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Reflections from Pioneering Women in Psychology

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Reflections from Pioneering Women in Psychology

Description

This volume traces the life journeys of a cohort of influential and transformative women in psychology, now in or nearing retirement, who have changed the discipline and the broader world of academia in significant ways. The 26 reflective essays record how these scholars thrived in an academic landscape that was often, at best, unwelcoming, and, at worst, hostile, toward them. They explicitly and implicitly acknowledge that their paths were inextricably linked with the evolution of women's roles in society; they highlight and celebrate their achievements as much as they acknowledge and recognize the obstacles, barriers, and hurdles they overcame. They tell their stories with candor and humor, resulting in a compilation of inspiring essays. The end result of these individual narratives is a volume that provides a unique resource for current and future academics to help them navigate through the crossroads, curves, and challenges of their own careers in academia.

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Introduction

The Voices of Remarkable Women in Psychology

Nicky J. Newton and Jamila Bookwala

Women, historically, have had a profound and transformative impact on the discipline of psychology. They have made theoretical, empirical, methodological, analytic, and applied contributions that have advanced knowledge, secured the discipline's stature in the world of science, and improved health and well-being at the individual, community, and broad societal levels. These contributions have occurred despite women's encounters with numerous impediments and barriers in their professional careers, and with little public awareness or acknowledgment of how these were navigated and overcome. This volume offers a collection of chapters that describe the professional lives and career trajectories of some of the most prominent women who have shaped the discipline of psychology over the past five decades, through their teaching, scholarship, and leadership. The life stories herein, written in the authors' own voices, provide a historical (or rather, her-storical) record of how these scholars thrived in an academic landscape that was often, at best, unwelcoming, and, at worst, hostile toward them. Their stories describe the resources they used, the networks they built, the compromises they made, and the generations they inspired. The chapters in this book explicitly and implicitly acknowledge that our contributors' paths were inextricably linked with the evolving changes in women's roles in society.

Our contributors entered the world of higher education around the middle of the 20th century, many chancing upon psychology after first following other majors in college. As women in academia, their paths forward were often uncertain and their career goals mostly undefined, often with few structural supports and fewer same-gender role models. Nevertheless, every single one of our contributors rose to prominence in their own fields. Today, they are at the stage of life when formal retirement has occurred or draws near. Some authors contemplate retirement from their academic jobs, others are in the process of making that change, and still others have already made it. Not surprisingly, many continue to work and lead in their fields. And while they have already made a lasting impact

on their field and profession, they continue to find ways to make significant contributions through their scholarship, mentorship, and leadership. Their willingness to write for this volume provides further evidence of their desire to continue to contribute and inspire.

The Motivation for the Volume

As coeditors, we consider it essential to update the existing record on women psychologists' transformative contributions to the discipline and their specific fields in the last few decades, following on from the records in previous volumes (e.g., O'Connell, 2001; O'Connell & Russo, 1983; 1988, 1990; Scarborough & Furumoto, 1987). Additionally, we believe that the accounts of these transformative contributions contain heightened veracity and richness because they come from the source: the women themselves. Our approach was to compile autobiographical accounts that would provide an enduring record of contemporary women's influential contributions to the discipline. Additionally, we sought to provide a resource for current and future female academics to help them navigate through the crossroads, curves, and challenges of their own academic careers. Of course, we fully expect that the stories and wisdom shared in this book will prove valuable to academics in all fields, of all genders, and from all underrepresented groups. Put simply, we view this volume as a thriver's guide, based on accounts by prominent women as they look back at their careers while being situated in stages of pre-, peri-, or postretirement.

As coeditors, we have had our own winding career trajectories. We come from quite different backgrounds. Jamila Bookwala arrived in the United States as a young 22-year-old woman, leaving her home country (India) with little understanding of or preparation for life as an international graduate student. She had a jagged career path initially, starting her doctoral education at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York in 1986, only to quit the program to return to India three years later with a master's degree from Hunter College (despite never having taken a course at Hunter). She returned to the US as a newlywed in 1990 to resume her doctoral education, this time at the University of Pittsburgh, where she earned her PhD in 1995. After a short spell as a project director at Kent State University, she pressed for a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania, where she juggled the unusual challenges of political drama in the division of geriatric psychiatry, becoming a mother, and losing her postdoctoral mentor to industry in a short span of time. A faculty position at one of the satellite campuses of

Pennsylvania State University gave her the break she had been seeking with deliberate patience. The disappointment of a rescinded offer to join a major university followed and was gloriously overshadowed by becoming a mother again. Eventually, Jamila found her professional home at Lafayette College, where she now serves as Dean of the Faculty and Professor of Psychology.

