Reflections About What I Learned as an Editor Making Judgments about Gender and Gendered Contexts with a Feminist Perspective

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Editors' Aims and Scope statements for *Sex Roles* have evolved over its 46-year history reflecting how historically situated and dynamic all scholarship necessarily is (Chrisler, 2010; Yoder, 2016a). As I learned across my 5-year tenure as the journal's Editor, my own thinking was continually challenged and refined because I served as the final judge of what fit and did not fit within the journal's contents as well as put my own feminist values into practice. In the present reflections, I lay out the values and understandings that guided my editorial decisions during a time of major changes in everyday and scientific notions of gender, reviewing what contents I regarded as falling inside and outside the boundaries of *Sex Roles'* aims and scope as well as highlighting the feminist imperative we have as scholars to ask "So what?" about our work, including my own work as Editor of both *Sex Roles* (2016–2020) and *Psychology of Women Quarterly* (2010–2015). My goals are to provide transparency to the work I did as Editor of *Sex Roles*, offer a stepping stone from past to future editors' endeavors, and, more broadly, share some ideas that may inspire gender scholars to build on, challenge, and ultimately improve and advance gender-focused research and practice.

I defined *Sex Roles* overall as a "global, multidisciplinary, scholarly, social and behavioral science journal with a feminist perspective" (Yoder, 2016a, p. 1). Although I am proud of the methodological scope of the scholarship in *Sex Roles*, including quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, and content analytic approaches, as well as its global breadth, its contents far outstripped my own areas of expertise. I was trained in the 1970s, and I think most comfortably as an experimental social psychologist, firmly believing that an individual's social context matters. I feel more at home with simple, clear, and elegant experimental and quasi-

experimental designs than with complex statistical analyses or detailed qualitative or content analyses. Although very few papers published during my tenure fit within the confines of my narrow comfort zone, I do believe that having this firm methodological grounding in a classic Campbell and Stanley (1963) approach to research proved invaluable as an editor. Although I certainly see value in research arguing in support of the null hypothesis (for example, see Yoder et al., 2008), I maintained a conservative and admittedly inflexible stance regarding significance testing by upholding the $p < .05$ cut-off and the need to accompany a p -value with an indicator of effect size. If I missed some exceptions, then this oversight was not intentional, and I was pleased to see *Sex Roles* mentioned for the robustness of the work we reported (Replicability Rankings, 2018).

My initial foci here are on the contents of *Sex Roles* and the role I played in determining and shaping that content. There obviously is both power and responsibility in serving as an editor. My go-to resource became the 6th edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (2009), which served as a major reference during my tenure. Beyond all the details of APA style, my dog-eared copy offered guidance about the responsibility of editors "for the quality and content of the journal," including decisions about which manuscripts "contribute significantly to the content area covered by the journal" (p. 226). Although I routinely asked reviewers to weigh in on the appropriateness of every paper that I forwarded for peer review, the major screening for fit typically occurs at the initial processing of a paper, at which point an editor can "desk reject" it. This judgment call is what I want to first explore here in order to make visible what contents I regarded as falling inside and then outside the boundaries of *Sex Roles'* aims and scope.

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Inside *Sex Roles*' Aims and Scope

I defined the core content of *Sex Roles* as focusing on “...how gender organizes people’s lives and their surrounding worlds, including gender identities, belief systems, representations, interactions, relations, organizations, institutions, and statuses” (Yoder, 2016a, p. 1). As I noted at my editorial launch, “I purposively want to capture both the individual and the structural in this definition, as well as span disciplines and levels of analysis from the individual micro level through the meso interpersonal to the macro societal levels” (p. 2). In this initial editorial and in my subsequent practice, I filtered this definition down to what became my guiding mantra: *Sex Roles* is a journal focused primarily on understanding gender and examining the gendering of contexts. On first blush, this summary appears simple and straightforward, and although I found it to be very useful in practice, it proved to be much more complex to implement than I initially anticipated. It is this complexity that I want to unpack here by sharing what I learned, the ideas that guided my decisions, and what I still am grappling with after handling 3,206 manuscripts and making almost 5,000 decisions at *Sex Roles*.

Many scholars have sought to define gender, and they have done so from various disciplinary perspectives and with understandings that have expanded over time. For me, gender fundamentally is a social category that is socially constructed in interaction with others (Johnson & Yoder, 2019). It implies psychologically, socially, and culturally based differences between the social categories of being female and being male. It is culturally and historically embedded, intersects with other social structures and identities/experiences, includes masculinity as well as femininity and questioning of the gender binary, and reproduces power structures, privilege, and inequality. I also drew a line between gender and both sex (referring to biological markers) and sexuality (as in sexual identity, attitudes, and behaviors) in the use of language in *Sex Roles*, by recognizing that gender cannot stand independent of other social attributes and its surrounding context, and in requiring that papers appropriate for *Sex Roles* include a central focus on gender. Given my understandings regarding gender, let me point to some published examples from the 549 original articles, Feminist Forum papers, and invited commentaries published during my tenure to illustrate my contentions and then turn to some of what I deemed not appropriate for *Sex Roles*. My primary goal with the examples I selected is to illustrate the trends I wish to highlight across an array of published papers so I refer you to each paper itself for further details.

Gender as Culturally and Historically Embedded

All research certainly is culturally and historically embedded, but some studies make this embeddedness their explicit focus. Published papers that have pointedly explored the cultural embeddedness of gender have defined culture more narrowly in organizational contexts and more broadly at societal and cross-societal levels. For example, two studies conducted by Wayne and Casper (2016, p. 463) documented that U.S. undergraduates as well as actual job-seekers, especially women, were more attracted to workplaces described as having family-supportive cultures (i.e., being “accommodating of family-related needs”) than to those that simply touted family-friendly policies. At a country level, James-Hawkins et al. (2017) interviewed non-married Qatari college women being educated in a cultural context where norms regarding women’s education and employment were evolving while norms about family remained inflexibly traditional. They described the diverse ways in which these women dealt with expected normative conflict, such as being in denial, framing education as a pathway to being a better mother, and prioritizing financial independence even within anticipated marriages. Relatedly, Dutt and Grabe (2017, p. 309) examined a process of “deideologization” whereby the education of Maasai women in northern Tanzania led to their contestation of traditional patriarchal beliefs.

