

Burman, E. (ed) (1990) *Feminists and Psychological Practice*. London: Sage.

Introduction

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The function of an editorial introduction is to locate a book in its context and demonstrate both its relevance and its coherence. However, in accordance with the feminist commitment to make visible the processes involved in producing an academic artefact, I will also describe why and how this book came about. What the account will illustrate is the importance and urgency of the issues this volume addresses. In particular it shows the difficulty of bringing into a public academic arena precisely that which the structure of the arena has sought to suppress. These issues are the marginalization of gender (as well as 'race', class and sexuality): in both the theoretical frameworks offered by psychology, and in the experience of women who are or have been involved with psychology - whether in teaching, research or 'professional' capacities.

The book addresses what feminists do in psychology, what these experiences demonstrate about the functioning of psychology, the issues that women are faced with in their work, and in some cases why they may no longer regard themselves as 'doing psychology'. The term 'practice' functions to highlight the *productive* nature of psychology. Psychology as a reflexive discipline, created by people about people, is founded on a bedrock of 'explanation' shot through with ideological assumptions, most of which form part of the taken for granted currency of modern western culture. Hence psychology can be said to construct its own object of enquiry, reflecting and perpetuating particular social interests. The emphasis on psychology as a social practice thus serves to draw attention to the material conditions that constitute institutional psychology (or psychologies) and its (their) effects.

This book, then, traces a trajectory of feminist intervention within and in relation to psychology. It is structured around three themes; Part One explores the extent to which feminists are positioned inside or outside orthodox psychology, and the corresponding implications of these positions; Part Two examines the changing definitions of psychological knowledge produced by feminist practice; Part Three is organized around current debates, dilemmas and strategies for resistance. A more detailed and systematic summary of each chapter precedes each section of the book - so you should look there for more formal brief outlines. At the end of the book I identify key areas for further development, debate and action.

In the rest of this introduction I will outline the institutional context in which the issues addressed within this volume take place and then [2] indicate the particular political functions that have come to define and structure psychological practice. In contrast to this, the final section argues that the position of feminists working in psychology can be seen necessarily to involve challenges to the discipline's dominant practices. Applying the issue of reflexivity to the production of this book I finish by describing and indicating some implications of the difficulties and dilemmas encountered when producing a book of this kind.

Institutional context

The initial impetus for this book was both startlingly simple and obvious. I had been working on a temporary contract in a polytechnic psychology department, and as the year drew to a close and I began to have a little time for reflection, the gnawing doubts about what I was doing, why I was doing it (and why I still had not finished my PhD) resurfaced. There were so many 'good', valid reasons I could find to justify my

ambivalent involvement in psychology, yet here I was, after years of conflict and acute feelings of political compromise, with an academic job - somewhat to my surprise. The time lapses skated over in my CV testify to political activities I am proud to have been involved with but which are not considered legitimate, academic psychology. Moreover, in talking with other women I have found out (in feminist consciousness-raising fashion) that my headaches about teaching, research and staff relationships, engagement with academic practices, political commitments, competing with pressures for public acknowledgement and job security, all these are general problems. A little reflection made clear that these problems are not only common to the experience of feminists in psychology, but they also provide a key route to understanding what psychology is and what it does. The discussions and stories that recur every time feminists working in psychology happen to meet, the issues we talk about between or after sessions at conferences, the horror stories we exchange privately with friends, these are precisely the issues that need to be raised publicly. The experiences of women, of feminists in psychology, should not be confined to the domain of private support (although this of course is often a necessary step). The stories we have to tell, our perspectives, strategies and practices, provide a vital commentary on and challenge to the existing operation of psychology (and may well extend much further).

