



**Joshua S. Goldstein.** *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa.* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001. xv + 523 pp. \$40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-00180-9.



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## The Science of Gender

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In *War and Gender*, Joshua Goldstein attempts a synthesis of disparate analyses addressing the “near-total exclusion of women from combat” over time and across cultures (pp. 5, 58). This intriguing approach is largely effective, and the text makes an important contribution to the burgeoning literature on gender and war/international relations. In this bridge-building effort, Goldstein employs analytic tools from multiple disciplines, including history, biology, psychology, sociology, and political science. He argues that war and gender are mutually constitutive, although Goldstein does not use the constructivist term; he prefers the more positivist language of “reciprocal causality,” viz., “[c]ausality runs both ways between war and gender” (pp. 6, 191, 410). Although explicitly aimed at an academic audience, this analysis will also be of interest to military professionals, government policy makers, and general interest readers, as Goldstein debunks many of the myths surrounding war and gender that have shaped past policy decisions and public perceptions. His analysis is refreshing in its challenge to

the artificial boundaries of academic disciplines and to accepted but ungrounded assumptions about gender and war, yet it is bounded by the positivist approach of social science methodology.

Goldstein begins by challenging the dichotomous construction of sex/biology (nature) vs. gender/culture (nurture), arguing that the two are “highly interdependent” and that biology “provides diverse potentials” while cultures “limit, select, and channel them” (p. 2). He articulates this concept succinctly, “[b]iology is diversity” (pp. 131, 191), and demonstrates this variability across societies in detail in Chapters Two and Three. Goldstein defines war as lethal intergroup violence and feminism as an ideology opposing male domination and promoting gender equality (pp. 2-3). He then reviews the historical record of men and women in war in simple and complex societies. He concludes that the cross-cultural consistency of gendered war roles is pervasive, albeit not quite universal: women have fought in wars but are (or are portrayed/perceived as) exceptions to the gender rule that men are warriors. To explain the con-

sistency of this link between war and gender, Goldstein turns to variants of feminist theory—Liberal Feminism, Difference Feminism (including Ecofeminism), Postmodern Feminism—and the two dominant mainstream conventional international relations (IR) theories—Realism and Liberalism. Goldstein uses these theories to generate a set of twenty “testable” hypotheses about the relationship between gender and war. Notably absent from this inventory are Postcolonial Feminist theory and Critical IR theory, although the postmodern variant of the latter is briefly criticized as “gender blind” (p. 36). Some of the assumptions of Critical IR theory make an unlabeled appearance later in Chapter Four (social identity) and Chapter Six (labor exploitation).

Chapter Two examines the historical record of women as combatants. Goldstein begins with all-female units in eighteenth-century Dahomey, Europe in WWII (with an intriguing contrast between Soviet and German practices), Russia in WWI, and briefly in the Taiping rebellion and other non-European cases. He also explores the record of women in mixed units, common in partisan and guerrilla forces in Yugoslavia, Vietnam, Nicaragua, South Africa, and elsewhere, as well as in contemporary state militaries such as NATO members Canada, Denmark, France, and Norway. This section of the chapter includes a lengthy case study on U.S. military gender practice. Next Goldstein reviews the record of individual women fighters and military leaders. He concludes that gender exclusion from combat is by policy choice, not by physical capability: the evidence shows that women can and do fight (p. 127), so the explanation for the relationship between war and gender lies elsewhere.

In Chapter Three, Goldstein focuses on “Bodies,” that is, biological explanations of the “puzzle of gendered war roles,” and he concludes that “none of the gender differences is sufficient to explain the puzzle” (pp. 133, 182). Goldstein finds no support for arguments regarding genetic predisposition to aggression and little support for the hypothesized link between testosterone and aggression due to “problems of measurement, reverse causality, and poor experimental design” (pp. 153, 182). Gender differences in size and strength provide, at best, a partial explanation for gender-exclusive war roles; given the diversity within each gender group, these differences point to a propensity toward but not a physical imperative for gender exclusion. The interplay between biology and culture is emphasized throughout the chapter.