Nicky Newton received her PhD in Psychology from the University of Michigan in 2011, after her previous career as a professional flute player in her native New Zealand with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra was curtailed due to injury. Following a short stint in a tenure-track position at Youngstown State University and postdoctoral positions at Northwestern University and University of Michigan, she is now Associate Professor of Psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Canada. As a late bloomer in the field of psychology, Nicky brings a different viewpoint to women psychologists' experiences, particularly as she is situated within academia as a comparatively older woman in relatively junior positions.

We serendipitously met as mentor and mentee through the APA Division 20 (Adult Development and Aging) Early Career Task Force mentoring program in 2018. This book project grew from our shared interest and expertise in adult development and narrative, particularly women's experiences of aging. During our discussions via Zoom, well before such meetings became normative due to COVID-19, we routinely noted that there was a cohort of trailblazing women scholars in various subdisciplines of psychology who today, nearing or in retirement, possessed a wealth of personal and professional experience as yet untold. We considered that their narratives of navigating through the uncharted waters and barrier-laden landscapes of academia, which was often unprepared for and unwelcoming toward women, demanded to be recorded and shared. This generation of scholars, who were young women during the second wave of the Women's Rights Movement, no doubt has public records of their scholarly achievements in the form of curriculum vitae, awards, tributes, and other recognitions. What has remained largely hidden from view are their individual journeys of triumphs and successes, trials and tribulations overcome, roadblocks internal and external, biases implicit and explicit.

We had a number of aims for putting this volume together; paramount among them was to record the paths of contemporary women psychologists who have been (and continue to be) changemakers. We wanted to share their insights and wisdom; to acknowledge, highlight, and celebrate their achievements. As Johnston and Johnson (2008) point out:

“The dynamics shaping the reactions of . . . women psychologists to gender-based obstacles and discrimination are complex and deserve further analysis” (p. 54). At earlier points in history, women psychologists have embodied different motivations to succeed in the field, often rooted in feminism; for example, Eleanor Gibson commented, “Women’s lib [sic] means for me the freedom to do what I’d do if I were a man on the faculty, and I just want to do that. I just want to be left alone to do it” (1976, p. 23; cited in Johnston & Johnson, 2008, p. 54).

Although we include the reflective chapters of 26 women pioneers in psychology, our list of contributors is by no means comprehensive; there are, no doubt, others who could have been included. Our goal was to bring together for this volume women who represented a wide diversity of backgrounds and range of subdisciplines within psychology – social, feminist, personality, developmental, lifespan, clinical, health, quantitative, education, cognitive, and all the intersections possible thereof – and our final cohort of contributors includes those who were willing and available to contribute the stories of their life paths. A handful of scholars declined our invitation due to personal reasons or professional demands; we did not hear back from a couple; and tragically, we lost one of our contributors, Dr. Jean Lau Chin, to COVID-19. Of those who agreed, all were gracious, enthusiastic, and encouraging. We thank them for sharing their remarkable professional journeys and for their patience during the editorial process.

We encouraged contributors to situate their individual narratives at the intersection of the personal and professional, describing their journey in their own distinctive way. For instance, their story might not be linear or chronological; it might focus on one or more segments of their career or on their entire career. In writing their reflective chapters, we invited contributors to share the unique personal and professional circumstances and contexts that influenced their pursuit of, persistence in, and passion for a career in academia. We suggested that they reflect on the reasons for their development and success as a teacher, scholar, and mentor, and encapsulate their most significant contributions to and impact on their field, discipline, or profession. We also encouraged them to share words of wisdom drawn directly from their own experiences and reflections, if they felt comfortable, so that they might leave a legacy for current and future scholars at different career stages: early, mid, and established.

Our approach to this volume was guided by the Life Course Perspective (Elder, 1985, 1996; Settersten, 2003). The Life Course Perspective incorporates the principles of lifespan development, human agency, historical

time and geographic place, timing of decisions, and linked lives (Elder, 1985), positing that the lives we live are embedded in contexts shaped by personal history and social circumstances. This perspective links life stages, examines transitions, and explores agency within contexts in which individuals live their lives, including gender (Crosnoe & Elder, 2002). Accordingly, the type of careers our contributors have achieved in academia are predicated on an idiosyncratic pattern of intersections of situations, conditions, resources, and roles: gender, gender identity, sexual identity, race, ethnicity, time, and place are all significant factors that have played an important part in how their career trajectories have unfolded.

