GENDER AND RESEARCH

VOLUME IV

SAGE BENCHMARKS IN SOCIAL RESEARCH METHODS

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VOLUME 4

Men's Studies, Queer Theory, Polyvocality

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Men, Masculinity and the Process of Sociological Enquiry

David Morgan

I think he be transformed into a beast;
For I can nowhere find him like a man.

(*As You Like It*)

This chapter came about as the result of two events. In the first place, and most immediately, Helen Roberts persuaded me to contribute to a session on 'non-sexist methodology' at a conference on methodology organised by the British Sociological Association and Social Science Research Council in January 1979.[1] Since the term 'non-sexist methodology' presents all kinds of conceptual and methodological difficulties (some of which I indicate later) I shall not make it the central theme of this particular chapter which is more to do with the way in which notions of 'men' and 'masculinity' pervade sociological enquiry and the way in which these might be related to the conditions of production of academic work. A second, and possibly deeper influence, one which certainly influenced my decision to agree to participate in the 'non-sexist methodology' session, was my experiences as a tutor at the BSA Summer School on 'Feminism and Sociological Research' in the Summer of 1978. To use Frankenberg's distinction,[2] this was closer to 'knowing' than to 'knowing about'. I had 'known about' feminism before participating in the Summer School and I had some thoughts about its relationship to sociological theorizing. But to participate in a conference where the two men tutors[3] and

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Source: H. Roberts (ed.), *Doing Feminist Research*, London: Routledge, 1981, pp. 83–113.

the three or four men students were very much outnumbered by a largely feminist population was a much more profound form of 'knowing'. This was not, let me stress, the result of any overt hostility. On the contrary, I reflected that, had the gender-ratio been reversed I should have been either propositioned or patronised and, in any event, largely excluded. Rather, what happened was that, at each point, my normally-taken-for-granted gender came up for critical self-examination and reflection. For a while the experience which is, I suspect, the lot of most women academics for most of the time was in some small way my experience.

By way of approaching this topic consider the following two extracts taken from one of the most celebrated methodological appendices in the history of empirical sociology (Whyte, 1943, pp. 302, 299):

> Whenever a girl or a group of girls would walk down the street, the fellows on the corner would make mental notes and later would discuss their evaluations of the females. These evaluations would run largely in terms of shape, and here I was glad to argue that Mary had a better 'build' than Anna or vice versa.
>
> As I went along, I found that life in Cornerville was not nearly so interesting and pleasant for the girls as it was for the men. A young man had complete freedom to wander and hang around. The girls could not hang on street corners.

These are clearly not unambiguously 'sexist' passages. Certainly Whyte appears to have been 'glad' to compare the shapes of Mary and Anna and this may suggest a zeal beyond the demands of rapport. Certainly he uses the term 'girl' without indicating whether it is a native term or whether the implicit bracketing of woman/child is his own work. And yet the passages could be treated as much as a demonstration of the part that sexism plays in a particular social setting including a recognition of the constraints that it places on women's freedom of movement, as a manifestation of implicit sexism. And yet again the book, which treats largely of the affairs of men and masculinity is called *Street Corner Society.* Perhaps the infrequency with which women appear in the book is a reflection of Whyte's own difficulties as a male investigator or of the actual situation which obtained in Cornerville or, most likely, both of these in interaction. The point is not whether Whyte and his book may be correctly labelled as 'sexist' but to consider the process whereby considerations of gender failed to occupy a central place in the book and in most subsequent discussions of it.

It is a measure of the worth of Whyte's book that we may possibly recover some of the answers to questions about gender from the text even if they did not form the central theme of the research. Clearly most sociological texts have some degree of ambiguity in this resect and it was partly for this reason that I decided to abandon, as a central concern, the question of 'sexist' versus 'non-sexist' methodology. There were two further difficulties. In the first place,

the term 'non-sexist methodology' implied that there was some absolute standard of objectivity by which sociological research could be evaluated. Few sociologists, I suspect, would accept this assumption in other areas and there seemed to be little point in introducing it in a discussion of sexism and sociological research. The term 'less-sexist methodology' might possibly recommend itself as a substitute but I do not intend to use it at all systematically in this chapter. In the second place, there was the problem of this distinction between 'feminist' and 'non-sexist' methodology.[4] Clearly, the distinction can and should be made and that the former term, since it is more positive and more precise, is to be preferred. If, however, this term is to be preserved, we are faced with the further problem as to whether men could ever be considered as undertaking feminist research.

