

THE
Psychology
of Women

Ongoing Debates

Edited by

MARY ROTH WALSH

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Acknowledgments

This is the first book to consist entirely of debates in the psychology of women. My choice of a title reflects the fact that the issues and controversies addressed herein continue even as I write this preface. The search for answers to these questions has engaged a whole army of scholars, both women and men. Although this book is titled *The Psychology of Women*, some of these debates have contributed to the development of a psychology of men and a psychology of gender. Nonetheless, the questions here are about women and their answers have important political implications for the quality of women's lives. Many of the authors whose work is included in this book have devoted years, some almost their entire professional careers, to developing an area of specialization important to the psychology of women. We all owe these scholars an enormous debt of gratitude for expanding the frontiers of knowledge.

I owe a personal debt to my own mentor in the psychology of women, Matina Horner, now president of Radcliffe College. I belong to a small but fortunate generation of women scholars who began graduate work when the second wave of twentieth-century feminism was just beginning to enrich our lives with new ideas and new possibilities for academic work. In 1970, I was enrolled in a Radcliffe College seminar and I remember walking through Harvard Square and seeing Kate Millet's pathbreaking book, *Sexual Politics*, prominently displayed in bookstore windows. I also remember browsing in the library and being surprised to find a reserve reading list for a new course on the psychology of women. I immediately went to the psychology department and found the office of the instructor, Matina Horner, then a new assistant professor of clinical psychology at Harvard. I can still remember her warm spirit and generous reception. Research on tokenism in the work environment was just beginning to emerge, and I did not yet know how difficult it was to be a faculty woman at Harvard or elsewhere in the early 1970s, but Matina's presence signaled new opportunities for women students. Her kindness opened new doors for me and for many others.

Acknowledgments

x I enrolled in Matina Horner's seminar on the psychology of women the following year and each session reinforced my view that I wanted to do research in this area. Matina generously shared reams of unpublished papers with me and she became a member of my Ph.D. examining committees and the sponsor of my post-doctoral training grant in the psychology of women. I am proud to include her 1972 article in this book. Her work on fear of success has stimulated almost twenty years of research on female achievement barriers. I am also deeply indebted to Joyce Lazar at the National Institute of Mental Health for research support and to the Bunting Institute for its Fellowship during 1974–76.

Soon afterward, I began working with a project sponsored by the American Medical Women's Association and directed by Marlys Hearst Witte with funding from the Women's Educational Equity Act and the National Institute of Education. I served as director of curriculum, and my visits to medical schools all over the country planted the seeds for this book. My work involved facilitating programs and making research in women's studies available to an unusual audience: medical school students, faculty, administrators, and deans. Our classrooms were hotbeds of debate; discussions continued long after the sessions were over. I am grateful that I had the chance to participate in such an exciting intellectual program and that I have been able to continue my association with such outstanding physicians and national leaders as Lila A. Wallis, Constance U. Battle, and Kathryn E. McGoldrick.

Sam Bass Warner and Nathan Glazer are both scholars in quite different fields but in 1980 they helped me prepare grant proposals so I could begin the research for this book. Their help enabled me to win two separate awards from the National Endowment for the Humanities—a summer grant and a College Teacher's Award. Although the awards were a major source of support, I am especially grateful to these two men for their confidence in me.

I met Carolyn Wood Sherif, now deceased, in the spring of 1980, and she, along with Ruth Hubbard, wrote letters of support for me for several successful fellowship applications. In the years that followed, all of the following people shared information and reactions which helped me, in numerous ways, to do research related to this book and to see it through the publication process: Pamela Adelman, Judith Alpert, Susan Basow, Nancy Bifano, Phyllis Bronstein, Alice Brown-Collins, Paula Caplan, Faye Crosby, Florence Denmark, Myra Marx Ferree, Mary Ellen Foti, Laurel Furumoto, Lucia Gilbert, Judith A. Hall, Karen Howe, Nancy Henley, Janet Hyde, Randi Koeske, Bernice Lott, Neil Malamuth, Margaret Matlin, Vicki Mays, Kathleen McCartney, Sonja M. McKinlay, Martha Mednick,

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In February 1982, I visited Brendan A. Maher at Harvard University, who had a special interest in the history of psychology. Brendan's enthusiasm for the work I was doing on the history of the psychology of women helped me obtain concrete institutional support when he, along with Sheldon White, sponsored my appointment as a Visiting Scholar in the Psychology Department of Harvard University from 1983 to 1985. This validation of my work in the psychology of women was very important and it helped speed my research and work on this book.

