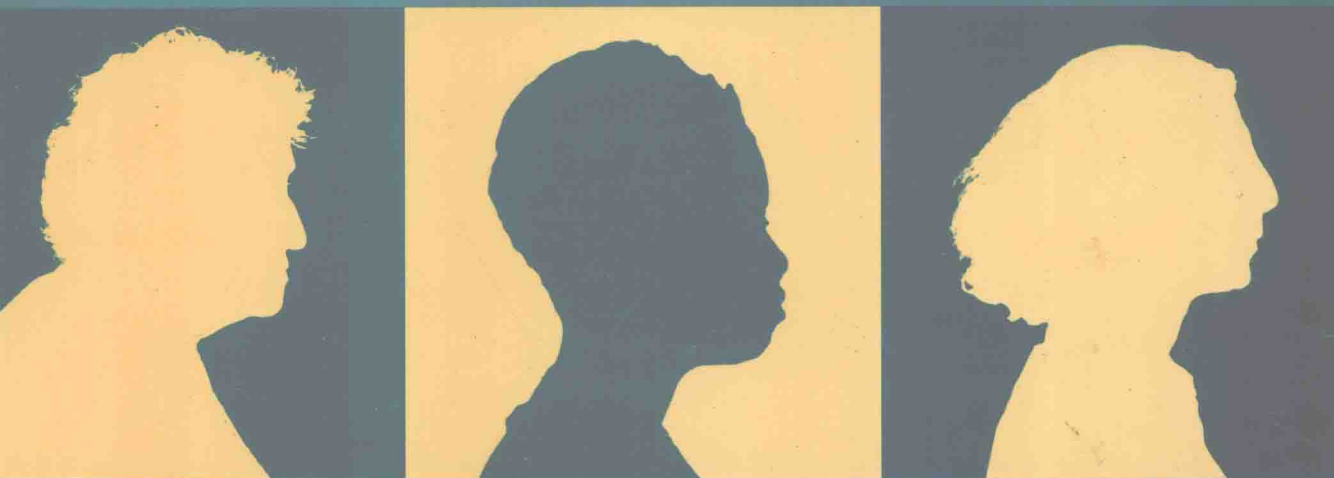




IN OUR OWN WORDS



Readings on the Psychology of Women and Gender



MARY CRAWFORD RHODA UNGER

In Our Own Words

Readings on the Psychology of Women and Gender

Mary Crawford

West Chester University of Pennsylvania

Rhoda Unger

Montclair State University

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WOMEN AND GENDER

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In Our Own Words

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About the Editors

MARY CRAWFORD is Professor of Psychology and Women's Studies at West Chester University of Pennsylvania. She has held the Jane W. Irwin Chair in Women's Studies at Hamilton College, served as Distinguished Visiting Teacher/Scholar at Trenton State College, and directed the graduate program in women's studies at the University of South Carolina. She received her Ph.D. in experimental psychology from the University of Delaware. Professor Crawford is active in the Division on the Psychology of Women of the American Psychological Association as well as many regional and national groups concerned with gender equity. Her publications include the books *Gender and Thought*; *Talking Difference: On Gender and Language*; and *Women and Gender: A Feminist Psychology*. In addition to her scholarly works, she has written on women's issues in popular periodicals such as *MS. Magazine*.

RHODA UNGER is Professor of Psychology at Montclair State University in New Jersey. She received her Ph.D. in experimental psychology from Harvard University. Professor Unger was the first recipient of the Carolyn Wood Sherif Award from the Division on the Psychology of Women of the American Psychological Association. She is also the recipient of two distinguished publication awards and a distinguished career award from the Association for Women in Psychology. She has been active in various feminist organizations within psychology since 1972 and has lectured extensively in the United States and abroad. She is currently the North American editor of the international journal *Feminism & Psychology*. Professor Unger is the author or editor of six previous books, including *Representations: Social Constructions of Gender*; *Women, Gender, and Social Psychology*; *Female and Male*; and *Women and Gender: A Feminist Psychology*.

For Our Mothers and Their Stories

Preface

In the past two decades, feminist psychology has grown and matured. In the process, it has enlarged psychological theory, research, and practice and developed new, transformative ways of thinking about women and gender relations. Truly, we are living at an exciting time for teaching and learning about the psychology of women and gender.