In the light of these difficulties I consider my aim in this chapter to be a relatively modest one. I am taking for granted the feminist critique of everyday sociological practice – whether in research or teaching, theorising or empirical research – and am seeking to ask, in the light of this critique, what are the implications for male researchers, for men in sociology? I hope to illustrate some of these themes from examples taken from my own work and I attempt to situate this discussion in an examination of the normal conditions of academic sociological enquiry.[5]

I should stress at the beginning that I am not arguing for or against the adoption of particular techniques or modes of sociological enquiry; rather I am arguing for a critical examination of the social context of sociological research, the assumptions that arise out of this context and the way in which these assumptions (by their silences and omissions as much as by their more obvious statements) shape the more detailed processes of enquiry. In other words, I am assuming that there is nothing inherently sexist in the use of social surveys or path analysis or, indeed, in positivism.[6] Thus, while there may well be something sexist in the use of the actual terms 'hard' and 'soft' data we cannot assume that the use of 'softer' methods is in some way less sexist than the use of techniques which might be labelled 'hard'.[7] Qualitative methodology and ethnography after all has its own brand of *machismo* with its image of the male sociologist bringing back news from the fringes of society, the lower depths, the mean streets, areas traditionally 'off limits' to women investigators. What I am suggesting we need to do is to consider, to adapt a term from Eagleton,[8] the 'sociological mode of production' rather than particular methods of data collection.

It is worth stressing also that this concern about sexism in sociological enquiry is a concern about scholarship. This is not to privilege scholarship over or against the ethical or political concerns that gave rise to the debate about sexism. Indeed the way in which distinctions such as that between the scholarly and the political are made and sustained is itself a proper matter for scholarly investigation. What I am arguing, more prosaically, is that this is not just a matter of concern for those who happen to be interested in feminism or 'women's studies' but something that affects everyone engaged in sociological work. Sexist domain assumptions, in whatever specialised field of enquiry, do have consequences for the outcome of

investigations and in many cases the final outcome would have been very different had the investigator taken account of questions of gender. The exacting demands of Schutz may serve as some kind of signpost for our investigations (1972, p. 222):

> In scientific judgment no presupposition or any pre-given element can be accepted as simply 'at hand' without need of any further explanation. On the contrary, when I act as a scientist, I subject to a detailed step-by-step analysis everything taken from the world of everyday life: my own judgments, the judgments of others which I have previously accepted without criticism, indeed everything that I have previously taken as a matter of belief or have even thought in a confused fashion.

I hope to illustrate these assumptions as well as progress towards some tentative conclusions by examining some examples taken from my own work. In this I am following the example set by Frankenberg (Frankenberg, 1976) and the relatively simple precept that 'sexism begins at home' rather than making any particular claims about my own work as 'sexist', 'less-sexist' or 'non-sexist'.

Anglican Bishops

My master's thesis was on the social and educational backgrounds of Anglican bishops from 1860 to 1960 (Morgan 1963; 1969b). In this I noted the striking although not unexpected homogeneity in terms of family background and education and the ways in which these patterns had changed or remained relatively stable over my hundred-year period. Following 'normal' sociological practice, family background was evaluated largely in terms of the status of the father. I did not, of course, note the fact of homogeneity in terms of gender. In common with most other investigations of elites in contemporary society I took this for granted as a fact so obvious that it was not worthy of comment. Similarly women appear chiefly, and briefly, as 'celebrities' in Mills's *The Power Elite* and the theme of gender is touched upon in only one paper (Kelsall's re-examination of higher civil servants) in two collections dealing with elites and power in British society.[9]