Beginning in 1983, the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women provided a very supportive environment with seminars for feminist scholars in the social sciences. Peggy McIntosh was responsible for obtaining funding for this innovative program and I am grateful to her and to the Andrew Mellon Foundation for a national fellowship I received in the spring of 1984. She also obtained funding allowing several of us to continue meeting for two more years as the Anna Wilder Phelps Social Science Seminar. I discussed the early outlines of this book with faculty in that seminar: Emily Steir Adler, Laurie Crumpacker, Katheleen Dunn, Laurel Furumoto, Michele Hoffnung, Ruth Harriet Jacobs, Sukie Magraw, Frances Maher, Robin Roth, Jane Torrey, and Eleanor Vander Haegen. I appreciate their enthusiasm for my work.

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The library of the Boston Women's Health Book Collective in Watertown, Massachusetts, and the authors of *The New Our Bodies, Ourselves* were important sources of information for me for several research topics. The library has books and articles on women's health issues found in none of the four medical school libraries in the area. Judy Norsigian, Norma Swenson, and Esther Rome shared with me references and the names of researchers I might never have discovered, including Diane Laskin Siegal and Paula Duress, who showed me material from their Midlife and Older Women Book Project.

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xii Several years ago, Irene Hanson Frieze suggested that I organize national sessions on teaching of the psychology of women at several major conferences: the Association for Women in Psychology, the American Psychological Association, and the American Educational Research Association. These meetings proved to be a splendid opportunity to learn about the progress and problems of faculty who were teaching courses related to the psychology of women. At one of these meetings, serendipity played a role and I met Gladys Topkis, Senior Editor at Yale University Press. Her lovely note asking about my work was the catalyst that finally set this book in motion. I am grateful for her editorial guidance and her knowledge of the publishing world. Since we met, I have read many acknowledgments of her editorial skill and her friendship with other scholars, and I feel fortunate to belong to this circle. Charles Grench at Yale University Press opened the first door for me there, and now Gladys Topkis has opened the second. And I cannot begin to describe how hard Manuscript Editor Stephanie Jones worked on this manuscript and how carefully she went over each page with her sharp editorial eyes. This book is much better because of her efforts.

Patricia M. Stano, a computer consultant from Marlborough, Massachusetts, helped me master my computer. Without her assistance I could not possibly have completed the final production of this book in such a short period of time. I have taught two seminars based on this book and the support and enthusiasm of my students at the University of Lowell have been very important to me. The university has also awarded me Research Scholar status this semester. This, and the university funding for my student research assistant, E. Alice Moore, are making the final preparation of this book much easier.

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The Psychology of Women

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Introduction

A Brief History of the Psychology of Women

In 1968, psychologist Naomi Weisstein charged: “Psychology has nothing to say about what women are really like, what they need and what they want, essentially, because psychology does not know” (p. 268). Ironically, just as Weisstein was making this charge, the rebirth of the feminist movement was stimulating a massive reappraisal of the entire field of psychology. The result was the development of a new research field: the psychology of women.

This is not to say that the topic of women had previously been completely ignored. The problem lies rather in how earlier psychologists, psychoanalysts, and psychiatrists had approached the topic. In the early 1970s, feminist social scientists directed much of their attention to refuting what had passed for a psychology of women in the past.

The feminist challenge encompassed almost every aspect of psychology, from broad conceptual issues to specific research methodologies and therapeutic practices. Freud’s view of female personality development, for example, was dismissed as misogynist and based on biological determinism. Critics also claimed that therapists were ignoring the social causes of women’s distress, encouraging women to adjust to a sexist society. “As far as the woman is concerned,” commented Germaine Greer (1971), “psychiatry is an extraordinary confidence trick: the unsuspecting creature seeks aid because she feels unhappy, anxious and confused, and psychology persuades her to seek the cause in *herself*” (p. 82).

Neither could feminist critics derive any satisfaction from the work of academic psychologists. At best, social scientists relegated female subjects to the periphery of their research interests. As Mary Brown Parlee commented, the result was “distorted facts” and “omitted problems” which, in turn, “perpetuated pseudoscientific data relevant to women” (1975, p. 124). More often than not, researchers ignored women’s existence entirely,

- 2 viewing male behavior as the prototype of human behavior. All of this falls into what Nancy Henley has characterized as “psychology against women” (1974, p. 20).