There is now a developing feminist critique of academic psychology which interrogates both the selection of research areas and its methods of investigation (Wilkinson, 1986). As the contributions in this volume make clear, the broad rubric of 'equal opportunities' has made some impact in clinical and educational psychology, although specifically [3] feminist concerns have had little hearing. The conviction that prompts this book, then, is that we must not only scrutinize the outcome of what we do, but also address the processes and effects of processes as they arise and resonate across the whole spectrum of psychology. With this understanding of our own positions we will be better equipped to intervene in and change the practices in which we are involved. The issues encountered by this project are both specific and general: specific to psychology, to the British context; general to higher education and to western psychology. In many ways the audience this book addresses is not yet formally constituted; we write here to create the space in which the experiences, insights and positions of women in psychology can come to be talked about and acted upon. In some ways this creates tensions in constructing and addressing the positions from which this book might be read, so it is worth identifying who you, the reader, might be.

This book is published in a series which explicitly addresses psychology and psychologists. This is where its main point of intervention lies. But it also adds to and extends the developing literature on the experience and history of feminist initiatives in further and higher education and in the 'helping professions'. It is helpful for feminists in parallel disciplines or professions to know how our struggles compare, and to amplify the debates within and around women's studies. While it adds to the general sociology of psychological knowledge and practice that enables us to contextualize current positions both culturally and historically, this book appears at a time of crucial political transition - the ramifications of which are being felt far and wide. In particular, the issues of 'professionalization' and working within the system to change it pose major dilemmas in the current climate of the 'restructuring' of education, social services and local government. The outcome of these changes is that the space for critical commentary and intervention is dwindling dramatically. It is significant that it is at this time that the British Psychological Society, as the central organization of psychologists in Britain, is instituting the procedure of 'chartering' psychologists and has produced a major public document which defines and directs the *Future of the Psychological Sciences* (BPS, 1988). The implications of these developments are taken up at the end of the book. The

final incipient but developing audience for whom this book is written is also potentially the largest; the undergraduates. The issues raised in this volume are of personal and professional interest to the women who are embarking on a 'career' in psychology. In particular this book addresses undergraduates taking (the growing number of) Psychology of Women-type courses, where we should learn to analyse our own position within as well as outside the discipline. Which is where we begin.

Women's entry into the institution usually starts at degree level. It is often observed that the majority of undergraduates taking psychology degrees are women (in my department something like 90 per cent last year). Around half of all postgraduates are women, but only a tiny fraction of teaching staff are women, and these are rarely in positions of seniority (Kagan, 1989). Here we have a pattern of women's visibility and employment that broadly reflects women's positions in higher education and 'the professions' generally. There are of course features that are specific to each discipline that structure particular issues for women. So it may be the image of psychology as a 'soft science' that attracted so many women in the first place; and it is precisely this image that current funding strategists are anxious to dispel - hence the widespread transfer from BAs to BScs in psychology. While this shift in title may not be reflected in the actual content of material taught, nevertheless as the contributions in this book argue, the current ethos (one might almost say the current ideology) of psychology is that of science, and an irrelevant, outmoded model of science at that. Much has been written about the history and development of psychology as structured by the effort to demarcate its rightful territory and to avoid any contaminating association both with sociology (Parker, 1989) and with psychoanalysis (Urwin, 1986). The drive to prove the scientificity of psychology is especially active at the moment given current government priorities in secondary and higher education. These have been translated in real terms into the creation of academic 'centres of excellence' with the closure of less favoured or more troublesome departments and, imminently, demands that academic institutions become profit-making businesses.

In many respects psychology shares this political context with higher education in Britain generally. But the elaboration of these issues within psychology poses particular problems for women, problems that are not peculiar to the British context but are inherent to the structure of western psychology. The areas which the discipline has tried to sanitize or exclude from its domain are those which look at the socially constructed determinants of behaviour and explore the experience and explanation for contradiction and ambivalence - precisely those issues to which (without necessarily being essentialist about this!) women are drawn. As in Essed's (1988) analysis of the structure of racism, it is its very ordinariness and taken for granted nature that confers an insidious inevitability on women's subordinate position. In this volume, Carolyn Kagan and Sue Lewis's contribution testifies to the subtle and often inadvertent (as well as more blatant) forms of devaluation and differential treatment to which women teaching in psychology departments are subject. Corinne Squire's chapter explores how a feminist understanding of psychology [5] necessarily transforms both the content and relations of teaching and Celia Kitzinger documents the ideological deployment of the rhetoric of science to demarcate and exclude feminist and lesbian feminist research on the grounds that it reflects a 'political' or partisan position.