In the more than twenty years that each of us has been teaching in this area, we have noticed that when students first begin to learn about the psychology of women and gender, they make sense of it by looking for stories that capture the realities of living in a gendered world. They want to learn about people, and they want to hear the individual voices of girls and women. They seek narrative—unique accounts that capture shared experiences. By listening to the viewpoints of others, students interpret and make meaning of their own experiences, both positive and negative.

Students want models of resistance and rebellion, and evidence of social change for the better, to balance the depressing data on prejudice and discrimination. Often, they seek this evidence independently. Many teachers have noticed that courses in the psychology of women and gender generate a sort of “dialogue by clipping.” By the end of the second week of class, the contributions start coming in. A student shares a “Cathy” cartoon strip. Another brings in a news-magazine story on women executives. A third offers her copy of a feminist detective novel, and a fourth her favorite Marge Piercy poem. They want to know what their classmates and teacher think of these counternarratives.

The need for sense-making through narrative may be universal. And for students, beginning to learn about psychology can be frustrating. They may turn to narrative at least in part to compensate for psychology’s limitations. In working with students, we have identified several causes of their frustration with conventional psychology, and our goal in putting together this collection is to address each of them.

First, psychology can seem distanced and cold to the beginning student. Psychology’s methods most often involve making inferences from group data. Many of its most respected studies involve decontextualized laboratory ma-

nipulations. While experienced psychologists know that group data and controlled settings are important in establishing reliable and valid evidence about the topics we study, students may find such research alienating. Moreover, psychological research historically has oversampled white people, college students, and males. For women and people of color, finding those who are like oneself represented in the theories and empirical studies of psychology has not been easy.

Another source of frustration is that much of what students learn in their psychology of women and gender courses is discouraging. Research, by definition, can only describe and analyze what is past. To be sure, statistics about violence against women, the wage gap, and other issues provide important documentation of sexism. Experimental studies of attributions, stereotypes, and so on reveal the workings of gender under the laboratory lens. But these kinds of research may also arouse feelings of helplessness and despair. Indeed, we do still live in a sexist world. But that is only part of the picture.

In this collection, we attempt to meet students' needs for women's stories and to enrich the study of women and gender. The women who have written these essays differ in age, sexual orientation, social class, race/ethnicity, sensibility, and opinion. In choosing selections, we have been mindful of the need to teach critical thinking about women and gender. When students read the accounts in this collection, their ability to think critically about psychological knowledge grows. Learning about how one woman has experienced skin color and beauty, for example, can bring about a deeper understanding of the strengths and limitations of standard psychological research on attractiveness. Hearing a mother's perspective on the issues involved in bringing up daughters gives new meaning to research on gender role socialization. Seeing an old issue from a new perspective is perhaps one of the great moments in learning, a moment that can be brought about through the unique stories of the diverse women in this collection.

We offer *In Our Own Words*, then, to share with a new generation our belief that psychology is about very real, very human issues; to demonstrate concretely that women are a diverse group with many divergent viewpoints and experiences; and to help students learn to think critically about psychological research and women's lives. To that end, we have drawn on the richness and diversity of women's own voices as they tell about their lives. The individual selections and the organization of the book reflect our goals.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

The selections in this book are grouped into six sections that reflect our perspective on gender as a social construction. Part I, *Making Our Voices Heard: Historical Perspectives*, recounts the experiences of women who have made scholarship their life's work. Part II, *The Making of a Woman: Bodies, Power, and Society*, explores women's understanding of the cultural meanings of the female body. In Part III, *Making Meaning*, women create their own reconstructions of meanings on issues as varied as sexuality and the SAT. Part IV, *Making A Living: Women, Work, and Achievement*, provides the accounts of diverse

women in the work force and contrasts them with media images of working women. In Part V, Making Connections, women speak of the nontraditional families, friendships, and helping relationships they create. Finally, Part VI, Making Our Lifepaths, looks at developmental issues for diverse girls and women across the lifespan.

Each part is introduced by a short essay that shapes an approach to critical reading of the individual selections, inviting the student reader to engage in dialogue with each author, to compare the divergent viewpoints of the various authors, and to think critically about the implications of their views. A brief Afterword invites reflection on how the differences in women's lives are shaped by social class, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and age cohort.