There were, however, efforts to steer a different course. Earlier in the century, a small number of psychologists launched an attack on the Victorian notion of sex differences. In the process, they did succeed in narrowing the scientific definition of differences between men and women. One of the leaders in this struggle was Helen Thompson [Woolley]. Her research at the University of Chicago, involving a detailed study of the motor skills and sensory abilities of fifty male and female undergraduate students, demonstrated that the intellectual similarities between the two sexes far outweighed the differences (Thompson, 1903). The noted sociologist William Isaac Thomas, who had earlier defended the notion that there were significant differences between men and women, hailed her findings as “probably the most important contribution to this field” (Rosenberg, 1982, p. 81).

Leta Stetter Hollingworth, another brilliant pioneer, coauthored several articles with Thompson and established a remarkable record for herself in this field. Before she received her Ph.D. from Columbia University in 1916, Hollingworth had already published a book and nine scientific papers on the psychology of women. Her research and writing have a strikingly modern flavor. In one of her articles, she criticized the social forces that pressured women into becoming mothers, a situation that later feminists would label “the motherhood mandate” (Hollingworth, 1916; Russo, 1979, p. 7).

Hollingworth also rejected the notion, widely accepted by leading psychologists of her time, that men tended to have a wider range of intellectual abilities than women, an idea known as “the variability thesis.” In her research, she also attacked the popular view that women’s cognitive abilities declined during menstruation (Hollingworth, 1914a, 1914b).

Although Hollingworth shifted the focus of her research when she took a teaching position at Columbia University in child psychology, her interest in the psychology of women continued. Hollingworth hoped to see the time when a psychology of women would be written “based on truth, not opinion; on precise, not on anecdotal evidence; on accurate data, rather than on remnants of magic” (1914b, p. 99). She also had a plan, which she never realized, to write a book on the psychology of women entitled “Mrs. Pilgrim’s Progress,” reflecting her emphasis on women’s self-determination (Shields, 1975, p. 857).

Meanwhile, a new controversy concerning the psychology of women began to take shape, arising out of Freud’s work on female psychosexual

development (Fliegel, 1986). Three of the five protagonists involved in the ensuing debate were women. Helene Deutsch and Jeanne Lampl-de Groot supported Freud's position while Karen Horney dissented. In her critique of Freud's views, Horney struck a note that feminists of the 1970s would respond to: she insisted that psychoanalytic theories about women evolved from a male point of view (Horney, 1926; Westkott, 1986).

Positions on both sides of the debate quickly hardened. At one point, Freud dismissed criticisms of his work on women as the "denials of the feminists, who are anxious to force us to regard the two sexes as completely equal in position and worth" (1925, p. 258). As Zenia Odes Fliegel (1986) has noted, after Horney's break with Freud in the 1920s the criticism of Freud's views on women disappeared almost entirely from the mainstream of psychoanalytic literature.

Other women psychologists also experienced difficulty in making their voices heard (Scarborough & Furumoto, 1987). Although women made up one-third of the membership of the American Psychological Association by the 1930s, women psychologists were largely relegated to clinical and counseling work, then considered lower in status than teaching and research positions. Consequently, they remained outside the academic circles where most of the research and theory building was taking place (Furumoto, 1987; Furumoto, in press).

In 1941, in an effort to improve their status within the profession, a number of women psychologists banded together to form the National Council of Women Psychologists (later the International Council of Women Psychologists). Although the council sponsored a number of projects, including a newsletter and efforts to expand job opportunities, that prefigured the efforts of women psychologists in the 1970s, its leaders were able to effect only minimal changes in the profession's treatment of women (Walsh, 1985c).

When the council voted to eliminate the word *women* from the title of their organization in 1959, they brought to a close its role as a lobbyist for women within the profession. Cynthia Deutsch, who once had unsuccessfully attempted to persuade the council to sponsor a study of sex discrimination against women psychologists in the late 1950s, later described the forces working against professional women in those years. Deutsch argued that a good deal of the blame for the dearth of professional training and career opportunities for women could be traced to psychoanalytic theory, which assigned women a dependent and passive role vis-à-vis men. The psychoanalytic movement also identified women with the concept of "Mom," thus confirming the attitudes of male psychologists who continued to treat women colleagues as "dependent and subordinately

4 nurturing, rather than as fully equal scientists" (Deutsch, 1986, p. 187).

