

## **“We would not take no for an answer”: Women Psychologists and Gender Politics During World War II**

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*This essay explores the complex relationship among gender, professionalization, and ideology that developed as psychologists mobilized for World War II. Upon being excluded from mobilization plans by the male leaders of the profession, women psychologists organized the National Council of Women Psychologists to advance their interests. But while their male colleagues enjoyed new employment opportunities in the military services and government agencies, the women were confined largely to volunteer activities in their local communities. Although women psychologists succeeded in gaining representation on wartime committees and in drawing attention to their professional problems, they were unable to change the status quo in psychology. Situated in a cultural milieu that stressed the masculine nature of science, women psychologists were hampered by their own acceptance of a professional ideology of meritocratic reward, and remained ambivalent about their feminist activities.*

Throughout the 20th century women have increasingly challenged the assumption that they are neither interested in nor qualified for scientific careers. It is also true that as women successfully breached this overwhelmingly male bastion, a growing body of biological, social, and cultural arguments were advanced to rationalize their usually restricted scientific role. This was especially evident during the Second World War, as social and economic forces strained existing professional relationships.

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With the outbreak of war in Europe, American psychologists began mobilizing for the national defense. Women psychologists as well were eager to apply their special skills in the impending emergency. Although motivated by genuine patriotism, many of these women also recognized that the crisis situation provided a unique opportunity to expand their limited professional roles. It soon became apparent, however, that mobilization plans ignored the potential contributions of women psychologists. The women protested their cavalier treatment and subsequently founded the National Council of Women Psychologists (NCWP) to promote female concerns and action. Convinced that there were ways to utilize their training and experience in the war effort, these women were vociferously determined "not to take no for an answer" (Schwesinger, 1943, pp. 298–299).

Despite this feminist battle cry, individual and organizational efforts by women to secure, much less to expand, their professional sphere in psychology succeeded poorly in World War II. The military agencies and government bureaus that willingly embraced male academics proved less interested in recognizing the expertise of women psychologists. Although various organizations, including the NCWP, were successful in gaining representation for women psychologists on wartime committees and in highlighting their professional problems, they were incapable of effecting permanent social change. The "woman problem" was further compounded by wartime occupational patterns that engendered a pronounced shift towards applied research and service roles in psychology. As men moved into these previously feminine areas of psychology, women were inexorably marginalized. Rather than serving to increase their professional opportunities, the war marked a relative erosion in the status of women psychologists.

Several factors helped to account for this dismal situation. First, many of the women psychologists were ambivalent about a militantly feminist role for the NCWP. Although radicalized early by the patronizing response of their male colleagues, the women found it difficult to sustain their initial momentum in addressing issues of professional discrimination. Second, the women were products of their cultural milieu. Whatever their degree of achievement, they continued to be hampered by the belief that women lacked a scientific temperament and that women were less suited for scientific careers than men (Zuckerman & Cole, 1975). Third, as professionals, these women were guided by the ideology that science is a strictly meritocratic system, unsullied by marketplace pressures. This professional ideology operated as a powerful tool in maintaining the status quo. By the end of the war it was clear that the stereotype of the liberated woman worker, mythologized in Rosie the Riveter, did not apply to women psychologists.

This essay explores how women's issues were placed on the agenda of the psychological profession during World War II, and in particular analyzes indi-

vidual and collective responses to the professional problems of women. The role and activities of women psychologists during the war are relatively unknown. Historians of psychology have studied this topic little and only recently has an emerging cadre of feminist scholars drawn attention to its importance (Bernstein & Russo, 1974; O'Connell & Russo, 1983; Russo & O'Connell, 1980; Sexton, 1974; Stevens & Gardner, 1982; see also Kronk, 1979). Much of this later scholarship has been celebratory in tone; concentrating largely on identifying the contributions of "psychology's foremothers," these authors seek to redress the neglect of women's achievements in history books. We applaud this goal, but we also urge attention to the historical task of understanding women's experience in its broader professional and social context. This article is an attempt to outline the complex relationships between gender, professionalization, and ideology that evolved as the fluid wartime environment threatened the status quo. In doing so, we hope to further expose the processes that lead to separate spheres of activity for men and women.

### Career Patterns of Women Psychologists

During the 1920s and 1930s increasing numbers of women were making careers in psychology. One fifth of the researchers in psychology listed in the 1921 and 1938 editions of *American Men of Science* were women. Women accounted for an even larger percentage—nearly a third—of the membership in the two major professional societies, the American Psychological Association (APA) and the American Association for Applied Psychology (AAAP). By the beginning of the war, it was estimated that well over 1,000 women held graduate degrees in psychology, approximately 20–25% of the total number of psychologists and almost 27% of the doctorates in psychology (Marquis, 1944; Rossiter, 1982).