In broader cross-country studies, Dotti Sani and Quaranta (2017) found that societal levels of gender equality across 36 countries were related to adolescents’ own gender-egalitarian attitudes, with surprisingly wider gaps between young women and young men in more egalitarian contexts, and Elischberger et al. (2018) exposed differences in the correlates of transprejudice in the United States and India. Notably, some cross-country studies also revealed gender-relevant generalizations. For example, Charafeddine et al. (2020) showed that children across three disparate societies similarly associated males with power in mixed-gender interactions, and Sánchez Guerrero and Schober (2020) recorded little variation in the intergenerational transmission of gender beliefs across both native and immigrant adolescent-parent dyads in four Western post-industrial societies.

In the pages of *Sex Roles*, gender is shown to be not only culturally but also historically embedded. For example, drawing from 14 waves of cross-sectional data from large, nationally representative Dutch samples, Thijs et al. (2019) concluded that educational expansion, not secularization and female labor force participation, contributed most to growing support of gender egalitarianism in the Netherlands from 1979 to 2006. Comparing human

figures drawn by children across a time period characterized by increasing gender-status equality in Germany (1977–2015), Lamm et al. (2019) concluded that the proportion of male and female figures was more balanced in 2015, with girls drawing more female figures and with female figures appearing more feminine.

Combining interests in historical and cultural factors, Mandel and Lazarus (2021) looked across both 25 countries and time (2002–2012), noting cross-country convergence in women's labor force participation rates but not in gender ideology over time. Whereas women's greater labor force participation was associated with a more egalitarian division of household labor in 2002, this was not the case in 2012 when country-level gender ideology became the more influential correlate with egalitarian labor, suggesting the limited effectiveness of labor force participation alone in changing gendered domestic behaviors. Similarly, Lee and colleagues (2018) cleverly combined their interests in gender's historical and cultural embeddedness by looking across time (1974–2010) and across patterns of family formation and family life across states within the United States. They found, looking historically, that endorsement of gender egalitarianism rose until the mid-1990s, with a reversal from 1996–2000, and, looking contextually, that gender beliefs in the 1970s correlated with a state's support for the Equal Rights Amendment. They also found a common pattern across time and states in which higher levels of unemployment were associated with men's stronger support for gender egalitarianism, thus documenting historical, contextual, and general trends in gendered attitudes.

These studies highlight the importance of grounding reported research in the culture and the time period studied. I was more diligent about the former than the latter, routinely asking authors (including those in the U.S. for whom this information was most commonly omitted) to specify the country(ies) in which their work was done—if not in the title, then at least in the Abstract. I was not as conscientious about checking that authors disclosed the time period during which their data were collected, but I do think this is a best practice that authors and editors should implement (also see Matsick et al., [in press](#)).

Gender and Intersectionality

Across my 5-year tenure as Editor, the concept of intersectionality certainly attracted growing attention across disciplines more broadly and specifically within the pages of *Sex Roles*, which itself featured a special issue in 2008 (vol. 59, issue 5–6) devoted to this emerging perspective. I was not always comfortable (also see Marecek, 2016) with how intersectionality was operationalized in some published papers. At such times, I had behind-the-scenes exchanges with authors who could point to published scholarship in support of their actions and interpretations

yet my own concerns remained. For example, I find a factorial ANOVA model to be conceptually inconsistent with intersectionality's core tenet that social identities and their expressions and social categorizations such as race/ethnicity, class, and gender are inextricably intertwined (also see Warner, 2008, 2016). (If a factorial model is used, at the very least, I would argue for the use of an oneway ANOVA, which would honor such inseparability as well as legitimate the cross-diagonal comparisons not available in a factorial approach.) These instances of disagreement laid bare the gatekeeping role I necessarily, yet at times uncomfortably, played as an editor, forcing me to juggle my own understandings against those of other scholars over points that are arguably unresolved in the literature. The comfort I did take at these times came from my strongly held conviction that research is a process, not an endpoint, so that as scholarship marches on, our understandings will as well.

Like other scholars (e.g., Shields, 2018), I worry that intersectionality can easily slip toward being a “buzzword” so that it eventually is dismissed as a passing fad or becomes a bandwagon concept (see Mednick, 1989) to which authors lay claim without fully taking an intersectional perspective throughout their work. As an editor, I have seen submissions that I judge to be evidence of the latter, especially when authors' operationalization of intersectionality in their study's design and analyses as well as their interpretations of findings neglect or gloss over the importance of power that is central to any intersectional perspective (Cole, 2009; Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016; McCormick-Huhn et al., 2019). I further believe there are instances when reviewers hesitate to be critical of work framed as intersectional by failing to demand that authors be held more accountable for staying true to the core tenets of the concept. I too would be hard pressed to define a clear threshold about what does and does not reflect an intersectional framework, pointing to the need for further theory-building and research.

Still, I contend that there are sound examples published in *Sex Roles* during my tenure that demonstrate how the concept of intersectionality can enrich our understandings of gender and gendered contexts, with these studies ultimately combining to make a strong case that gender cannot be considered in isolation of other social attributes and without regard for its social context. I found it helpful to think about intersectionality in relation to one's core gender identity, to one's expressions of gender (including gender-relevant attitudes and “doing gender”; West & Fenstermaker, 1995), and to a group's treatment (including both unearned advantages and discrimination) and response strategies based on intersecting social categorizations. I offer these published examples in hopes that they inspire authors and reviewers to do more than give lip service to the construct of intersectionality.

