation.
7. Emphasis in the original.
8. For a description of state feminisms, see Stetson and Mazur (2005).
9. We have not seen this term in print but have heard it used as, and use it here as, an analog to state feminism for international organizations.
10. Although we think that dialogues constituted by one-directional critiques are fine, but not the point of this particular engagement
11. Something we find problematic.
12. See, for example, Parashar (2013a, 2013b) and D'Costa and Lee-Koo (2013) regarding race/nationality/geography. Various conversations (e.g., Kadera 2013, allmalepanels.tumblr.com) address problems of conferring more legitimacy to male voices. And Reiter (2015, 5) observes that male voices like Goldstein's (2001) were needed to "confer legitimacy on the study of gender and war to the mainstream of IR."

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