This gives us one set of clues about why women may be voting with their feet, if indeed they are enfranchised, and leaving psychology, or at least leaving academic psychology, after their first degree to work in arenas where more congenial frameworks of explanation are available and acceptable. This sets up a variety of positions for women psychologists. In this book Jane Jefferson describes how she moved from a teaching post to take up a PhD place in a different discipline which has a more explicit political

perspective and sociological framework. Although many women are forced to adopt personal strategies of this sort, at a more collective level of action it is tempting for women academics, particularly feminists who feel marginalized and isolated within psychology, to make efforts to broaden their scope and move into (or set up) women's studies-type courses. However, as Meg Coulson and Kum-Kum Bhavnani point out in their chapter, the development of women's studies and the consequent promotion of (some) women into senior positions is not without its problems. On the other hand the personal costs of working outside the remit of orthodox academia to engage in relevant research set up on feminist terms are clearly articulated by Sue Sharpe. Moreover, as the contributions on these areas point out, if we compare staff teaching psychology with educational and clinical psychologists, we find that many more women are 'professional' psychologists.

Normalizing and pathologizing

Even outside 'academic' psychology we find progressives and feminists hampered by concepts and frameworks that have come to define the scope of psychology. The domain of the psychological is experience and behaviour, that is *individual* experience and behaviour. The age-old tensions between mind and body, between the individual and society, between nature and culture, are inscribed in the structure of psychology. 'We waver uneasily between the particular and the general, more often slipping into the terminology of the 'pathological' and the 'normal'. And here we hit the bottom line, where we see the direct ramifications of psychology's effort to partake of the respectability of science. In particular, psychology has vied with medicine for its institutional status and social power (Rose, 1985). But while medicine operates with at least some foundation for a notion of normal functioning or health, based on adequate functioning of an organ or body, *psychology's* concepts of mental health and normality, though [6] cast in the syntax of science, are based on social definitions or (at best) derived from statistical regularities whose force blurs the distinction between description and prescription. The consequences of this for psychology's support and for representation of a particular ideology of families (as white, two heterosexually partnered, and married) are elaborated by Ann Phoenix in her account of the theoretical challenge presented by her research with young black mothers.

Hence the legacy of psychology as a discipline founded with the purpose of sorting out and classifying individuals according to social and administrative categories is clearly visible today. Progressive clinical psychologists working in mental handicap are forced to operate within the human rights framework of normalization theory. As Christine Adcock and Karen Newbigging graphically illustrate, this confronts them daily with dilemmas that grotesquely play out the inadequate or reactionary interests and practice of psychology in contemporary society: do we encourage a woman with a learning disability to take on gender-typical roles, behaviour and dress and thus render her vulnerable to sexual abuse? The sexuality whose garb we thrust upon her is heterosexuality; and when she acts on this we typically respond by controlling and denying it through compulsory sterilization, and artificially regulate her menstrual cycle to control awkward moods and emotions. It is psychology which has successfully marketed such processes as 'socialization' and 'normalization', which have inscribed within them particular assumptions about what society is like and what it means to be normal; normalization theory in this example accepts and perpetuates a model of society where gender is the fundamental social category, where men dominate women, and heterosexuality is privileged (see Riley, 1983, for a critique of developmental psychology and Rose, 1985, for educational and clinical-type roles).