For example, two papers by Martinque Jones and her colleagues explored U.S. Black women's gendered racial identity. In the earlier paper, Jones and Day (2018) used a mixed methods approach in which Black women completed measures of racial and gender centrality as well as an open-ended question assessing the meaning participants assigned to these identities. The authors identified four profiles of gendered racial identity, "defined as the significance and qualitative meaning Black women assign to the membership within Black and women social groups" (p. 1). Importantly for intersectional theory, their work documented heterogeneity within an often lumped together social category. This conclusion is further supported by their later large-sample, qualitative study in which Black college women variously redefined their attributions of being (and stereotypically being seen) as Strong Black Women (Jones et al., 2021).

Other scholars explore intersectional variations in how individuals elect to express or "do" their gender. For example, Peng (2018) qualitatively analyzed the narratives of two generations of migrant mothers regarding the daily mothering of their left-behind children, focusing on the intersections of gender, social class, and the rural–urban divide in China. First-generation migrant mothers faced stronger economic constraints and structural obstacles resulting from their migration from rural to urban areas than did new-generation mothers, affecting how each cohort expressed mothering. Whereas first-generation women prioritized their children's economic needs, new-generation mothers strove to also meet their children's emotional and educational needs. Thus, the ways in which these generations of women performed (gender-specific) mothering was influenced by their different socio-economic and cultural statuses.

Gendered expressions also form one focus of Harnois' (2017) paper. Seeking to predict U.S. men's political consciousness (i.e., awareness of gender inequality and support for women's political activism), Harnois examined various social categories (i.e., men's race/ethnicity [non-Hispanic Black and White], sexuality, social class, and marital status) as well as men's attitudes regarding racial/ethnic and sexuality-based inequalities. In simple bivariate analyses, she found that only men's race/ethnicity was related to both forms of political consciousness such that Black men scored higher than White men. However, in more complex multivariate analyses, perceptions of race-based inequalities were especially potent predictors of awareness of gender inequality above and beyond social categorizations. These findings suggest the ideological importance of gender and racial/ethnic intersections in understanding individuals' belief systems that endorse (in)equalities.

Turning to discrimination based on intersecting social categorizations, across three U.S.-based studies, Broussard and Warner (2019) had college students and MTurk workers react to transgender and cisgender targets who presented

themselves as either gender-conforming or nonconforming. Not surprisingly, compared to conforming cisgender targets, gender nonconforming and transgender targets were less liked and were regarded as blurring a line between being male or being female (distinctiveness threat). Intriguingly however, gender-conforming transgender targets elicited more distinctiveness threat than did conforming cisgender targets, especially among raters who held stronger beliefs in the gender binary and gender essentialism. In sum, there is no singular reaction from others regarding a target's compliance with others' expectations regarding doing gender within the constraints of a male/female gender binary. Flipping this focus from prejudicial attitudes to recipients' reactions to discrimination, Spates et al. (2020, p. 513) identified four themes underlying how U.S. Black women coped with gendered racism, "highlighting the complexity of living at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities."

Expanding on this last point about marginalized identities, I believe it is critically important to design and conduct intersectional studies as well as to their interpret findings by recognizing the central role played by systems of inequality throughout the research process (see Bowleg, 2008). Not all published studies claiming intersectionality during my tenure made these linkages as clearly or as fully as I would have liked. One noteworthy exception is Leyser-Whalen and Berenson's (2019) study of a sample of racially/ethnically diverse, low-income U.S. women awaiting their own voluntary sterilization procedure. Whereas most women reported agency in making their own decision, they referred to cursory discussions with their male intimate partners and little control over the possibility of his vasectomy. Importantly, the rationale for their study included a focus on women's agency/power, which then carried over into the interview questions they asked, probed, and then analyzed and which then, in turn, extended to their interpretations of their findings, thus infusing their whole research endeavor. The authors concluded that their study "reveals that power and control are not absolute and can be simultaneously restrictive and emancipatory as they contextually emerge in people's lived experiences as the women we studied advocated for female sterilization and understood their restrictions as women, and Women of Color, when advocating for vasectomy" (p. 761).

Masculinity, Femininity, and the Gender Binary

Framing *Sex Roles*' focus on gender as a social construction also led me to think more deeply about how authors' conceptualized masculinity and femininity. I consistently desk rejected papers that operationalized masculinity and femininity as essentialized sex-related traits. I regard masculinity and femininity as sociocultural expectations (stereotypes and norms) assigned by the self and others that are

connected with an individual's gender categorization. Some papers intriguingly used men's alleged violations of masculinity (as an essentialized trait) to operationalize a context of masculinity threat. For example, O'Connor et al. (2017) demonstrated that such threat (combined with men's pre-existing beliefs in precarious manhood) led to heightened expressed amusement with sexist and anti-gay jokes (but not anti-Muslim and neutral jokes), suggesting that these U.S. men were attempting to reaffirm their masculinity. Harrison and Michelson (2019), using national-level U.S. survey data, concluded that although women more strongly supported transgender rights than men, threatened masculinity was a better predictor of opposition to transgender rights than was gender identity itself. Krahé (2018) looked at individuals' gendered self-concept, that is, how characteristic German men and women regarded positive and negative attributes considered desirable for men and for women. They found that negative masculinity was not associated with self-reports of anger expressed when driving when it was balanced by positive femininity.

More commonly researchers explored individuals' conformity to gendered norms. For instance, Giaccardi et al. (2017) associated higher levels of U.S. male undergraduates' conformity with self-reported increased risk-taking behaviors involving sexual, alcohol, and drug use and speeding while driving. Silver et al. (2019) exposed complex relationships among various components of masculine role conformity and U.S. college men's feminist, unsure, and non-feminist identifications. Shafer et al. (2020) examined masculine norm adherence in the context of two countries with more (Canada) and less (U.S.) family-supportive policies, finding a stronger negative association between norm adherence and positive fathering behaviors in the United States than in Canada. Conformity to normative expectations also affected women. For example, Pickens and Braun's (2018, p. 431) interviews with young adult, heterosexual, single women in New Zealand revealed that their desires to enact a "desirable" (normative) femininity played a role in shaping their attitudes regarding singledom as a "defective" state.