USING THIS BOOK

In selecting and grouping the narratives for *In Our Own Words*, our goal was to provide a varied collection centered around the main conceptual issues usually addressed in courses on women and gender. Therefore, we chose the six general themes described above, rather than tying the topics to any particular textbook's organization. The collection can stand on its own or be used as a flexible adjunct to any current textbook on women and gender. In writing our own text (*Women and Gender: A Feminist Psychology*, 2nd edition, 1996), we tried to give voice to the experiences and thoughts of individual women as well as to synthesize feminist research. We plan to use *In Our Own Words* in conjunction with our text, and we hope that other instructors who have adopted *Women and Gender* will find *In Our Own Words* a valuable and engaging addition to their syllabus. We also expect that it will find a place in introductory women's studies, introductory psychology, sociology of gender, and developmental psychology courses.

Because most of the readings, and all of the introductory essays, are quite short, each part can be assigned as a unit. A section of readings might be used to complement or to replace a textbook chapter. Alternatively, selections can be assigned individually or in groupings different from ours. Because this is an anthology of wonderfully unique voices, the organization we have imposed is, in a sense, arbitrary. Each author's voice can stand on its own.

Most of the pieces could be read in conjunction with more than one of the topics commonly addressed in courses on women and gender. Kate Bornstein's radical essay on her life as a transsexual could be read as part of a discussion on gender schemas and stereotypes, sexuality, biological aspects of gender, or personality development. Carol Tomlinson-Keasey's essay on a gifted woman who was one of the participants in Terman's famous study could be read in conjunction with the topic of adult development, intelligence, or achievement or as an example of women's history in biography. These two examples are typical of the essays in this collection: each has many points of connection to psychological issues and allows for many readings that uncover multiple meanings.

The works in this collection were discovered by students, colleagues, and friends, as well as by our own efforts. We are especially grateful to three feminist psychologists who provided constructive reviews of our preliminary set of

readings and made suggestions for works that, in some cases, we were able to include: Elizabeth R. Cole of Northeastern University, Patricia Connor-Greene of Clemson University, and Patricia Donat of Mississippi University for Women. We also thank our ace editor at McGraw-Hill, Beth Kaufman. Beth is more than just an editor; she is a one-woman cheering section and an active feminist contributor to this volume.

Mary Crawford classroom-tested an earlier version of this collection at the University of South Carolina in 1992 and 1993; students' detailed comments on the readability and appeal of the selections were invaluable in making final choices. Finally, to the students who, over the years, have given us photocopies of articles and essays with stick-on notes urging us to "Read this, you'll love it," we send a warm collective thanks. Some of you will find your favorites here.

Mary Crawford and Rhoda Unger

In Our Own Words

Readings on the Psychology of Women and Gender

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PART ONE

Making Our Voices Heard: Historical Perspectives

Just a few generations ago, white, privileged men were the only people thought to be capable of creating knowledge and governing society. For women, making one's voice heard has meant resisting core beliefs of western culture that do not accord us full intellect and agency. These beliefs have been expressed in societal forces that tell women that we are not clever enough, not motivated enough, and simply not good enough—or if we are, we shouldn't be. Women have faced sex discrimination in access to education, in hiring and promotion, and in judgments about our work. The cumulative effect is a powerful message that women should forget about our dreams of achievement and stay in the place assigned to us.

Women have always resisted staying "in their place." Yet the young women in each new generation may believe themselves to be alone in their struggle, because they do not know about the strong women who came before them. Although not everyone wants to earn a Ph.D., do scientific research, or write novels, each of us is faced with the task of achieving

our full potential, and each of us needs to find the courage to take ourselves seriously.

In this group of readings you will learn about six women—four psychologists, a mathematician, and a writer—who tried to find ways to make a contribution to society. We chose the stories that appear here because we believe that hearing our foremothers' stories can help women find their own voices. That each of them took different paths and used different tactics reflects their specific situations. As you read their stories, you may want to think about how their social class, ethnicity, and the era they live(d) in shaped their choices.

When Rhoda Unger and I (M.C.) decided to write our own stories as part of this collection, we agreed it would not be easy. Why might psychologists, who specialize in human behavior, find it difficult to write about their own lives? We decided that each of us should write her own account without consulting with the other.

When we traded "first drafts," we were astonished at the similarities in our stories. We

have been friends for years; our first extended professional contact was in 1988, when Rhoda spoke at a conference I organized, and we started work together on *Women and Gender* in 1989. We had talked about some similarities in our personal histories: that each of us was the first in her family to go to college, for example, and that each of us had switched from experimental to social psychology along the way. But neither of us had ever expressed to the other just how lonely we were as aspiring young students, how “different” we felt, or how difficult it was to combine marriage, motherhood, and our work. Why do you think that these parts of women’s history often remain invisible? Each of us describes various roadblocks we encountered. How do personal and social structural factors interact in creating these roadblocks? What were some sources of encouragement and support for each of us along the way?