Goldstein examines “Groups”, that is, group dynamics of bonding, hierarchy, and gender segregation, draw-

ing from research on both animal behavior and human psychology, in Chapter Four. He finds no support for the male bonding hypothesis popular with some critics of expanded roles for women in the U.S. military, such as Martin van Creveld in his recent publication *Men, Women, and War* (2002). Goldstein does find some evidence for a gendered orientation toward competitive hierarchies, reinforced by gender segregation in childhood play. Some analysts might conclude that these group patterns, taken together with average gender differences in size and strength, might “create an overwhelming mandate for men” as warriors, but Goldstein rejects this multicausal explanation (p. 250). He argues instead that these elements “do not combine additively or multiplicatively so much as they overlap one another,” such that “the 10 percent of women who would make the best soldiers” are those who “are relatively strong, rough, aggressive, spatially adept, and competitive, and as children were ‘tomboys’ who crossed gender lines” (p. 250).

In Chapter Five, Goldstein turns to “Heroes,” that is, sociological explanations of gendered war roles, and finds that gender socialization—the construction of gender identity in a particular society—provides a good but still partial explanation of the puzzle. War is constructed as a test or signifier of manhood/masculinity: victory is confirmation of male identity, defeat is emasculation. Femininity is constructed to reinforce the “man as warrior” construction, both in support roles as nurse, mother, or wife and in opposition as peace activist: all confirm militarized masculinity. Goldstein briefly examines proposed alternatives to war in shaping masculinity, suggesting some hope for a way out of this seemingly inescapable nexus of war and gender (pp. 286-287). He returns to this theme of delinking gender and war in the conclusion.

Goldstein next analyzes “Conquests,” that is, hypotheses for the war-gender link based in male sexuality, practices of feminization of enemies as symbolic domination, and exploitation of women’s bodies and labor, in Chapter Six. In documenting the ubiquitous practice of “feminization of the enemy,” Goldstein observes that gender is deployed as a weapon to humiliate a military opponent or to discredit peace activism and political dissent from military policy. A recent example is Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld’s remark about “media mood swings” in regard to criticism of the war in Iraq, a reference clearly intended to evoke the archetype of the “irrational” menstrual/menopausal woman. Here Goldstein considers the symbolic significance of rape in war as well as evidence of military homophobia underlying

exclusion policies aimed at sexual minorities. The chapter poses what I found to be a rather disturbing question: “Are women or men the main victims of war” (p. 399)? Rather than challenging the dichotomous construction of direct vs. indirect violence, Goldstein focuses on the difficulty of quantifying the effects of war. This positivist disclaimer diverts attention from the important question of the ways in which violence are gendered. We must understand how and why gender shapes violence in order to address it. Nevertheless, Goldstein’s conclusion concurs with my own. “Neither men nor women benefit from war at the expense of the other ... both genders lose in war” (p. 402).

In Chapter Seven, Goldstein summarizes his “Reflections,” or conclusions, packaging them neatly in a two-page table, as well as in concise prose summaries under the heading, “Six cherished myths go down in flames” (p. 407). Those six are: Amazons did not exist; neither genetics per se nor hormones (male or female) nor male bonding nor women’s innate pacifism explain gendered war roles (p. 407). Instead, Goldstein finds that the best explanations of the war-gender link are “small, innate biological gender differences in average size, strength, and roughness of play” and “cultural molding of tough, brave men who feminize their enemies to encode domination” (p. 406). I think this last statement errs in letting the social construction of femininity—and hence people gendered feminine—off the hook for responsibility for the war system, given Goldstein’s own analysis, but I think our difference here is one of emphasis, not of understanding.

Several of the text’s features make it particularly useful for the classroom, including its style of organization, an extensive bibliography, and numerous graphics and illustrations. The reference note form is a bit unorthodox and initially may be difficult for researchers to follow, but was evidently adopted to make the text’s prose flow more easily—without “all that name-dropping” that students in my courses so dislike. In addition, this book has a website (<http://www.warandgender.com>) which contains a description of the text, a detailed table of contents, the preface and complete first chapter, excerpts on selected topics, and a searchable reference list. There is also a discussion forum, newsletter page, and e-mail address for interaction with the author. Participation in the discussion forum might be incorporated as a class assignment. This text would be most useful for advanced undergraduate and graduate courses on international relations, especially international conflict and conflict resolution, as well as courses in political theory/methodology,

military history, gender studies, and sociology. Suzanne Mettler, a colleague in the Department of Political Science at Syracuse, used Goldstein’s *War and Gender* in her Spring 2002 course on “Gender and Politics.” She reports that students found the concise descriptions of theoretical perspectives helpful, the language accessible, and the argument provocative. She further notes that Goldstein’s analysis got students talking about masculinity and encouraged male students in the class to participate in discussion about gender. The engaging prose and well-organized argument would also make this text suitable for beginning undergraduates, albeit in smaller slices, for example, chapters or sections of chapters might be included in introductory course readers.