These are the issues which Celia Kitzinger takes up in her analysis of the significance of the place accorded to 'science' in psychology, and the challenges to both theory and practice presented by a radical feminist critique. Her account of the structuring of psychology so as to delegitimize progressive political projects illustrates a key feature of the curtailed structural positions permitted to feminists and feminist issues within psychology: any dissent from the prevailing or dominant ideological position is defined as either outside 'proper' psychology, or else is theorized only in pathologizing terms. Psychology has successfully proved itself to be indispensable to the functioning of industrial society, fitting people to jobs, fitting environments for maximum efficiency and even translating those areas taken up as potentially progressive, such as interpersonal skills, assertiveness training, into 'management' skills. The ways in which [7] certain aspects of 'gender research' have become incorporated into mainstream psychology illustrate some of the dilemmas and compromises involved in struggling for recognition and working within the system. The now widely acclaimed notion of 'androgyny' originally developed to liberate men and women from the crippling straitjacket of rigidly demarcated sex roles, has itself been turned into an instrument for capitalism (so that the 'androgynous' person is enabled to sack an employee with sensitivity; Bem cited in Billig, 1982). The history of the struggle to create the recently formed Psychology of Women section of the BPS illustrates the promises and costs of the project to find a place for women within the mainstream professional association. Jan Burns and Sue Wilkinson's accounts of these developments show that the different institutional responses to the organization of women in psychology in various countries demonstrate significant features about the particular political status and position of psychology.

Reflexivity

It should be clear by now that this is not an 'academic' book in the ordinary sense of the word. Presented in a broadly familiar format, produced by a well-known academic publisher, it clearly cannot but be an academic product. But this book is about the experience of women who are involved in the practice of psychology, the issues that we face, the perspectives we bring to bear. This is a book *about* psychology rather than an instance of it - though it is impossible to draw absolute distinctions due to the inherent reflexivity of the nature of our object (or perhaps more appropriately our 'subject') of study. Rather than speculate about feminist theory or methodologies in psychology, the point of departure for this book is to provide a forum for feminist comment and critique on the practice of what it is we do when we 'do psychology'.

Taking this remit bridges two of the great gulfs that have structured the social sciences and psychology in particular, namely the theory-experience split and the academic-practitioner (or theory-application) divide. The separation of the realm of 'pure' theory from 'hands-on' practical work in psychology reflects the general structural (and gendered) division between mental and manual labour, and its realization in psychology is both an artificially maintained and tense relationship. The retreat to theory is often a defence used to avoid taking responsibility for the implications of psychological research. The history of psychology testifies to how seemingly objective and detached research is structured by social and political agendas, not to [8] mention how psychology has always benefited from war and other such 'natural' disasters (Wexler, 1983).

It is of course no accident that it is through women's accounts that we see the breakdown of these oppositions which are so central to the maintenance of the cultural hegemony of academia. The feminist prioritization of experience necessarily throws into question accepted academic rules and practices, while feminist perspectives inform our

own understanding of women's positions (Stanley and Wise, 1983). Taking seriously the feminist project to make ourselves visible within our work means that an adequate account of women's relation to psychology must include not only the products of our work (be it as teachers, researchers or service providers) but also an analysis of the (sexual-)political processes involved in their production and practice. So, for example, the predominance of women, traditionally positioned as carers and domestic labourers, in 'caring professional' roles such as clinical and educational psychologists (although not in positions of seniority) rather than research or teaching, reveals much about the ethos and structure of academia (and is commented upon by most contributors in this book as they document how the dilemmas have touched their own lives). While these issues arise in many academic disciplines, one feature that crosses both psychology and feminism, though usually in quite opposed ways, is the inherent reflexivity of the psychological enterprise which (for feminists) raises questions of power relations between expert and client, teacher and student, student and supervisor, researcher and researched and within management structures (Culley and Portuges, 1985). A feminist analysis of psychology highlights the complex matrix of theory, theorized and theorizer, and in a society structured around the individual with mass demand for popular psychologies, positions us all as *subjects* of psychology and subjects us to its practices (see Henriques et al., 1984).

The enquiry here is reflexive in an additional sense; contributions not only interrogate psychology but also reflect insights gained from this domain back on to feminism. Several chapters in this book highlight issues that challenge and extend feminist thinking. Exploring the diverse ways feminists are to be positioned in psychology, this book considers the implications and dilemmas for feminist practice. Should we be working inside the British Psychological Society to make it and psychology more woman-friendly? Or are the concessions involved too compromising? Is feminism compatible with working in psychology? What role and contribution do feminist psychologists have in relation to the feminist community? Should we act to challenge and demystify uncritical adoption of dubious psychological concepts that are coming to inform feminist accounts? Are women who set up women's studies [9] courses reproducing inequalities and hierarchies within *feminism*? Does highlighting gender issues in clinical practice obscure other important structural power relations? And what can psychology offer to a progressive, feminist practice?