Also pertinent to our volume are the constructs of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) and generativity (Erikson, 1974). Crenshaw originally applied the term intersectionality to related identities in the lives of Black women – race, sex, and class – that intersect, and the attendant “isms” associated with each. In the last few decades, the term has also been broadened to include the nexus of gender, culture, and age, which is evident across the chapters contained here. In addition, in this volume the term “intersection” represents the myriad ways in which women’s personal and professional identities and activities cross and overlap. Our contributors can be seen to represent the seventh stage in Erikson’s eight-stage developmental theory, generativity, which encompasses establishing, guiding, and nourishing future generations as well as the world that current and future generations inherit. This is often embodied as mentoring, leadership, and leaving some form of legacy. The chapters in our volume demonstrate a strong impulse for generativity among our contributors, evident in their generosity of time, detailed accounts of their academic paths, and advice to current and future generations of women psychologists.

Situating the Current Volume within the History of Psychology

While not unique to the discipline of psychology, women have been largely overlooked or excluded from the field’s history (Bohan, 1992; Furumoto & Scarborough, 1986). For example, eminent male psychologists in the 1900s, such as G. Stanley Hall, Edward Thorndike, and James Cattell, all had negative opinions of women in the field (Bohan, 1992). Cattell published the volume *Men of Science* in 1906, which, in contradiction of its title, generously included 22 women psychologists (12 percent of the 186 psychologists included). In terms of graduate education, no women were admitted to PhD programs in psychology

prior to the early 1890s. In terms of employment in the early part of the 1900s, women were often limited to teaching at women's colleges, where unmarried women instructors had a better chance at attaining a high-status position. This situation frequently created a marriage vs. career dilemma: Women who pursued paths in higher education in the 19th and 20th centuries, as Furumoto and Scarborough observe, "...did so despite the widespread belief that it would make them unfit to fulfill the obligations prescribed by the widely-accepted notion of women's sphere: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity" (1986, p. 37). Women were often required to relinquish their academic positions once they married or became pregnant, or they were encouraged to focus on careers in applied areas, such as child welfare, school psychology, and clinical work. Particularly in the 1930s, academic psychology was seen as "men's work," applied psychology was seen as "women's work," and the national professional society, the American Psychological Association (APA), was thus less interested in applied psychologists (Scarborough & Rutherford, 2018).

Historical events and social movements can be tied to the growth of psychology as a field and women's roles within it. Indeed, in many ways, the Women's Rights Movements from the mid-1800s to the present moment have foregrounded the transformation of psychology as a discipline over the past few decades (Chrisler et al., 2013; Scarborough & Rutherford, 2018). The professionalization of psychology – with the advent of the APA in the late 1800s – paralleled the timing of the first wave of feminism, or the Women's Rights Movement. Many early female psychologists worked hard for increased recognition of women in psychology. Similarly, World War II ushered in the establishment of the National Council of Women Psychologists (NCWP) in 1941, whose mission was to "...promote and develop emergency services for the duration of the war and to utilize the energies of women psychologists..." (Scarborough & Rutherford, 2018, p. 333). One of the NCWP's related goals was the recognition of women in their professional roles.

A useful resource to help gauge the degree of women's inclusion in the field of psychology over time can be found in the histories of professional organizations. In 1892, when APA was initially formed, no women were included in their meetings. The percentage of women in APA grew from 18 percent in 1923 to 30 percent in 1938 (Unger, 2001); however, of that 30 percent of female APA members in 1938, only 37.6 percent held academic positions (compared to 76.3 percent of the male APA members). By 2013, 57 percent of APA's full members were women (Chrisler et al., 2013), and although there has been an increase in the representation of

women in APA governance structures (Scarborough & Rutherford, 2018), they remain “. . . underrepresented among journal editors and award winners in some categories (especially science)” (Chrisler et al., 2013, p. 450). However, one particular governance position in which women have made headway in the past decade or so is at the presidential level of APA, with eight women having held that position since 2010 (although it should be noted that in its first 86 years of existence, APA had only two female presidents; Florence Denmark – who writes in this volume – was the fifth woman to become APA president in 1980). Even typically more progressive professional organizations had male-dominated beginnings: When the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI) was founded in 1936, partly as a consequence of the lack of jobs for young psychologists thanks to the Great Depression, women were excluded from positions of leadership (Unger, 2001).