This project was more than a decade in the making. Goldstein presented his initial argument on a panel on feminism and peace studies at the 32nd Annual International Studies Association (ISA) conference in Vancouver, BC, Canada, in March 1991. His presentation on aggression and war, now fully developed in *War and Gender*, generated a lively discussion with, as I recall, more heat than light. Self-identified feminist scholars in the audience took issue with his comparison of human and “ape” society, fearing, perhaps, a “biology is destiny” conclusion. Conventional IR scholars in the audience thought gender was an attribute of individuals rather than an analytic category. These “gender skeptics” argued that gender had no bearing on the study of war, traditionally taken to be the centerpiece of the discipline of international relations. I also recall that the audience was more diverse than has been true for many of the conference panels sponsored by the Feminist Theory and Gender Studies Section of ISA, where feminist scholars often end up talking amongst ourselves. Interestingly, it is we who are criticized for “holding a parallel conference” by mainstream scholars rather than they who see a need to attend panels on anything relating to gender. Goldstein observes this gendered terrain of IR scholarship (pp. 34-38, 53-57), and conventional IR scholars should find in his analysis a message that war is as much about securing identity as it is about securing territory. Indeed, neglecting this dimension makes conventional IR analysis inadequate to the central task of the discipline, that is, explaining “why war” (p. 407).

The intervening years since this panel have seen prolific production of scholarship about gender and international relations, and, as a discipline, international relations has gradually become more receptive to gender analysis. Evidence of this is apparent in the warm reception for *War and Gender*, which has won acclaim

as co-winner of APSA's 2002 Victoria Schuck Award for best book on women and politics and been the subject of a well-attended review panel at the International Studies Association's annual conference in New Orleans in March 2002 featuring Meredith Reid Sarkees, J. David Singer, J. Ann Tickner, Craig Murphy, and V. Spike Peterson. The volume has been reviewed favorably in *Armed Forces and Society* and *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, and more critically in *Contemporary Security Policy*, *Acta Politica (Netherlands)* and *International Studies Review*.<sup>[1]</sup> In her review in *Political Studies*, Marysia Zalewski finds Goldstein's text "extensively researched, well-written and engaging," yet she notes that "most feminist international relations scholars would not learn anything new though the collation of evidence is impressive" (p. 882). She cautions that Goldstein's "call for a synergy with liberalism" ignores "the vast majority of innovative feminist research in this area" (p. 882).<sup>[2]</sup> Additionally, *War and Gender* is the subject of a review symposium by Matthew Evangelista, Elisabeth PrÅ¼gl, and Elizabeth Kier in the American Political Science Association's new journal, *Perspectives on Politics*.<sup>[3]</sup> (The journal itself may be read as a response to criticism of the conventional quantitative approach to politics of APSA spearheaded by the "perestroika/glasnost" group.)

The wealth of literature written to date on war and gender, which Goldstein appears to have read so extensively, has never before commanded this attention, so I have to ask why the response to Goldstein's work has been so intense. As he himself admits, much of his argument is not new: he is simply compiling evidence to support or refute hypotheses derived from others' analyses. But his analysis is being taken seriously and seemingly accorded some measure of legitimacy even by mainstream IR scholars. What is the source of this legitimacy? I think it is precisely his willingness to use the positivist language and methodology of mainstream IR; this is an interesting and important bridge-building strategy, but one with limits we must acknowledge.

Goldstein himself acknowledges the problem of empiricism in quoting Simone de Beauvoir's observation that "men describe the world from their own point of view" in his critique of conventional IR theoretical perspectives (p. 52). For example, he problematizes "western empirical evidence" (p. 138) and critiques the standard comparison of human society to war-like chimpanzees rather than peaceful bonobos (pp. 183-194), yet seems to ignore his own caution in pursuit of "Data! Data! Data!" on the relationship between gender and war (p. 58). Critical IR

perspectives urge us to consider: whose "data," whose "evidence?" Historians, soldiers, and statesmen themselves, like the conventional IR theorists whom Goldstein critiques, also wear "gender blinders" (p. 35) or, rather, understand and interpret events in ways that are not gender neutral. Historical accounts are distorted as to "what counts" and what doesn't by the perceptions of their authors and the contexts in which they are recorded, while the voices and experiences of women and subject peoples excluded from education and positions of political power are omitted from the official "war story," as Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott have observed. The "data" are gendered.