There is no doubt but that across some (if not most) papers in *Sex Roles*, a gender binary of fe/male remains intact, starting with the "simple" measurement of participants' gender. Most authors ask participants to self-identify as boys/men or girls/women, with some researchers offering additional response options and then either including or excluding (with a clearly stated rationale) those respondents. Other papers explored the complexity of categorizing gender. Broussard and colleagues (2018) examined preferences among U.S. participants for a binary item (male or female) as well as different expanded response options designed to capture diverse gender identities, making note of raters' differences involving their beliefs in a gender binary,

distinctiveness threat (threats to presumed differences between those assigned male or female at birth), religiosity, and infrequent transgender contact. Tordoff et al. (2021) explored U.S. young adults' recommendations for developing trans-inclusive language in sex education programs, and Lindqvist et al. (2019) sought to reduce male bias in language across two experiments by including gender-neutral third-person pronouns in Swedish and English designed to challenge the gender binary. Overall, how to inclusively but also understandably have research participants identify their gender identity or socially designated gender category requires deeper attention, focused not just on how gender is measured but extending to what expanded gender categories mean in terms of individuals' lived experiences and understandings. This needed specificity also extends to authors who must be transparent and consistent in how they categorized their participants (e.g., referring to participants as "cisgender" only when collected information includes individuals' reported sex assignment at birth).

There are a growing number of papers in *Sex Roles* that have focused, meaningfully I think, on exploring individuals' attitudes about the gender binary itself and the assumptions of cisnormativity or gender essentialism that underlie it. For example, Makwana et al. (2018) found that traditional gender role beliefs were implicated in the prediction of transphobia among samples of women and men in both the United Kingdom and Belgium. Prusaczyk and Hodson (2020, p. 440) reported that political conservatism predicted prejudice toward gender non-conformists among U.S. heterosexual women and men that was explained, in part, by endorsement of the gender binary (specifically a belief that "there is not enough respect of the natural divisions between the sexes"). Ching et al. (2020) found that gender essentialism was directly associated with transprejudice among Chinese participants as well as mediated associations involving authoritarianism, culturally-specific filial piety, and social dominance orientation.

These select studies suggest that more work is needed to explore the measurement of gender identification, the assignment of a gender category, and beliefs about a gender binary and essentialism. I think they also raise questions that future researchers might pursue that go beyond the impact of gender binaries and gender essentialism on trans issues to affect thinking about gender and gendered contexts more broadly as well as to distinguish among gender, sex, and sexual essentialism.

Gendered Power Structures, Privilege, and Inequality

By studying gender and gendered contexts, papers in *Sex Roles* address issues regarding power structures, privilege, and inequality with varying degrees of openness as well as

more or less directly. Intersectionality theorists have emphasized the importance of directly making these connections (e.g., McCormick-Huhn et al., 2019), but not all authors in *Sex Roles* have put this imperative into practice to the degree I believe is critical. Although I did ask almost all authors to consider making such connections in their Practice Implication section, there are some examples that I can point to in *Sex Roles* that laudably put this focus front-and-center. I highlight examples here that cut across more narrow individual levels of analysis through relationships and organizations to broad societal considerations.

Starting at the individual level, Austin (2016) interviewed transgender and gender nonconforming U.S. young adults about their gender identity development. The central theme that emerged from her grounded theory analysis centered on the metaphor of being in the “dark,” referring to an oppressed context of “confusion, invisibility, pain, marginalization, and isolation” (p. 221). Two other papers explored individuals’ perceptions regarding facial appearance. Gundersen and Kunst (2019) revealed across two studies that Norwegians, especially those scoring higher in hostile sexism, who were asked to identify which women among an array of faces were “typical” feminists selected more masculine- and less feminine-looking faces. In their third and fourth studies, participants scoring higher in hostile sexism chose strongly masculinized visual representations to identify all men, but less so when seeking a “typical” male feminist. The authors situated their findings in existing research that linked more masculinized faces to perceptions of threat which have implications for exercising persuasive influence (power). Reporting three studies, Mulder et al. (2020) found that British participants characterized both male and female victims of sexual assault as less proscriptively masculine (i.e., undesirable traits more normatively accepted in men than in women such as controlling and insensitive) and more prescriptively feminine (i.e., normatively desirable traits in women such as warm and kind) than control targets. They interpreted their findings as attempts by participants to normalize sexual assault by femininizing (disempowering) victims. Across these three examples, the authors’ findings are overtly linked to overarching patriarchal power structures.

Examples focused on relationship issues include Morgan and Davis-Delano’s (2016) study of U.S.-based focus groups composed of heterosexual women, heterosexual men, and mixed-gender sexual minorities that they recruited to explore participants’ perceptions of heterosexual marking (i.e., behaving in ways to signal that one is heterosexual). Much of what participants described across groups as heterosexual marking reflected and worked to reinforce gender stereotypes that conflate gender conformity with heterosexuality, with some of these aspects (e.g., when men and boys convey their heterosexuality by objectifying girls and women) further reflecting and perpetuating gender inequality. Taking a

more macro-level perspective with regard to relationships, Luo and Chui (2019) revealed that Chinese women who migrated from rural to urban areas because of merit, especially educational attainment, devoted less time to household labor than did women who remained in rural areas, equaling the time reported by urban natives. Exploring the impact of invisible gendered power in marriage, James-Hawkins et al.’s (2021) interviews with Qatari undergraduate women identified ways in which these women gave into or resisted self-imposed barriers to their educational and career aspirations by referring to what they expected to be approved by their parents and future husbands within a strongly patriarchal culture, often more readily recognizing constraints on other women (as outsiders) than on themselves (as insiders).