The 1970 APA meeting was something of a watershed for women’s inclusion in the field, in terms of both numbers and ideas (Chrisler et al., 2013; Scarborough & Rutherford, 2018; Unger, 2001). The Task Force on the Status of Women was formed that year. Dissatisfaction with the discriminatory practices in psychology had been publicly aired the previous year during the 1969 APA meeting in Chicago, and the 1960s/1970s Women’s Rights Movement was regarded as the progenitor of increased access for women to education and careers in psychology (Chrisler et al., 2013). The 1970s were particularly formative for women in psychology, with the advent of APA’s Division 35, the Society for Women in Psychology (SWP), in 1973, as well as the Committee on Women in Psychology in the same year, and the Women’s Program Office established in 1977. Based on these developments and the increased visibility of women’s contributions to and participation in APA, Scarborough and Rutherford (2018) speak of the time between 1972 and 1991 as the *Feminist Surge*, acknowledging the important role that feminism has had for increased opportunities for women in psychology. Additionally, they note that women’s diversity was also a focus of APA’s Division 35, which established task forces in the 1970s and 1980s focused on the concerns of Black women, Hispanic women, lesbians, Asian women, and Native American women.

More recently, APA’s Committee on Women in Psychology published the 2017 APA task force report “The Changing Gender Composition of Psychology” (APA, 2017). The report highlights how much has changed but also how much has remained the same for women in psychology. For example, women are now highly represented in graduate programs, with

up to 80 percent of health service provider programs composed of women; of the approximately 180,000 psychologists in the US workforce at the time of the report, 60–65 percent were women. The report also outlines the burgeoning numbers of women graduate students (and the decline in numbers of men) in doctoral programs in the last few decades, in both enrollments and degree completion, as well as the increasing racial diversity of women attaining their doctorates. However, women still experience a lack of parity with men; the report documents that, as of 2010, over all types of employment related to psychology, women's salaries remained at 77.8 percent of men's salaries.

There is little doubt that in the last few years, the United States has witnessed remarkable social, political, and cultural upheaval: the advent of social movements, such as Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, #TimesUp, and the current COVID-19 pandemic that continues to sweep the globe. Unprecedented numbers of women have been running for – and successfully gaining – office at many levels of political participation, particularly in 2020. For example, as of June 2020, 490 women had filed to run for a seat in the United States House of Representatives, almost equally split between the two main political parties (Sachs, 2020). Some have likened the present historical moment to fourth wave feminism, although this categorization has its critics (Grady, 2018); whichever way we view it, women's lives, and their concerns and issues, have returned to the national spotlight.

Situating the Current Volume among Previous Volumes

Past scholarly works regarding women's historical contributions to psychology have been predominantly biographical in nature. Thanks to scholars such as Bohan (1992), Scarborough and Furumoto (1987), O'Connell (2001), O'Connell and Russo (1983, 1988, 1990), and Unger (2001), and the many scholars they reference in their work, we can gain a sense of the lives of women in psychology in the early years of the discipline. Previous authors have highlighted three generations of women psychologists. In their book, *Untold Lives*, Scarborough and Furumoto (1987) present short biographies of women in the field of psychology who gained their doctorates by 1906, referring to them as the first generation of women psychologists. In the three-volume series *Models of Achievement: Reflections of Eminent Women in Psychology*, O'Connell and Russo (1983, 1988; O'Connell, 2001) present women who could be considered the second and third generations of women

who gained their doctorates between 1927 and 1939 (volume one), 1942 and 1967 (volume two), and 1921 and 1950 (volume three). In a sense, the current volume extends this third generation to include women who were awarded their PhDs between 1958 and 1986, the majority of whom received their degrees in the 1970s. In addition to the second wave of the Women's Rights Movement, the lives of the contributors to this book are also bounded by sociohistorical events such as the end of World War II, the Baby Boom, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Vietnam War.

In Johnston and Johnson's (2008) study of the second generation of American women psychologists, the authors outline a number of obstacles to the process of documenting women's history in the field. Their initial examination of published literature provided information on 107 women who had gained their doctorates between 1906 and 1945. However, a further 213 women were reported in the *Psychological Register* (Murchison, 1932): These were women who had "less than stellar psychological careers or whose psychological careers were cut short through lack of access to suitable positions" (Johnston & Johnson, 2008, p. 56). Additionally, while this second generation of women psychologists was more diverse than the first, the authors mention structural obstacles for Black graduate students and women particularly, such as little to no available housing on or close to campus and few job offers. Johnston and Johnson also observe that they had to dig deeper to find information concerning diversity among the women who had achieved in their field; in essence, this access barrier remains, particularly for women of color.