Although psychology was a highly feminized discipline, trailing only nutrition in its percentage of female scientists and zoology in its absolute number, few women managed to attain positions of leadership within professional organizations. For instance, only two women had been elected president of the APA since its founding in 1892—Mary Calkins in 1905, and Margaret Washburn in 1921. But these women achieved eminence when the APA was still a small, comparatively intimate society with fewer than 400 members; as the organization grew to nearly 3,000 members by 1940, conservative nominating committees effectively limited the chances for other women to hold elected office. By comparison, no woman had been elected president of the AAAP, and only two served on its 29-member founding board. Women were, however, better represented in the AAAP as division chairs, journal editors, and administrative officers than in the APA where they held virtually no offices (Finison & Furumoto, 1980; Mitchell, 1951; Rossiter, 1982).

The exclusionary practices of the APA extended to rank-and-file members as well. Between 1923 and 1938 the APA had experienced an extraordinary rise in female membership: from 81 women in 1923 (18% of the total) the number grew eightfold to 687 (or 30%) in 1938. Perhaps alarmed by this unprecedented influx, in 1925 several of the APA's elite, prompted by Harvard psychologist Edwin G. Boring, suggested establishing a two-tier membership with a distinguished category for fellows (originally termed *members*). Although a few of the leaders polled were concerned that a differentiated membership might give rise to jealousies and make the society "undemocratic," the majority approved the measure as a means of quality control. The associate category was subsequently introduced in 1926 with little opposition; all current APA members became fellows, but new associates interested in becoming so would have to be elected by the usually all-male council. Although no one at the time showed anxiety that the new system might affect men and women differently, by the early 1940s women psychologists finally recognized that it had operated to restrict their position within the APA. The statistical evidence was indisputable: while the percentage of women in the society had risen from 18 to 30% between 1923 and 1938, the number of women fellows rose only 1%, from 18 to 19% (Mitchell, 1951; O'Donnell, 1979; Rossiter, 1982).

The prevalent sex discrimination encountered by these women is also reflected in the dual labor market that had evolved in psychology. Male Ph.D.s tended to hold high-status jobs in university and college departments, concentrating on teaching and experimental research. Female Ph.D.s, on the other hand, were usually tracked into service-oriented positions in hospitals, clinics, courts, and schools. Discouraged and frequently prevented from pursuing academic careers, women filled the ranks of applied psychology's low-paid, low-status workers. The few women who did gain academic employment were mostly relegated to women's colleges, and to university clinics and child welfare institutes linked to departments of psychology and education (Capshew, Gillespie, & Pressman, 1983; Fernberger, 1939; Finison & Furumoto, 1980; Frith, 1939).

The limited opportunities experienced by typical women psychologists are strikingly illustrated in the career paths of Alice Bryan and Georgene Seward, two Columbia University graduate students in the 1920s. Alice Bryan (1902-) first entered Columbia through its extension division in 1918 to pursue a two-year secretarial course. In 1921 she became an instructor in the Extension Division of the United YMCA Schools, and taught correspondence courses in advertising to war veterans for the next eight years. After her marriage in 1924 she enrolled as a part-time student at Columbia, receiving a B.S. in psychology in 1929 and a Ph.D. in 1934. Despite her impressive academic credentials, for the next five years Bryan held a series of part-time jobs, mixing teaching, research, testing, and consulting until finally obtaining full-time employment as a psychologist in Columbia's School of Library Service in 1939. Although she retained her

professional identification with psychology through World War II, her career was permanently diverted into library science (Bryan, 1983).

In contrast to Bryan, Georgene Seward (1902–) followed the academic fast track in her graduate career at Columbia. She received a B.A. in 1923 after three years of study, and a Ph.D. in psychology in 1928. Her colleagues at Columbia included faculty members Leta and Harry Hollingworth, professor Gardner Murphy and his student wife Lois Barclay, and fellow students Margaret Mead and John Seward, who she married in 1927. The professional disparity often encountered in dual-career marriages helped sensitize her to gender issues. While her husband taught at Columbia, Seward's career floundered on the lower rungs of the academic ladder for a conspicuously long time. Following seven years at the rank of instructor at Barnard College, Seward moved to Connecticut College for Women in 1937, where she remained an assistant professor through the war years. Frustrated at being consigned to what she considered an institutional purgatory, Seward nonetheless struggled faithfully towards the academic mainstream in psychology (Stevens & Gardner, 1982).

Although graduate education was imbued with a professional ideology that stressed psychology's identity as an academic discipline based on experimental research, the growing need for service workers demanded the development of centers of applied training such as Columbia Teachers College and the University of Minnesota. Partly because the lower status of applied work was widely recognized, women gained unusual access to graduate training in this area. Columbia University, with its large program and supportive faculty, was perhaps the best place for a woman to pursue graduate education in psychology in the interwar period. In a 1943 survey of active professional psychologists, Columbia had granted 144 Ph.D.s in psychology to women, fully 22% of the female Ph.D. holders. At institutions with a strong experimental orientation, however, women fared poorly. Harvard University, where only five women received the Ph.D. (less than 1% of the total) may have been the worst, as the story of Mildred Mitchell suggests (Bryan & Boring, 1946).