The examples I chose to highlight here that are framed within organizations involve the workplace, academic conferences, and a women-centered organization. Across two vignette studies with U.S. adults and a third experiment with U.S. college students who could send neutral or sexuality-related articles to a female confederate, Halper and Rios (2019) found that the personality trait of fear of being negatively evaluated predicted men’s, but not women’s, intent to or actual engagement in sexual harassment. Importantly, they discussed their findings regarding the impact of this specific personality trait, as opposed to the others they assessed, as suggesting that threatened social status plays a role in men’s proclivities to sexually harass subordinates. Looking comprehensively at a single workplace, Rafnsdóttir and Weigt (2019) conducted interviews and observed a heavy industry plant in Iceland that publicly committed to hire an equal number of women and men at all job levels. Despite expressed support from managers and employees, the 50/50 target was not reached, with the authors concluding that broader gender stereotypes and a purportedly masculinized working climate within the plant, both of which privileged men over women, were operating to undermine this goal.

Surveying presenters at three U.S. national academic conferences with varying levels of female representation, Biggs et al. (2018) documented that the greater the representation of women, the less women reported experiencing sexism and perceiving pressures to act in a more masculine manner. Furthermore, women who regarded the conference they attended as sexist and silencing recorded heightened intentions to leave academe whereas men who experienced sexism confined their exit intentions to the conference itself. The authors framed their findings in terms of women’s devalued status and lack of fit, plausibly contributing to a “leaky pipeline” (p. 394). On a more positive note, Dutt and Grabe (2019) interviewed rural Nicaraguan women who were members of a grass-roots women’s organization focused on addressing local problems from lack of food to unequal power relations between women and men. They

concluded that knowledge gained through the organization about women's human rights transformed women's valuation of their capabilities and that community engagement fostered solidarity-promoting opportunities for change as well as empowering feelings of self-sufficiency and self-determination.

Some Recommendations for Gender Scholars

My reflections on these contents in *Sex Roles* lead me to offer some food-for-thought recommendations for gender scholars moving forward. To more comprehensively establish the cultural context in which gender was studied, it is important to be clear and upfront (e.g., in the title and Abstract) about the geographical location(s) of participants. When data are collected within specific organizations, including universities, it is informative to know about their gendered climate, starting with the gender composition of participants' work group and the institution. To historically situate a study, a basic indicator comes from disclosing the time period of data collection. A richer analysis also might include data collection focused on contemporaneous, historically-relevant events (e.g., not just assuming that a study of sexual harassment is being influenced by the #Me Too Movement, <https://metoomvmt.org/>, but rather actively including questions about participants' awareness and understandings of such likely pervasive and timely cultural influences).

To move intersectionality research forward, I urge scholars to take care to be true to its core conceptual tenet that social identities and categorizations intersect such that they are inextricably intertwined. I believe this interconnection extends not only to how we see ourselves as individuals (gender identity) but also to how others see us (gender stereotyping and norms) and what we do to perform or not perform our culturally proscribed gender (doing gender). It also acknowledges that social categories carry both privileges and oppressions so that recognizing that dominant groups benefit from unearned advantages is as necessary as bringing awareness to the disadvantages incurred by oppressed groups. Indeed, I think that exposing both sides of an intersectional understanding is needed to have a complete picture of power structures in which gender is just one, albeit fundamentally important, social category.

An intersectional framework also makes clear why all researchers need to be conscientious about fully describing their sample across multiple social categories. Doing so makes clear who was and, critically, was not included, with the latter calling for authors to not only make visible who was not part of their data collection but also to speculate about what may be missing or potentially misleading about their conclusions and about future research directions to address these gaps. One example from my experience is authors who casually report, but do not make centrally

clear, that their work on intimate relationships is specific to heterosexuals.

I further worry that "gender" may be an overworked term in need of more clearly stated specificity and, along with this specificity, more thoughtful operationalizations. When a participant checks a box for male, female, or other, does this response capture how that individual sees themselves (either biologically or psychologically), how others see them, how they present themselves to others, what their lived experiences and perceptions are, etc.? As our conceptualization of gender becomes broader and more inclusive, we need to think beyond measuring it as a single item and, importantly, not to misrepresent what we did and did not collect. For example, I have encountered authors who refer to their participants as "cisgender" but they did not assess information about their participants' sex assignment at birth. I further believe we need to be aware that most participants may not relate to such complexity in ways we might expect; for example, I find so-called "gender reveal" events especially revealing of this point because the declaration of fetuses' "gender" is based on biological markers like chromosomes and genitals (i.e., sex). Ultimately, I believe we need to triangulate across multiple items, with each framed to fit the likely understandings of the people we study. For example, regarding gender as an identity, measures of individuals' attitudes about the gender binary and essentialism may offer some fertile grounds for expanding what we know about how our participants themselves think about their own and others' "gender."

Finally, although this social process may change over time, we know that humans naturally categorize (Woll, 2002), that gender is a fundamental category (Scheider, 2004), and that gender is an ascribed status. These understandings put power structures, privilege, and inequality front-and-center in the study of gender (see Ridgeway, 2014). As such, issues of power and (dis)advantage, as well as calls for social change toward gender equality, need to permeate our work from what projects we take on and let go, through how we design our data collections and conduct our analyses, to how we interpret our findings and what next steps we propose (and hopefully actually carry out) for our research programs.