These past records are extremely valuable, and we acknowledge that we, and the contributors to the current volume, stand on the pioneering shoulders of those who came before us. However, our volume is different from previous volumes in that it captures the scholars' own accounts of their academic lives and focuses on a group of women who led, participated in, and were otherwise impacted by the second wave of the Women's Rights Movement. Autobiographical accounts of eminent psychologists' lives and career trajectories are not entirely absent from the historical record; indeed, along with the others mentioned earlier, nine volumes have been published of *A History of Psychology in Autobiography*, the most recent by the American Psychological Association (Lindzey & Runyan, 2007). However, these volumes have largely excluded women; for example, the volume edited by Lindzey and Runyan included a sole woman among the nine scholars featured: Elizabeth Loftus, who also writes in the present volume.

The Reflective Essays in This Volume

In a sense, while not to the same degree, some of the issues that plagued earlier generations of women psychologists remain today. The reflective chapters from the current generation of pioneering women in psychology are evidence of both continuity and change; their contributions add to not only the historical account of women's involvement in academia, particularly in the realm of inclusion, but also the development of groundbreaking new knowledge in the discipline and the mentoring of the next generation. Today's academic landscape is markedly different in many ways from the one the authors in the current volume entered – one in which “the doors to graduate schools were open just wide enough for a few White women, and even fewer Women of Color, to slip through” (Chrisler et al., 2013, p. 444). Despite their entry at a time when the odds of a successful career were stacked against them and they often had to contend with professional, societal, and legal biases and barriers to survive in academia (Chrisler et al., 2013), these scholars persisted, thrived, and flourished. This volume is a testament to their remarkable professional journeys and transformative impact as scholars, rising to prominence in their respective subdisciplines and fields of study despite explicit and implicit barriers and biases. As such, this volume provides an opportunity to learn from their unique, rich, and deep experiences and expertise.

Because our focus is on hearing the individual stories and celebrating the differences in the life paths of these pioneering women, we felt that imposing any sort of structure or organizational principle in the way the chapters are presented would be antithetical to our approach. Hence, after much debate, we have ordered the essays alphabetically, giving ample room for the reader to organize the stories as they would like. However, there are some observable commonalities. Some essays acknowledge the presence of sexism and discrimination in academia, although the authors dealt with this using differing strategies; some observe that its presence was par for the course, reflecting the era, or that they didn't have a label for it. The presence or absence of role models is often noted. Many of the contributors' paths inadvertently crossed at some point, either as a result of intersecting networks, scholarly lineage, or institutional affiliation; many contributors to the volume pass on advice to the reader that is often rooted in painful experience. Throughout their telling, themes of candor, perseverance, resilience, and the importance of social support are evident in the stories that the authors share with the reader.

Many of these pioneers were the first to develop and teach psychology of women courses or to launch Women's Studies programs at their institutions (e.g., Basow, Denmark, Deaux, Frieze). Some were first generation students (e.g., Antonucci, Chrisler, Deaux, Linton, Marecek). Due to the dearth of female mentors available to them during college, graduate school, or as early career scholars, a few specifically state that they aimed to be the mentor they would have liked to have had (e.g., Basow, Chrisler). Many others – while not explicitly saying so – have been the stellar mentors that were missing from their own professional development. Some authors recount early setbacks to their ultimately successful careers that demonstrate the beneficial – often necessary – role of persistence (e.g., Pruchno, Ryff). Other contributors acknowledge personal hurdles to succeeding in academia, whether it be due to race, physical challenge, or nonfit within their department that at times resulted in resistance and hostility (e.g., Aldwin, Frieze, Heatherington, Linton, Slaughter Kotzin, Stephens). While many narratives are linear, others focus on a particular period of life (e.g., Beale Spencer) or on a philosophical dilemma that drove a career (e.g., Stewart). Similarly, some careers were nonlinear (e.g., Frieze); some contributors could have had careers in other arenas, such as ballet (Aiken, Antonucci). Roles in and preferences for research, teaching, administration, and applications of research are also outlined (e.g., Aiken, Loftus, Resnick, Whitbourne), as well as ways to combine any or all of them. Serendipity and luck are championed (e.g., Chrisler, Denmark, Ellsworth, Fiske, Rook, Shields), in addition to chapters that outline how personal life and research focus can, at times, intersect (e.g., Kiecolt-Glaser, Wortman).

The 26 women psychologists whose reflective chapters are included in this volume continue the decades-long lineage of pioneering women in their field, acknowledged and highlighted in earlier publications that record their lives. Additionally, while not the focus of the current volume, we would like to acknowledge all the women we don't know about from the last two hundred or so years: Those who tried but were discouraged, or those who have not – as yet – been officially recognized as contributing to the field. We recognize them all, and their embodiment of the wonderful complexity of women's experiences in and contributions to academia. We hope readers will enjoy learning about these groundbreaking women psychologists from the women themselves, in their own telling, as much as we have enjoyed compiling their reflective chapters.

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