Taking reflexivity as the starting point for a feminist enquiry also has effects to which the production of this book can testify. Many of the contributors to this volume have commented how useful the process of writing their chapters was for them. For some women it presented an opportunity to set down on paper ideas they had been thinking and talking about for some time but had not fully articulated. For others it offered a springboard for discussion with colleagues and personal exploration of similarities and differences between their views and positions. In one case the act of writing so empowered the authors that they were able to take a stronger stand in their workplace and actually start to change some of the oppressive practices that their chapter describes. From these beginnings the feminist intervention in psychology gathers force.

Many voices

Beyond the usual disclaimers about time and space there are a number of priorities that have guided my selection of contributions that should be stated clearly. First, I wanted a range of involvements in psychology to be covered in this volume, not only women who were teaching or writing psychology but also women who, in the BPS's terms do 'practise' psychology, in the narrower sense, and although only clinical and educational psychology are addressed here I would like to think that subsequent books will address

other arenas in which feminist psychologists work. In particular the positions of women involved in occupational psychology call for exploration and the many areas where psychologists are employed (without professional titles but as psychologists) as in personnel work and advertising.

Second, the accounts which appear in this book are selected on the basis of women I knew or knew of, rather than 'stars' (though using this term is to displace rather than identify the problem). I did not want to publish the accounts of women who are particularly well known: although some of the contributors have published quite extensively before (though interestingly not necessarily for a psychological audience), most have not. One of the recurring issues for feminists in relation to academia is that of publishing: the pressure to be in print, to measure your reputation by column inches or quantity of papers. As Celia Kitzinger's contribution graphically illustrates, competing publicly for institutional approval (or at least notoriety) presupposes some commitment or at least collusion with the prevailing rules of the [10] discipline. Many women have been much too ambivalent to take this step. For myself, this will be my first publication that solidly (but not solely) addresses a psychological audience - and I feel comfortable about this because its appearance challenges and intervenes in dominant meanings. I say more about this at the end of the book.

Third, just as the women who publish in psychology are a (self-) selected few who precisely by virtue of this selection may be the exception rather than the rule, so no account of feminists' relationships with psychology could be complete without comments from women who have left the discipline. For every feminist who is working in psychology there must be dozens who have left, whether by drifting away from doctoral research into more pressing political pursuits, or taking their skills and commitments to arenas where they could be more usefully and easily practised. Even with this knowledge it was surprisingly difficult to persuade women not only that they had interesting and relevant things to say, but also that it was worthwhile for them to say it. It is surely illuminating that for a number of the women I contacted the investment involved in digging over their memories and articulating in print their reasons and their feelings was too much to overcome the psychological distance they had built between themselves and their previous involvement with psychology. Two women who write in this book have both moved out of psychology to do their research - in Jane Jefferson's case to another discipline, in Sue Sharpe's case outside any explicitly formulated disciplinary framework. The women who no longer have any tangible involvement with academic and psychological practices, whose perspectives would also be most valuable, do not appear.

Difficulties

A text is constituted not only by what it is, but also by what it is not. There are a number of other significant absences in this book. Perhaps the most striking of these is the absence of accredited authorship accompanying one chapter. Far from reflecting a radical critique of the ownership of ideas, these women write anonymously because they do not feel able to give public expression to their views with impunity. The women concerned consider that they have already suffered discrimination by virtue of voicing dissent and highlighting sexism in their workplaces, and so although committed to radical critique and practice cannot admit to this in such a public forum. It is a sad reflection on the state of psychology that debate can only be introduced under such circumstances, and is testimony to the backwardness of British psychology in relation to other countries. Jan Burns and Sue Wilkinson describe this in more detail. [11]

I am also acutely aware of other significant omissions. It would have been particularly illuminating to have included an undergraduate account which could

highlight with the clear sight of the relative novice what is involved in learning the rules of the discipline and becoming culturally competent members. Another useful contribution could have been to apply perspectives from discourse analysis and feminist methodology to analyse the resistance exhibited by men when they are put in the subordinate positions of student or respondent or 'client' (O'Brien and McKee, 1982; Walkerdine, 1981). Although these accounts usefully inform the occupational experience of women psychologists, they also serve to draw attention to the power dynamics structuring these relationships which this disjunction between gender and professional status brings to the fore.