Outside *Sex Roles'* Aims and Scope

Before disclosing the parameters I used to demarcate the boundaries of content appropriate for *Sex Roles*, I need to start with a disclaimer that although I desk rejected manuscripts as not suitable for *Sex Roles*, I certainly did not make any judgment about their suitability for submission to another journal (unless I judged them as violating guidelines regarding duplicate and piecemeal publication,

plagiarism, and self-plagiarism; Publication Manual, 2009, pp.13–16). Most fundamentally, I required that every manuscript include some central component focused on understanding gender or exposing a gendered context. One concrete indicator of this focus required that authors give significant attention to the grounding and explication of what their study contributed to gender scholarship. Although I certainly would not dictate that submissions cite papers in *Sex Roles*, a ready indication of whether a manuscript developed from and thus contributed to gender scholarship was its inclusion of gender-focused works in its reference list. I saw such framing as critically important toward passing the litmus test of appropriateness for the journal.

Simply studying men or, more commonly, women was not sufficient to meet this criterion; however, this focus did not rule out single-gender research. There are ample examples in the journal's pages that included participants with a single gender-identity or categorization. A good proportion of such examples deal with objectification theory, which in its original form explored gendered processes in women's body image beginning with the objectifying male gaze (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). For example, Bareket et al. (2019), studying heterosexual Israeli men, established a moderate association between men's objectifying (i.e., time spent on bodies over faces) gaze of photographs of women and their endorsement of sexually objectifying attitudes about women. The consequences of such objectification and women's internalization of it are well established in *Sex Roles* in single-gender work focused on women (e.g., Szymanski et al., 2021, with U.S. women; Yao et al., 2021, with Chinese women), and some insights from the theory are extended to men, notably focused on pressures toward muscularity in men (e.g., Lee & Lee, 2020, with Korean men; Girard et al., 2018, with French men) as well as in women (e.g., Bozsik et al., 2018, with U.S. women; Campos et al., 2021, with Brazilian women).

A wide range of gender- or gendered-focused research with single-gender participants is available in *Sex Roles* beyond those papers testing objectification theory. For instance, Croft et al. (2020) predicted heterosexual Canadian women's current mate preferences from their gendered attitudes regarding their aspirations to prioritize career over family and their gender-typed role expectations as primary breadwinner or caregiver. Berkovitch and Manor (2019, p. 200) exposed how heterosexual Israeli women renegotiated the "gender contract" in retirement by uncovering seemingly contradictory discourses of devotion to family along with earning the space and time to be individualistically autonomous. Thompson and Haydock (2020) interviewed U.S. men with breast cancer about their marginalization in the pink-ribbon culture of breast cancer and ideals about masculinity and the male body. Studying U.S. participants who identified as men and who

performed drag, Levitt et al. (2018, p. 367) proposed a "drag gender" based in part on these gay and queer men's desires to confront issues of sexism, the gender binary, and/or heterosexism through their performances. The commonality across these examples is that although their authors studied either women or men, they made gender or a gendered context a central part of the development and design of their study, their analyses of their findings, and their framing of their paper.

It also was my judgment that papers that simply documented gender differences fell outside the boundaries of appropriate content (also see Matsick et al., *in press*). Although there certainly is a long history of comparing girls/women with boys/men (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974), I join other gender scholars (e.g., Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988) in believing that documenting differences without explanation for those differences essentializes them, perpetuating gender stereotypes and ignoring "when and how gender operates as a system of oppression or as an aspect of identity" (Shields, 2008, p. 303). There are, however, papers that include a focus on gender differences in the pages of *Sex Roles*, although I contend that these studies move beyond simply documenting differences to understanding gendered processes that underlie them and/or uncovering the gendered contexts that created them.

Regarding gendered processes, Xie et al. (2019) first documented an often-found difference in Chinese middle school students' math anxiety (higher in young women), but followed up this difference by exploring associations with self-esteem, test anxiety, general manifest anxiety, and control beliefs. Their structural equation models differed for young women and young men, supporting a direct relationship between self-esteem and math anxiety, as well as a mediating role for beliefs in how much one controls one's situation, for young men but not for young women. For all students, self-esteem was linked to math anxiety through either general anxiety or text anxiety, suggesting that these mediators, rather than self-esteem or control beliefs, be targeted by interventions seeking to reduce math anxiety across all students. Similarly, Panno et al. (2018) found that Italian undergraduate women generally took fewer risks on a behavioral risk-taking task than men did as well as exhibited higher levels of state anxiety, which played a mediating role between gender and risk-taking.

Gendered contexts can also serve as moderators to heightened or attenuate gender differences. For example, although a double standard of sexual advice encourages casual heterosexual hook-ups more readily for men than for women, Rudman et al. (2017) documented that this difference in expectations for women and men was found among U.S. adults in the context of high, but not low, safety risk. Caldwell and Wojtach (2020) had U.S. undergraduates create captions for cartoons as well as rate their own humor self-efficacy. MTurk workers, unaware of the writers' gender or perceived self-efficacy, rated the funniness of paired

cartoons, yielding higher scores for male humorists in the context of low self-efficacy and higher scores for female writers in the context of high self-efficacy—thus qualifying the stereotype that men are funnier than women. Exploring the stereotype that women are more successful at prospective memory, Niedźwieńska and Zielińska (2020) found that Polish women in a heterosexual relationship remembered to text the authors better than women without partners whereas the opposite pattern was true for men, revealing the influence of one's relationship context not just one's gender. Yang and Girgus' (2019) meta-analysis documented higher levels of sociotropy (the tendency to overemphasize maintaining positive social relationships) in women than in men, but this difference was smaller in collectivist than in individualistic countries.

Other studies intriguingly looked at the impact of difference thinking itself. For example, Cundiff and Vescio (2016) found that the more strongly U.S. undergraduates endorsed attributions regarding gender differences in skills, interests, and personalities (dispositions) in Study 1 and those exposed to essentialist (vs. socially constructed) explanations for gender differences in Study 2, the less likely they were to believe that women's underrepresentation in leadership positions or STEM occupations was caused by sexism. Across three studies with U.S. adults, Zell et al. (2016) demonstrated that higher levels of hostile sexism were linked to larger perceived gender differences in traits (Study 1) as well as an exaggeration of the size of these differences (Study 2) and that participants who read a fabricated news article about large (vs. small or a control) differences and then wrote a brief essay giving supporting examples from their lives reported stronger beliefs in gender differences that, in turn, predicted elevated levels of both hostile and benevolent sexism. I found studies such as these two examples especially compelling for constructively demonstrating why the simple documentation without explanation of gender differences would be inconsistent with the feminist perspective at the core of *Sex Roles*.