Biases in Goldstein's positivist approach are apparent in the privileging of some sources as authoritative while others are discarded as myth. Stories and depictions of Amazons are dismissed, yet minimal effort is made to explore the functions of such "myths" in sustaining both war and gender hierarchies. Written sources are privileged over oral or visual sources as are European language sources over indigenous records. For example, Goldstein asserts that "Rumors of female armies in ancient China are murky" (p. 76), yet his sources are secondary English language publications. Further, Goldstein writes that "Shaka Zulu's army by one erroneous account had an all-female front-line regiment," while "scholarship on Shaka's military tactics makes clear that all the soldiers were men" (p. 77). Why is the first interpretation erroneous and the second authoritative? Did the authors cited personally interview the warriors? Might Europeans simply have assumed that Zulu warriors were male because they were warriors? Cross-cultural comparison by observers not in and of a particular culture must be viewed with greater caution.

In his discussion of ancient depictions of practices of sodomizing and castrating soldiers of vanquished armies, Goldstein implicitly assumes that male sexuality is "naturally" heterosexual. He infers that sodomy "feminizes" enemies as a form of domination ritual (pp. 357-362). This interpretation assumes homosexual acts are weapons of humiliation of the enemy rather than expressions of the disguised homo-eroticism that feminist scholars such as Cynthia Enloe and Carol Cohn have identified as a cause of female combat exclusion used to sustain the construction of militarized masculinity. That is, Goldstein sees sodomy only as a punishment for the vanquished rather than as a pleasure for the victor: could it not be both? Further, could this not be "myth" as well, if depictions of Amazons in battle are only myth? Here similar sources of information have been accorded differ-

ent interpretations.

Further, although Goldstein challenges the binary of sex/nature vs. gender/nurture, his positivist approach sustains other dichotomous constructions. Although he notes the many ways in which women are mobilized to support the war system (pp. 306-321, 380-396), Goldstein seems to accept the construction of “war” as what soldiers do and “not war” as what civilian noncombatants (read “women”) do. This obscures rather than clarifies the interdependence of war and gender. It is not soldiers who make war but societies that make war: defense contractors, military spouses, civilian DOD employees, USO and Red Cross volunteers, and so on are all necessary components of the war system, not superfluous “auxiliaries.” War does not happen without women’s knowledge, cooperation, and participation, however few or many actually take up arms to engage in “battle.” The fluid reality of the artificial “combat” vs. “combat support” distinction in recent U.S. military operations makes this all too clear.

Finally, although he insists that “biology is diversity” (p. 191), Goldstein tends to universalize gender, missing the complexities of gendered, raced, and “othered” hegemonic vs. subordinate masculinities and femininities as these intersect with other socially-constructed “dimensions of difference.” In *Man, the State, and War* (1954), Kenneth Waltz argues that war occurs “because there is nothing to prevent it” (p. 188). In *Gender Camouflage* (1999), Laurie Weinstein and I argue that wars occur because power hierarchies grounded in constructions of not only gender but also race/color, ethnic-

ity/nationality, class/caste, and sexuality require them. War sustains gender hierarchy, oligarchy, colonialism/racism/ethnicism, and heterosexism because difference is deployed to justify domination, as seen in Geeta Chowdhry and Sheila Nair’s new anthology, *Power, Postcolonialism, and International Relations* (2002) and Lily Ling’s *Postcolonial International Relations* (2002). Attention to Postcolonial Feminist perspectives would enhance Goldstein’s analysis.

Notes:

[1]. *Armed Forces and Society* 29:1 (Fall 2002): p. 161; *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 40:2 (May 2003): p. 240; *Contemporary Security Policy* 23:2 (August 2002): pp. 187-188; *Acta Politica* 37:3 (Autumn 2002): pp. 318-320; and *International Studies Review* 4:3 (Fall 2002): pp. 153-166.

[2]. *Political Studies* 50:4 (September 2002).

[3]. *Perspectives on Politics* 1:2 (June 2003): pp. 327-347.

[4]. Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott, *Gendering War Talk* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

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