There are further difficulties that arise from the style of presentation adopted in this book. Producing writing based on experiential accounts dismantles the traditional defence of intellectualization and poses difficulties of vulnerability and misinterpretation for the authors. So, for example, a chapter which was commissioned to discuss research and supervisory relationships had to be abandoned because the author came to the conclusion that whatever she wrote would be interpreted as personal criticism rather than an exploration of the general issues raised by her own experience.

There are also of course many differences present within this volume. Feminism is not an orthodoxy, and there are clear tensions and even contradictions between the chapters in this book. My purpose here is neither to excuse nor erase these differences, but to draw attention to and comment on them.

The first of these is the relative emphasis placed on theory and on experience. Although all chapters are based on the author's (or authors') experiences, she (or they) write with varying degrees of personalization. Some women write in what are clearly general terms about the implications of issues raised from their own experience, whereas others have made a conscious effort to speak only for themselves. Hence some women present more theoretical analyses based on their own experience whereas others draw on concrete examples to illustrate their points. Where these involve descriptions of women with whom contributors work as service providers, as in the chapters by Maye Taylor and by Christine Adcock and Karen Newbigging, the authors adopt a variety of techniques to try to avoid objectifying them. For Maye Taylor this means giving examples of situations rather than individual 'cases', while Christine and Karen use both vignettes and accounts of specific relationships to illustrate the contradictory positions individually oriented clinical practice sets up.

These differences are reflected also in the variety of forms of [12] presentation; some women use conventional academic formats including the citation of supporting and relevant literature, whereas other accounts primarily focus on the author's own perspective alone. It is frequently a difficult experience for women schooled in the academic discourse of 'objectivity' to learn to own the statements they previously had to put in others' mouths to gain credibility and acceptability.

Following from this, there are different levels of address. While Jane Jefferson and Sue Sharpe's accounts may 'speak to' undergraduates' experiences and those of women who have recently been involved with psychology (and thought better of maintaining the involvement), Carolyn Kagan and Sue Lewis document the issues raised by their experiences as women teaching women students. At another level, Meg Coulson and Kum-Kum Bhavnani's chapter presents a more theoretical and wider-ranging interrogation of the general situation of feminists in higher education, in which psychology participates in particular ways. Both Corinne Squire and Celia Kitzinger comment on how the understanding of the relevance and usefulness of psychology gained from within psychology contrasts with the perception of feminists outside, providing a practical illustration of the role they affirm for feminist psychologists of demystifying psychology. Hence the positions from which women write vary enormously as do the

questions about psychology that their practice raises. It is the commitment to feminist interrogation of psychology, and a shared understanding that women's particular positioning exists relative to the rest of psychology that unifies the book.

There are also a number of political differences between the accounts. Jan Burns for example clearly envisages the development of a disciplinary area of 'the psychology of women' as, given certain conditions, progressive and possible, whereas Celia Kitzinger sees it as necessarily contradictory and compromising to work within the boundaries of psychology. Meg Coulson and Kum-Kum Bhavnani mount a general challenge to the notion that women's greater promotion and progression within academic power structures necessarily serves the interests of all women, while Sue Wilkinson and Jane Ussher acknowledge the difficulties but maintain the value of claiming a space for women within psychology's academic and bureaucratic structure. Differences of this kind reflect broader debates about separatism and the dilemmas of working inside or outside a disciplinary framework that are part of any fruitful feminist enquiry. Some of these issues are taken up both within the main text and in the editorial endnote that concludes this book. But you, the reader, will supply a further framework of commentary and enquiry for yourself. [13]

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