We next move back in time to Mary Whiton Calkins, a pioneering woman psychologist. Calkins’ story is given voice by Laurel Furumoto, a feminist psychologist who did her graduate studies in the same psychology department at Harvard where Calkins had done hers some eighty years earlier. In Calkins’ day, psychology was a new field of study; its power structure (and that of higher education in general) was exclusively male. How did influential men both help and hinder her? Do you think it would be possible (or necessary) for a young woman to seek out one of the “great men” of the field for tutoring today? How did Calkins’ social class and family background shape her experience? Look for both opportunities and constraints.

Naomi Weisstein, an experimental psychologist, writes in her own distinctively witty and ironic voice about her graduate school days at Harvard. How was her second-class status as a woman conveyed to her? How was her experiential world different from that of the male graduate students? When Weisstein began searching for jobs, she encountered nepotism rules that forbade hiring related people in the same institution. How did these rules selectively affect women? She describes an academic hierarchy in which women were at the bottom

rung and men almost always at the top. Do such gendered hierarchies still exist? (You might want to look at your own psychology department and tally the proportion of women among the instructors and the full professors.) Moving from Harvard to an “unknown” university, how did Weisstein’s opportunities further decline? How does she explain her survival against the odds?

We have started with the stories of four women in psychology because most readers of this book will be students of psychology and other social sciences. But women in other fields have stories to tell, too. Emmy Noether and bell hooks are women from a prototypically “male” field, mathematics, and a prototypically “female” field, English, respectively.

Emmy Noether’s story is told by Mary Crawford, who stumbled on her existence while researching an article on women scientists. Crawford then went to Bryn Mawr College, where Noether spent the last years of her life, and found materials for her story hidden away in the archives. Noether, like Calkins, struggled to gain access to a field in which the power structure was exclusively male. How did her family background provide her with a “head start” in mathematics? What sacrifices did she make to be able to study and teach mathematics? How was she dependent on the good will of influential men? Why did she leave her native Germany for the United States, and how did her life change as a result? Albert Einstein called Noether a genius, yet many of her colleagues seemed more concerned with her appearance than her mind. Think about what the life of a female genius in mathematics might be like today.

bell hooks, a feminist theorist, academic, and writer, describes being “terrorized” by racism and sexism as an African American undergraduate and graduate student majoring in English. She eloquently describes how, in the academic hierarchy we have discussed, students are on the ultimate bottom rung. How did the hierarchy function to silence students’ protests about racist and sexist treatment? How did students from privileged class back-

grounds (mostly white) and those from working class backgrounds (mostly people of color) experience the pattern of abuse differently? What coping strategies did hooks and others use? Like white women before them, black women are now a tiny minority of college and university professors. Have you ever had a black woman for a teacher?

Some interesting commonalities emerge when the six stories are considered together. Elite universities—Harvard, Stanford, Göttingen—figure in several of them. Do you think that similar barriers exist at less lofty institutions? Women's colleges play an important positive role: for Calkins and Weisstein, the college was Wellesley; for Noether, Bryn Mawr. Why have women's colleges historically been so important, and what function might they serve today?

A feminist truism is the saying, "Anonymous was a woman." Mary Crawford had to dig into archival records to learn about Emmy Noether, who contributed to the mathematics of relativity. Laurel Furumoto says that as a graduate student she learned little about her predecessor's achievements. Mary Whiton Calkins invented the paired associate technique, developed an influential theory of the self, was president of both the American Psy-

chological Association and the American Philosophical Association, and published prolifically throughout a long career. Were her life and work discussed in any of your psychology textbooks? Looking back over these stories, what were some of the ways that each woman was denied credit and recognition for her work? Do these means of "erasing" women's achievements still occur?

The stories of these six women span a period of some 100 years, from the 1890s to the present. During this time, women's access to educational and professional resources has changed a great deal. Today, women are no longer denied degrees from prestigious universities, and they are more visible as researchers, intellectuals, and teachers. Many students think that gender equality now exists, and that all a woman needs to succeed is intelligence and motivation. Clearly, all of the women in these histories possess these characteristics. Yet Naomi Weisstein insists that they are not enough: "Many have had extraordinary strength and *not* survived." She argues that women are still in danger of having our full humanity denied. How might social structures be changed so that women's potential to contribute to society can be achieved, no matter what their social class or color?