In the case of bishops, to repeat, it might appear to be labouring the obvious even to mention their homogeneity in terms of gender; to which one can only reply that the obvious deserves at least as much attention from the sociologist as the extraordinary. It is also more difficult to recognise. Furthermore, even to raise this as an issue would be also to raise a host of other interesting issues focusing on the inter-relationships between religion, gender and sexuality. Finally, if it be a reasonable assumption that a bishop's class and status backgrounds in some way shape his views on ethical or political matters it is at least as reasonable to suppose that the massive maleness of the episcopacy and the clergy generally should have an influence equal to that of economic and social status. It was often reported, for example, that Bishop X or Archbishop Y did not 'suffer fools gladly'

and it would be interesting to speculate how far this was a 'masculine' trait in episcopal robes. Women, it may be hypothesised, are often expected to suffer fools gladly or at least quietly.

Somewhat more to my credit I did note that 88 per cent of the diocesan bishops during this hundred-year period were married. It did not appear to be the case that, generally speaking, a 'good' marriage directly helped preferment; in my somewhat humourless way I noted that 'bishops tend to marry in a horizontal social direction'. However the fact of marriage was clearly important to the social position of bishops just as it was, and is, to the incumbents of many other elite positions. In a recent study, Kanter shows how the proportion of managers married (and married to wives who do not hold a full-time paid job) rises with income and status (Kanter, 1977, p. 28). Furthermore, marriage could be seen as reflecting a continuation of a cumulative process of immersion and involvement in a wider elite network, one which may sometimes have had consequences for preferment but almost certainly had consequences for general social and political orientations.

I did, further, have a couple of pages on the role and status of bishops' wives. This rather brief consideration did in fact slightly over-represent the treatment of the topic in the available literature at the time. I noted the frequent use of the term 'helpmeet' in episcopal biographies and autobiographies and recorded the following two quotations: 'Of course at a certain age, when you have a house and so on, you get a wife as part of the furniture and find that you have a very comfortable institution' (Creighton, 1913, p. 33); 'No one, of course, could fail to observe how helpful Mrs. Wordsworth was to her husband in his new sphere; but she was so quiet and unassuming that her personality seemed to be almost merged in his' (Overton and Wordsworth, 1888, Chapter 8). Yet in spite of one or two passing suggestions the role of marriage in the performance of the episcopal role remained a relatively unexplored theme in my thesis as in many other elite studies of the time. Similarly the role of marriage and kinship in elite formation, maintenance, reproduction and ideology and the way in which kinship networks change as the nature of elites change is still, with the exception of studies such as that of Lupton and Wilson, an under-explored theme (Lupton and Wilson, 1959).

A Factory Study

My doctoral thesis was based upon a participant observation study of a northern factory (Morgan, 1969a; 1972, 1975; Emmett and Morgan, 1979). It arose out of a team project (financed by the then Department of Scientific and Industrial Research) and the other team members were Isabel Emmett, who studied managers within the same factory, and Michael Walker, who worked in a machine shop. Largely by chance I found myself working in an electrical components assembly department, consisting almost entirely of women. Men

were found to be in charge of things, as managers, foremen or charge hands or in some scientific staff capacity or, in one case, as an odd job man. The labour force of assemblers, painters, packers, testers and lower level supervisors were women.

If women were largely absent from the study of bishops they could scarcely be ignored in a factory of this kind and, indeed, the question of gender became a central concern of my thesis. Or rather, the question of women became a central concern, the way in which feminine or domestic identities became realised or significant on the shop floor; the question of men or masculine identities in the workplace was much less systematically explored, although not ignored completely. I think that I, at least initially, too readily assumed that the fact that these workers were women was a significant independent variable and that it was possible to see, or to assume, the simple carrying over of domestic identities on to the shop floor. However, as a team we were moving towards a more interactionist perspective. Characteristics such as age and gender were not seen as characteristics that automatically had an effect simply by virtue of the fact of their presence; we tended to see these as latent characteristics which were realised or muted in particular contexts, which were shaped in particular directions and combinations by these contexts and which weresometimes consequential and at other times of little consequence. In short, age and gender were not independent variables as appears to be the assumption in many statistical tables where data are broken down by age and sex. It is tempting to argue that we saw age and gender as dependent variables but the very use of these terms would be out of keeping with the spirit of an interactionist approach. Gender became important in a particular way, when, for example, an unmarried, personable male supervisor was attempting to coax work out of unmarried, personable female employees; gender becomes significant in different ways when that same supervisor was dealing with an older, married female employee.