Ironically, within a decade of the disappearance of the International Council of Women Psychologists as an interest group for women, efforts to improve the status of women in psychology again took shape. Spurred on by the civil rights and social reform movements of the late 1960s, women psychologists not only demanded a larger role within the profession but also called for a new approach to the study of women. The psychology of women was formally recognized as an official division of the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1973 (Denmark, 1977; Mednick, 1978; Walsh, 1985c). The APA also established an office for women's programs and a committee on women in psychology, both of which are still in existence. Special task forces have issued reports on a number of topics ranging from "Sex Bias and Sex Role Stereotyping in Psychotherapeutic Practice" to the development of guidelines for nonsexist research. (Brodsky & Hare-Mustin, 1980; McHugh, Koeske & Frieze, 1986).

An APA task force was called in 1972 to evaluate the status of women in the profession. One of its first actions was to conduct a national survey of courses focusing on the female life experience. The task force located thirty-two departments that offered courses on the female life experience. Fifteen years later, this number has swelled to more than two hundred. Further evidence of change is the fact that APA evaluates graduate programs in clinical, counseling, and school psychology on the basis of whether they include courses on sex roles. Even the Graduate Record Exam Advanced Test in psychology contains questions on the psychology of women and experts on women's issues are recruited to serve on the test evaluation committee (Walsh, 1985a; Walsh, 1985b).

Similarly, psychology has been transformed from a profession that, in Naomi Weisstein's words, had "nothing to say about women" to one that has a great deal to say. In 1975, the journal *Sex Roles* began publication, followed a year later by the *Psychology of Women Quarterly*. Since then, practically every psychology journal has increased the number of articles it publishes dealing with the psychology of women (Deaux, 1984; Lott, 1985; Lykes & Stewart, 1986). Margaret Matlin (1987), the author of a recent introductory college textbook on the psychology of women, estimates that the number of articles and books potentially relevant to the topic and published in the last fifteen to twenty years is close to one hundred thousand. Bibliographies on the psychology of women no longer claim to be comprehensive and now carefully select their focus (Dilling & Claster, 1985; Golub & Freedman, 1987).

The four most recent textbooks for college courses on the psychology of

women represent still another dimension of this knowledge explosion (Hyde, 1985; Matlin, 1987; Lott, 1987; Williams, 1987). In 1985, Janet Hyde noted in the preface to the third edition of her textbook that ten years earlier, when she began the first edition, her problem had been that “the field was too new” and the research was “too thin.” Now, in this latest edition, she found that she had more information than could possibly be included in one textbook and that it was difficult to make decisions on which topics to eliminate and where to abbreviate discussions (p. viii).

The changes that have taken place in psychology over the past twenty years do not, of course, constitute a panacea. Critics have pointed out that we still have a long way to go if our goal is to conduct truly nonsexist research (McHugh, Koeske, & Frieze, 1986; Lykes & Stewart, 1986). Nevertheless, it is clear that the psychology of women has come of age.

About This Book

My goal in this book is to confront the reader with some of the diverse viewpoints which exist in the psychology of women. I hope that this book will break new ground both for those just beginning their study in this field and also for those who have been involved in the field for some time. Each of the fourteen controversies I have identified is represented by two opposing points of view. There is, of course, nothing new in employing debates as a learning device. The Socratic method is some twenty-four hundred years old. But this book is different because it puts women at center stage, acknowledging the incredible growth of knowledge in the field. I also want this book to serve as a springboard to encourage further debate and controversy and stimulate the evaluation of information from different perspectives. I hope some readers will want to expand (or refute) the arguments presented in this book and add to the published literature in the field.

As I have already indicated, the field of the psychology of women has expanded rapidly in recent years. Clearly the two “voices” I have selected are not the only ones that speak on the specific issues. Sometimes it was very difficult for me to choose between two excellent articles on a given position. One measure of the increased maturity of the field is that the debates are no longer just between feminists and nonfeminists: several issues, though not all, involve a conflict of feminist perspectives. I view this growing diversity of perspectives within the field of the psychology of women as a very positive development. A continued flow of new ideas and rival claims is essential to growth in any field. The psychology of women is dependent on