

Women in the field of psychology history essay



The history of women's rights is a chronicle plagued with many challenges and breakthroughs for women. While woman(sp) had a difficult time making their way in the field of psychology, minorities had a bigger challenge in front of them during this era. Minorities continue to be underrepresented in the field of psychology today. In this paper I will discuss how women and minorities struggled for a place in psychology and what they did in order to succeed in the world of academia. I will also discuss how these early challenges have and continue to affect the field of psychology. I will begin with women's struggles in psychology, then I will talk about the African American in psychology, and finally I will introduce women minorities.

(excellent introduction)

Women's struggle for equality in the field of psychology began with our pioneers, Mary Whiton Calkins, Christine Ladd-Franklin, Margret Floy Washburn, Lillian Martin, and Eleanor Gamble, just to name a few (Furumoto and Scarborough, 1987). These women were facing several societal constraints and long held beliefs about the role of women during their era, which created controversy as they tried to fight their way into the field of psychology. The societal belief at the time was that women were intellectually inferior to men and in response to this; men began to develop theories about what could happen to women if they did try to penetrate higher education. This fear of women coming into academia was so strong that one medical professor from Harvard, reported that women in these "higher thinking roles" were damaging their health and reproductive system (Furumoto and Scarborough, 1987). G. Stanley Hall also argued that women who chose intellectual lives became essentially "castrated" (Furumoto,

1980). (new paragraph) Things began to change during the civil war (caps) because women were needed in the labor force. Women began to enter college and obtain higher education in response to the war. Men were leaving their communities to go to war. Although women were pursuing higher education there was still a strong societal belief that if they are mothers or wives this needed to be their priority. As women started attending school they remained restricted to concentrations that were considered “ women careers” such as home economics (Goodwin, 2008). This thinking was known as the “ woman’s sphere” meaning women were still restricted to traditional “ feminine roles”. One prominent male psychologist G. E. Muller welcomed women into his lab despite societal belief that they were intellectually inferior. Muller held the belief that women were capable of high quality research (Goodwin, 2008). Although women were being given these educational opportunities, there was still fear in the general community. This fear resulted in women not being recognized as important contributors to the field of psychology and were being left out of history books (Hilgard, 1987). Women who did great things in psychology also did not always get credit for their work. An example of this was Mary Calkins(‘) invention of the paired association technique in research. G. E. Muller took her technique and perfected it while Titchener later took credit for her invention and claimed it as his own when he added it into his student manual for laboratory research (Zusne, 1984). There were several other women who contributed to the field of psychology but much of their work was dismissed, largely because they were women and their ideas were believed to be inferior. (new paragraph) Eventually more women became involved in higher education and obtained their doctorate degrees. Women’s

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struggles continued(;) they just took on a different form. What Johnson & Johnson (2008) called the second generation of women psychologists, faced a different kind of prejudice as they fought for a voice in psychology. Married women struggled with getting positions in academic work if their husbands were professors (anti-nepotism- the idea that a married couple could not work at the same institution as their spouse even if they were in separate disciplines). These anti-nepotism rules became one issue that forced a new wave of thinking about the “ woman’s sphere” within the discipline of psychology. This woman’s sphere resulted in women psychologists dominating the areas of education, and clinical or child psychology, which gave their male counterparts more ammunition to argue that they were less able to do research and remained more suitable for traditional female positions in the field of psychology (Johnston, & Johnson, 2008). Women continued to challenge these popular beliefs and eventually the first married couple at Harvard was able to break through these anti-nepotism rules and were both named full professors in 1959 (Johnston & Johnson, 2008). While early women psychologist(s) had to work hard to gain access to graduate education (,) the second generation of women psychologists did not however, they still faced discrimination (Scarborough & Furumoto, 1987). The second generation of women psychologists were able to get positions but struggled with entering into the world of academia (Johnston & Johnson, 2008). Our pioneers had to decide between family and work, whereas the second generation of women psychologists essentially followed in their foremothers(‘) footsteps by remaining unmarried so they could pursue these opportunities with greater ease (Johnston & Johnson, 2008). What complicated things further for a woman was if she were a woman who was

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also a minority. A minority, particularly African American's (no ' and a ,) whether male or female(,) faced stronger and more engrained prejudices in their fight for entrance into higher institutions of learning (Pickren, 2004).

While women faced a number of obstacles in graduate training, minorities struggled much more and, this struggle continues today. African American's particularly were discouraged from pursuing education for fear that they might start to think about things such as freedom (Goodwin, 2008). Studies that were conducted using African Americans were dismissed if they concluded that African Americans might show any form of intelligence and thus ruled as useless studies (Goodwin, 2008). One historical example was a study done on intelligence that involved memory. Five hundred Caucasian children and five hundred African American children were given a poem to memorize and the results proved that all children were able to memorize this poem at the same rate. The study was thrown out with the argument that it was a bad test for intelligence (Goodwin, 2008). Because society believed that African Americans were intellectually inferior this study was thrown out instead of looking at it as an indicator that there was no difference among races. (new paragraph)African Americans faced other barriers with obtaining entrance into higher education like, restricting them to " only black colleges". The problem here was finding people to educate them. Some African Americans could get accepted into colleges understanding that they would go back to their communities and teach " their own" (Goodwin, 2008). What colleges they could attend had other challenges particularly with housing. African Americans could not live in the campus dormitories and had to locate off campus housing, which was equally difficult (Johnson & Johnson,

2008). Just about all African American psychologists that obtained their degrees during 1930-1940 had careers working as professors in their own communities and their research work utilized only African American subjects (Abramson, Barnett & Lack, 2005). Several of these early African American psychologists spent most of their career fighting for the rights of African Americans in the field and promoting the education of racial minorities (Goodwin, 2008). One of the most well-known African American psychologist's was Kenneth Brown Clark who is best known for Brown vs. The Board of Education, where he succeeded in outlawing segregation in schools (Phillips, 2000).

Women minorities struggles were more compounded. Mamie Phipps Clark, (Kenneth Brown Clark's wife) talked about her struggles in the field as an African American woman. Mamie initially had a difficult time securing employment. Mamie eventually was able to obtain a position as a data analyst (Johnson & Johnson, 2008). The only other PhD(Ph. D.) in Mamie's office was the director, a Caucasian woman. Mamie had the most education in her office yet because of her race she was only able to secure a position that any undergraduate student could have done. Another example of minority women in the field of psychology was Mary Henle, a noted Gestalt psychologist. Mary was Jewish and reported that she was not sure if her inability to obtain a position as a professor was because she was Jewish or because she was a woman (Johnson & Johnson, 2008).

It is clear, women and ethnic minorities have had a difficult time entering and securing meaningful positions in the field of psychology. These challenges for women and ethnic minorities have and continue to generate

many difficulties in psychology. Historically many women who were instrumental to the study of psychology have been left out or dismissed because of the highly regarded belief that women were intellectually inferior to men. Further complicating the history of psychology is the omission of African American psychologists and the limitations that were put on them. The fact that there is limited literature on the experience of early African American psychologists suggests that the disparity and prejudice of our history with regard to African American scholars remains true still today. Much like women, the African American experience is different from the Caucasian experience and if we are to truly understand the human mind it is imperative that our field have the representation to do this effectively. I believe if we do not begin to do something to assist our ethnic minority brothers and sisters to rise above the ranks, it will continue to remain a societal belief that we are doing just fine in the area of racial equality.

(excellent conclusion)