It is worth noting the way in which participant observation contributed to this way of seeing gender as something shaped and patterned in interactional contexts rather than as something unchanging that is brought to every encounter. As a man, I was very conscious of my ambiguous position in the department. My gender placed me – in that context – in the same position as the foreman and managers. The occupational role that I had assumed while carrying out the research, on the other hand placed me in the same position as the female employees. My class – reflected chiefly in my accent and my connections with the university – served to distance me from both categories. Age and marital status were yet further additional factors; some women at least were able to neutralise some of the ambiguities in my status in the department by adopting a quasi-maternal role, expressing concern about how I managed on my own and, in one case, offering to wash my shirts for me. This was not simply a case of a man working among women; it was a case of a man with various other characteristics working in a particular department – with a particular labour force

composition. In a different department – say the one that encountered another male colleague who worked on the project for a short while and was placed in a section employing a high proportion of young unmarried women – different latent characteristics would have come to the fore. The point I want to stress here is that gender differences in fieldwork are not simply a source of difficulties such as exclusion from important central rituals or, in my case, exclusion from all-important interactions in the toilets, but are also a source of knowledge about the particular field. The. 'participant observer', in short, has a gender identity.

Bloomsbury

I am currently attempting a study of Bloomsbury, using the abundant and ever-growing published literature to explore various themes in my overlapping interests in the sociology of the family and the sociology of culture. One theme that I have been exploring is that of 'friendship', its meaning and significance, its relationship to the processes of cultural production, and the way in which, in this particular grouping, a certain ideology of friendship could have been said to have been elaborated. One of the aspects of this ideology appears to have been a belief in the possibility of friendship between men and women, friendship that was not necessarily confounded by sexual attractions or jealousies. My early source for this theme was the set of volumes of reminiscences by Leonard Woolf and subsequent writings and commentaries (by authors such as Michael Holroyd, writing on Strachey) seemed to confirm this picture. It is only recently, in reading the first volume of letters by Virginia Woolf, that I have realised that this may have been a male perspective on friendship relationships (Nicolson (ed.), 1975). Here she expresses a degree of exclusion from and perhaps even some distaste for the conversations of the Cambridge Apostles who gathered in Bloomsbury. Her letters to women show a much greater freedom and spontaneity than, for the most part, her letters to men. This impression is confirmed in Showalter's critical assessment of the Bloomsbury group and her argument that, in the accounts of the circumstances surrounding Virginia Woolf's 'breakdowns' and ultimate suicide, there is the danger that Leonard's version might prevail over that of Virginia (Showalter, 1978, p. 279). This work is still in progress but it would appear that Jessie Bernard's question – 'whose marriage?' (Bernard, 1973) – has relevance here and that we should also ask the equally pertinent question, 'whose friendship?'

There is one not insignificant footnote – a reminder to myself, as it were – to this brief account of my work on Bloomsbury. Just as 'men who manage', often manage with the aid of a largely unheralded grouping of women in the role of secretaries (a point only recently given the recognition it deserves by Kanter (Kanter, 1977, pp. 69–103)) so too these open and formally egalitarian relationships between friends were supported by a hidden stage crew of servants, again largely female (Davidoff, 1974).

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

Finally I turn, with what might seem to be almost indecent abruptness, from a consideration of my own work to a very brief consideration of one of the classical texts in sociology: Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* It cannot have escaped many people's attention, at least in recent years, that women are very much hidden from this particular history; the lead parts – Franklin, Luther, Calvin, Baxter and Wesley – are all played by men and women only appear on the stage fleetingly in the guise of German factory workers with rather traditional orientations to work. Yet here, as elsewhere, these silences and omissions have their own eloquence. We are told how capitalist rationality required the separation of the workplace and household, a commonplace that has formed the background (perhaps too readily) for the examination of domestic labour under capitalism. Further, an important sub-theme in this text is the re-definition of sexuality and the way in which this became defined as a force most at odds with bourgeois rationality. If sexuality became identified with the irrational it is easy to see how it was possible for both to become identified with women, largely excluded from the main public arena of capitalist enterprise.