Given my focus on gender, I further found it imperative to carefully distinguish among gender, sex, and sexuality not only in the use of language (adhering to the 6th edition Publication Manual, 2009, pp. 73–74, and expanded in the 7th edition, 2020, pp. 138–141) but also in the journal's content. Although I did desk reject papers that focused on biological sex without a gender component, I was especially excited to see one paper that integrated a biological component into an almost exclusively gender-focused line of research involving objectification theory. Sullivan et al. (2020) concluded that paths from experienced sexual objectification to both body shame and body surveillance were moderated by specific genotypes. Similar to studies looking at general essentialist and gender difference thinking, Bowers and Whitley (2020) connected U.S. citizens' beliefs

in a biological basis for transgender status with stronger support for transgender rights.

My litmus test for papers regarding sexuality is that they examine sexual attitudes and behaviors by exposing the gendered context in which many are embedded (also see Conley et al., 2011) and/or that they explore intersections between gender and sexual identities. The most obvious examples of papers exploring the gendering of sexual attitudes are those that draw on the sexual double standard (e.g., Thompson et al., 2018 with U.S. heterosexual adults; Zaikman & Marks, 2017, a Feminist Forum paper). Similarly, there are a wide variety of papers dealing with the gendering of sexual behaviors, often drawing on heterosexual sexual scripts (e.g., Mulder & Olsohn, 2020, with young adult Dutch women and men; Rutagumirwa & Bailey, 2018, with Tanzanian older men) and extending to issues of consent (e.g., Newstrom et al., 2021, with U.S. women and men) and women's vigilance regarding their own sexual safety (e.g., Dutcher & McClelland, 2019, with U.S. college women). The studies exploring intersections of gender and sexual identities have taken various forms such as examining sexual minority stress among young U.S. lesbian and bisexual women (Ehlke et al., 2020), the perceived suitability of gay men for gender-stereotyped leadership positions (Barrantes & Eaton, 2018, in the U.S.), and heteronormative expectations based on racial/ethnic and immigrant statuses within strata of U.S. women and men (Silva & Evans, 2020).

Finally, I judged that narrative and systematic reviews fell outside the scope of the journal which largely publishes research articles doing original data collection and/or analyses. In line with this empirical focus, I required that Feminist Forum papers, which are original theoretical papers or conceptual review articles, offer new, integrative frameworks that bring together existing theory and research and thus serve to advance a field of study. The core point that I saw as bringing all papers in *Sex Roles* together was that they go beyond existing research to help advance an area of scholarship. To me then, a narrative or systematic review serves as a starting point for a new study's design or for providing synthesis and guidance toward future research directions if developed into a Feminist Forum paper rather than standing as a contribution itself.

"A Journal with a Feminist Perspective"

Although all editors of *Sex Roles* to date identified as feminists, Joan Chrisler (2002) was the first in her Aims and Scope statement to refer to it as "a journal with a feminist perspective." My responsibility as editor to operationalize this directive is where my own feminist approach came into play. It developed through the 1970s in the United States, and it is still firmly steeped in my beliefs that the "personal

is political” and that our core imperative as feminists is to make a difference (Johnson & Yoder, 2019). In line with this approach and over the course of reading thousands of manuscripts across the 12 years I served as an editor across two journals, I strongly advocated that we as feminists, scholars, and/or educators should be asking ourselves “So what?” upfront and throughout almost everything we do (Yoder, 2015). Building on the sound scholarship we do, I think we need to make good on our feminist values by thinking beyond just getting our work published toward its implications for feminist practice. Failure to do so, I contend, will only serve to support the existing patriarchal status quo.

One initiative that I carried over from my tenure as editor of *Psychology of Women Quarterly* was to require that almost all authors of original research studies include a subsection in their Discussion section focused on “Practice Implications.” (The few exceptions mostly involved psychometric work with existing measures.) The specific instructions I gave to authors early in the revision process stated: “The Practice Implications subsection should present your thoughtful answer to the question ‘So what?’, that is, address what about your findings may be useful to practice professionals (e.g., therapists/counselors, instructors, activists, policymakers, administrators), students, and/or everyday readers.”

Many authors took this charge more seriously than a few others, and I generally did not interfere with what authors chose to do or not do with this assignment. There also were projects that were more or less amenable toward making these connections between research and practice. But, as we all recognize, the impetus for doing any project over another always comes down to researchers’ values and what they see as meritorious of their efforts. As an editor, I come in at the back end of this process when these choices have been made and the work has been done; the front-end rests with researchers. I found it disheartening when I read technically well-done original research papers with findings or proposals for new measures that left me shrugging my shoulders and asking “So what?”.

On the other hand, I found it especially gratifying when I read equally sound papers that sparked conversations at the family dinner table or in my classes (see Yoder, 2016b), were cited in the popular press, or simply made me want to chat with the authors. I am not suggesting that any of these outcomes should drive our research agenda, but I do want to argue that as socially responsible, feminist scholars, we have an obligation to ask “So what?” of our research, our teaching, and the dissemination of what we do (Yoder, 2018). In fact, I believe that by adopting this imperative, we will necessarily have to be better researchers simply because we have more riding on our work than another notch in our publication belt. Here, I want to point to some examples

in *Sex Roles* that I found especially compelling, with the modest hope of giving them additional visibility and with the immodest hope of encouraging researchers to put their feminist values into practice in the work they elect to do and how they do it.

