

Gender coding ontological and epistemological positions
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Abstract:

The philosophical - ontological and epistemological - aspects of any science are foundational aspects of that science and determine what knowledge is produced in so far as they determine the methodologies and methods adopted by researchers - an idea captured by the concept of directional dependency. Researchers' ontological and epistemological positions are generally regarded as relatively fixed and influenced by several factors such as one's area of research, academic training, peer influence and market demands. Following interpretivist ontology, it is important to acknowledge that the reality which we study is not impervious to the knowledge we produce. Put differently, all assumptions researchers make must be questioned - since concepts are socially created based on preexisting beliefs which are, themselves, socially created - because they will ultimately impact findings and thereafter reality. In Political Science especially, the deliberate examination of these questions, and the implications of any one point of departure of scientific endeavours is often undermined by the focus on methods and their utility - this a gap this paper aims to fill.

Beyond the factors mentioned, many others can be postulated to influence academics' ontological and epistemological positioning. The one examined here is gender. Feminist theorizing argues that all social realities and behaviours should be analysed through a gendered perspective because gender permeates all aspects of the social world, working through and within organisations and assigning roles and behaviours to individuals. Several authors have found that in academia gender influences what fields individuals choose, what themes they explore in their research, how academic labour is divided (between teaching and researching and everything in the middle) and how (or whether) it is credited. Still, how gender influences researchers' ontological and epistemological positions has yet to be studied. Because little research has focused on these aspects, it is not clear whether one ontological and/or epistemological position is dominant in the field, but should that be the case, the hierarchy implied will lend itself further to being a tool for gender roles, as these too are necessarily hierarchical.

Against this backdrop and in the context of a wider research focused on probing the existence of a gendered ontological and epistemological divide in Political Science, this initial paper sets out to theorize how different ontological and epistemological positions may be gender coded. Such an analysis will involve the identification of the key features of the main ontological and epistemological positions in Political Theory and the mobilization of intersectional feminist theory in order to categorize them as either feminine or masculine. This classification will permit hypothesizing, from a gender perspective, the reasons men and women may adopt a specific ontological and epistemological position.

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