But most of all, perhaps, it is possible to see Weber's *Protestant, Ethic* as a study of masculinity, not a universal, biologically fixed notion of masculinity but one that was intimately bound up with the developing social formation of capitalism. The main character traits of the ideal-typical puritan – self-control, discipline, rationality, methodicalness – are traits which would probably be defined as 'masculine' by many people, including not a few social psychologists, in contemporary society. Contemporary feminist theory has been much concerned with the interplay of patriarchy and capitalism and it is likely that a re-examination of Weber's study could provide some fascinating insights into this complex area (Hamilton, 1978, Chapter 3; Hoch, 1979, Chapter 9). In this study, as in many other studies, men were there all the time but we did not see them because we imagined that we were looking at mankind.

This kind of re-analysis could, of course, be continued at much greater length and in much greater depth. I hope that I have provided enough to serve as illustrative material for a variety of interlinking general themes.

1. In the first place, I hope that I have demonstrated the need for taking gender seriously. If it is possible to talk of a non-sexist or less-sexist methodology, this must be the first requirement. Furthermore, 'taking gender seriously' is not simply a recognition of the justice of the feminist charges aginst normal sociological practice, perhaps a grudging or a mechanical recognition, but an exploration that can raise new issues and point the way to new solutions. It is, in short, a scholarly requirement, let alone anything else.

Yet it can also be seen that 'taking account of gender' is by no means a simple operation, the addition of one more category of analysis. It means taking

account, reflexively, of the gender of the researcher, as well as of the researched, and of the two in interaction. It involves, too, a critical examination of the notions of gender differentiation as they enter into sociological analysis, an examination of the routine assumptions that may lie behind the breaking down of numerical data 'by sex' (Mathieu, 1977; Oakley and Oakley, 1979). It involves devising modes of sociological or historical enquiry which may begin to capture the lives of those who are often 'hidden from history' – in the examples used here, the servants and the wives.

2. It may be noted that where gender is 'taken into account' it is usually in relation to women; I only started to consider gender to any real extent when I found myself in a factory department consisting largely of women. The same of course is true of whites and gentiles as opposed to blacks and Jews. We know more about wives and mothers than about husbands and fathers; if the former are obscured from our vision by being too far in the background, the latter are obscured from our vision by being, like Weber's Prostestants, too much in the foreground. When I started to think about my field-data I turned to the existing literature, even then quite extensive, dealing with 'women at work', work which treated this as a problem to be explained or justified. Consequently, I attempted to seek out ways in which feminine or domestic identities became manifest in the workplace. My analysis of masculinity was much more muted, although not entirely absent. Following the lead provided by Willis in his discussion of sexism among male adolescents and the way in which this sexism is part of the process of 'learning to labour' or the process whereby working-class kids get working-class jobs, it should be possible to re-examine some classic workshop ethnographies (Willis, 1978). A good candidate for such re-analysis might be Donald Roy's study of horseplay on the shopfloor, 'Banana Time', and not simply for the more obvious phallic connotations (Roy, 1960). Most workshop ethnographies – and other studies of occupations – are normally about men anyway and the re-examination of these studies in the light of notions of gender and masculinity should prove to be an illuminating, if difficult task. Thus taking gender into account is 'taking men into account' and not treating them – by ignoring the question of gender – as the normal subjects of research.

3. Moving away, a little, from the illustrative material it may be argued that 'taking gender into account' is particularly a problem for male sociologists. This is not to say that women in sociology have not, at times, been equally guilty of ignoring gender or of treating it as a one sided question of 'women in society'.[10] Women may be under internal or external pressure as 'tokens' or 'minorities'[11] to avoid gender issues or to treat them in the conventional manner. Yet, at the time of writing, women are more likely to see the connections between their own experiences as students, post-graduates, researchers and staff members in academic and research institutions on the one hand and the work arising out of the women's movement on the other. The BSA Women's Caucus is, it would appear from the outside, one such point of articulation between the two. Men, on the other hand, have to work against the grain – their grain – in order to free