

Research paper on mary calkins

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



The American Psychological Association (APA) was founded in 1892. At its inception, psychology in the United States was following the European tradition of the discipline. Since its founding, the United States psychologists have transformed the field and about half of all psychologists worldwide belong to the APA. Mary Calkins spent her entire professional career at Wellesley College and was the first female president of the APA, elected in 1905. She studied under William James at Harvard University (Simonton, 1992). Psychology was one of the first fields that were willing to allow women to study at an advanced level. Allowing women into the program at the same time that the science was trying to become an established discipline in the United States was a time sensitive issue that benefitted women and the field. Even though Mary Calkins pursued a graduate degree in psychology, she was not awarded it, which frequently happened to women in that time period where women earning college degrees, let alone advanced degrees, were a new concept. She completed her doctoral work at Harvard University in 1895 and declined a Radcliff degree, which was offered in lieu of Harvard diploma, because of her gender. Calkins, like many other educated and formally trained women of the time were still allowed admission to the APA is election. Calkins was elected the year after its formation, and was one of two women elected the first year that females were accepted into the APA.

In Europe, especially Germany, the psychological laboratories were focused on the male mind. Partially because of the influence of women, like Calkins, in the United States, the laboratories were being established without the emphasis on the male gender. Calkins, in particular, was vocal and spoke up

when she noted that some of her male colleagues were publishing or arguing findings that were unlike the results that she was seeing among her own students. Her being outspoken resulted in women being heard as they were entering the ranks of the psychological profession and differences between the genders being noted outright as laboratories were being established in the country.

One of the earliest calls for expert opinion of psychologists in the United States was founded in the debate of whether or not it was advisable for women to pursue post-secondary education. There were several questions that post-secondary educators and experts were concerned about as women swelled in numbers in college attendance. There was a concern if the method of delivery for education between men and women needed to be handled in a different manner. Of concern were inherent intellectual differences and the different expectations of social roles that existed between the genders at the time. Some psychologists argued that due to biological differences between the genders, education should be segregated at the higher learning institutions. It was feared that women's reproductive abilities would be affected by partaking in earning a higher education (Milar, 2000).

Mary Calkins was a proponent of introspection. This was the basis of her self-psychology. She had three main points to her theory: the subject, the object, and the relation that exists between the subject and the object. Calkins stated that there was no definition of the self, as each person is a unique individual. She did, however, identify five distinct qualities that each individual possesses: persistence; ability to change; complexity; uniqueness;

and relatedness. Objects are able to be defined by identifying them as members of a class and then distinguishing them from the other members of the class. Classification was determined by whether or not the object had a personal connection to the person. If there was a personal connection, a further categorization about whether or not the object was common or private followed. Impersonal objects were categorized as private or public. If objects were deemed as public, further classification of external or non-external was required. The relation between the subject and the object had three possible classifications: the subject could be receptive, active, or compelled by an object; the subject could be egocentric or allocentric; and the subject could be generalizing or individualizing. Each of these categories had their own subcategories. There had to be a determination regarding a subject's receptivity towards an object, any activity that occurred towards the object, and if there was any sense of being compelled by the object. The second category was determined by if an egoistic attitude placed emphasis on oneself or an allocentric attitude in which the emphasis is on other objects. With regards to generalizing or individualizing, this is determined by if the subject regards objects on a primary level through emotion or will or on a secondary level through perception, imagination, and thought.

Calkins did work throughout her career to differentiate her self-psychology from the other schools of thought that were predominant at the time, including behaviorism, Gestalt-psychology, and atomism. Late in her career, in 1930, Calkins referred to atomism as a study of experiences that may be tolerated by the self-psychologist, rather than the experiencer. In order for this to occur, it would need to be an abstraction from the existing self

(McDonald, 2007).

Since Calkin's self-psychology focused on the social nature of the self, she also used her situation and experience of being a member of a community of women while teaching at Wellesley College. Drawing on these experiences, and keeping active in the research of her peers, she wrote over 100 books and journal articles. She was often engrossed in research, active in the use of laboratories, and did not at all demonstrate any signs of inferiority to the men in her field, although women scholars were new, she did not allow that to be an obstacle to her research, her arguments, her writings, or her teaching. She did not back down from challenges, as she was as well-read and prepared for an argument as any other professional in her day. She was able to defend her point of view, argue with vigor and scholarly expertise, and write in a manner that showed her scholarly training. She did not let being a female dissuade her in any way from making her mark in the field of psychology, and she is still studied today due to her vast amount of published works (Minton, 2000).

A pioneer for the study of psychology in the United States, Calkins made her mark due to her vivacity and ability to delve into research, make an argument, and write in a scholarly manner, thereby publishing many works during her career. Her timing was remarkable as psychology was one of the few disciplines where women were allowed to not only study at the college level, but at the graduate and doctoral level, although many, like Calkins, earned her doctoral degree but never received one due to her gender. Firm in her beliefs, avid in research, and passionate in her writing, the students at Wellesley College certainly benefitted from her teaching, her character, and

her being a role model for the earliest generations of college educated women in the United States.

References

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