The projects with the most visible connections to practice explore interventions, with the most obvious of these studies providing evidence of those interventions’ effectiveness. Some of these interventions are carefully designed and experimentally tested, and across them, they cover an impressive range of outcomes. For example, Boccanfuso et al. (2021) exposed Australian undergraduates to an online confederate who revealed that she was either a transgender or cisgender woman, documenting that this E-contact reduced the transgender stigma endorsed by cisgender men. Pietri et al. (2021, Experiment 3) demonstrated that U.S. Black women students regarded a Black female computer scientist as warmer when seen in a video (vs. reading a written transcript), which was associated with stronger feelings of social connection and identification, which ultimately were linked to greater interest in computer science and programming. Klysing (2020) concluded that exposing Swedish participants to a social constructionist explanation of gender differences (vs. a biological explanation or a no-explanation control) led to stronger endorsement of a non-essentialist lay theory of gender which, in turn, predicted heightened recognition of sexist behavior. Liao et al. (2020) developed and tested the effectiveness of a television drama-based media literacy program on enhancing the media literacy skills and gender role attitudes of Taiwanese adolescents.

Other projects in *Sex Roles* explored the impact of naturalistic interventions. Surveying U.S. television viewers, Gillig et al. (2018) found that exposure to storylines featuring transgender individuals was related to more supportive attitudes toward transgender people and policies. Taschler and West (2017) revealed that the more frequent, higher quality contact members of the general British public reported having with counter-stereotypical women, the lower men’s and women’s levels of sexism, which, in turn, were associated with less rape myth acceptance in men. Rodgers et al. (2019) distinguished two types of media skepticism and critical thinking and explored their associations with Australian female adolescents’ body images, and Emery et al. (2020) uncovered different predictors and types of bystander intervention projected by friends witnessing intimate partner violence in samples of women from Beijing and Seoul.

Intriguingly, other studies in *Sex Roles* exposed shortcomings in interventions shown or presumed to be effective. For example, although Video Interventions for Diversity in STEM (VIDS) effectively led to increased knowledge of gender biases and lowered sexism among U.S. women and men, they also lowered women’s (as well as female scientists’) sense of belonging in the sciences, raised negative affect,

and heightened identity threat (Pietri et al., 2019). Mazei et al. (2020) examined German women's perceptions of six different negotiation strategies, supporting their argument that strategies that women found unappealing would interfere with the likelihood of their implementation. Webster et al. (2020) explored U.S. men's and women's responses to recruitment materials targeting underrepresented groups, finding that men perceived more disadvantages for nursing positions than women did for policing jobs.

A final pair of studies focused on interventions creatively captured outcomes beyond those obviously intended. For example, Sa et al. (2021) looked beyond the obvious outcome one would expect for a sexuality education intervention (i.e., accurate sexual knowledge) to include endorsement of nontraditional gender roles, rejection of the sexual double standard, and perceived sexual self-efficacy, concluding the intervention also empowered Chinese female adolescents. Similarly, Mulvey et al. (2020) documented that U.S. preschoolers assigned to a kinesthetic instruction program not only exhibited higher motor competence than controls but also grew the number of girls' mixed-gender friendships.

The "So what?" values of feminist research need not focus only on interventions. For example, they can be designed to make visible connections to everyday life. As an example, Ahn et al. (2017) looked at gendered processes in helping behavior by grounding their series of five studies in the day-to-day remembering of outstanding tasks (to-dos) shouldered by U.S. heterosexual women and men within their intimate relationships. Alternatively, studies can focus on exposing sexist barriers, such as Moss-Racusin et al.'s (2018 in the U.S.) exposure of gender biases in producing gender gaps in STEM fields.

Finally, projects can directly address taking feminist action. For example, Radke et al. (2018) distinguished between feminist actions that challenge gender inequality and protective actions intended to shield women from violence. In a series of three studies with U.S. community samples, they established that women endorsed feminist action more than men did and that this difference was explained by women's stronger awareness of gender inequality and identification as a feminist whereas men's support for protective action was linked to their benevolent sexism. Riquelme et al. (2020) revealed that among Spanish women and men with weaker feminist identification, exposure to humor that criticizes, confronts, and questions sexism (vs. neutral humor) enhanced participants' proclivity to participate in collective action in support of gender equality (Study 1) as well as their behavioral intentions (Study 2). Guizzo et al. (2017) found that Italian women who viewed a sexually objectifying television clip that was accompanied by a commentary advocating against the degradation of women reported a greater proclivity toward collective action along with stronger behavioral intentions, motivated by anger, than a

control condition. These studies, along with other research exploring potential predictors of endorsing and taking feminist action, offer directions for feminist activists who seek to promote social justice and change.

Conclusion

When I look back at my initial editorial (Yoder, 2016a) from my vantage of having served *Sex Roles* for the past 5 years as its Editor, I am grateful to those Editors who came before me as well as the Editorial Board members and reviewers from whose generous input and expertise I unceasingly drew. I now am struck by how much I learned by having to put my initial thinking, so seemingly straightforward at the time, into practice. My motivations for sharing the present reflections are to be transparent about the evolution of my thinking regarding what I saw as constituting scholarship focused on understanding gender and gendered contexts as well as falling outside this mission. By synthesizing some major foci across the many papers published and not published in *Sex Roles* and by highlighting some published exemplars, I hope to encourage gender theorists and researchers to build on, challenge, and refine this base of existing work. Furthermore, by addressing here the "So what?" question I asked myself about my own editorial contributions, I similarly hope to inspire gender scholars to put our feminist values into practice by linking our scholarship, from its inception through its dissemination, with feminist activism. Across my 40+ year career, it has been endlessly challenging and invigorating to see the field of gender studies evolve and especially gratifying to play some role in that evolution as editor of two highly ISI-ranked "Women's Studies" journals. I look forward to watching that progression continue.

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