Mildred Mitchell (1903–1983) was a high school teacher when she entered Harvard summer school in 1926 at the urging of a friend; soon afterwards she decided to stay and study for a doctorate in psychology. Although Mitchell found some encouragement for her interests in clinical and abnormal psychology through courses with Morton Prince of the Harvard Psychological Clinic and Frederic L. Wells at the Boston Psychopathic Hospital, she also encountered deeply entrenched sex discrimination. Since women were not allowed to officially enroll as Harvard students, Mitchell was forced to register at Radcliffe and pay her tuition there, despite the fact that all her classes were taken with Harvard faculty members. In her autobiography Mitchell pointedly described her treatment by Edwin Boring, who seemed to delight in erecting petty barriers for female students. For instance, Boring not only refused Mitchell a key to the

psychology laboratories, so that she had to wait for "some man with a key" in order to work in the evenings; he also insisted that when she did work at night with a male advisor, a chaperone be present. The department library and Widener Library were likewise closed to women in the evenings. Boring further impeded Mitchell's studies by barring her from the psychology colloquia because of her sex. He finally provided the catalyst for her decision to leave after she received her M.A., by disparaging Mary Whiton Calkins' refusal to accept a Radcliffe Ph.D. for doctoral work completed under William James at Harvard (Mitchell, 1983).

Mitchell continued her graduate studies at Yale University where her experience was more positive: she was immediately given a private office, along with keys to the library and laboratories, and was a welcome participant in the department colloquia. Mitchell found a helpful advisor for her hypnosis research in Clark Hull, whose arrival at Yale coincided with her own, and she completed her dissertation in 1931. However, for the next decade Mitchell held a succession of low-paying, low-status jobs in mental hospitals and clinics (Mitchell, 1983).

Each of these biographical vignettes reflects typical patterns for women psychologists who came of age in the 1920s and 1930s. While sex discrimination operated blatantly at certain institutions, it was more subtle at such educational havens as Columbia Teachers College where women were consistently channeled into clinical fields. Whatever their graduate training and intellectual promise, few women could expect regular academic employment; those who received it usually remained in low-level positions for the greater part of their careers. Most women psychologists of this generation outwardly accepted their limited professional horizons and strove to work within the discipline's biased reward system.

### **Mobilization and the Role of Women**

As war drew nearer, the normal political economy of the profession, revolving around the leadership of a few elite universities and based on an experimental philosophy, was disrupted. It was temporarily replaced by a new order shaped by government requirements and centered in Washington (Capshew, 1986b). Psychologists readily seized the opportunity to forge links with the federal government by applying esoteric knowledge to practical military concerns. Their efforts were centrally coordinated by the Emergency Committee in Psychology (ECP), formed in the fall of 1940 under the aegis of the National Research Council. Though democratic in representation, with delegates from each of the national psychological societies, the committee's original membership was all male and heavily weighted with academic scientists. The ECP rapidly assumed primary authority for mobilization plans, and through its quasi-independent Office of Psychological Personnel served as an employment agency for psychologists

seeking military and government positions. However, since war work was considered a "man's job," the possible contributions of women were overlooked (Dallenbach, 1946).

Despite some early plans that addressed their role (e.g., Paynter, 1938), the exclusion of women psychologists became glaringly obvious at the joint APA-AAAP annual meeting in September 1940 where reports on wartime activities dominated the discussions. Gladys Schwesinger, chair of the AAAP's Section of Consulting Psychology, disgustingly noted that "as the list of activities and persons rolled on, not a woman's name was mentioned, nor was any project reported in which women were to be given a part." Even worse for the action-minded women, "no promise was held that the pattern would be altered to include them." They protested but with disappointing results. Summarily ignoring their status as psychologists, the male leaders informed them that tradition favored the services of men in wartime. The women's role was to "keep the home fires burning"; the best they could expect was to "wait, weep, and comfort one another" (Schwesinger, 1943, p. 298).

Unwilling to take no for an answer, about 30 of the women met to lobby for a role in mobilization efforts. They promptly confronted Robert Brotemarkle, the AAAP representative to the Emergency Committee, with two pressing questions: Would women be omitted from the National Register of Scientific and Specialized Personnel that was being collated? And would they be represented in the Emergency Committee in Psychology (Brotemarkle, 1940)? Unfortunately, Brotemarkle could only counsel patience and, in particular, urged the women not to take independent action. Convinced that Brotemarkle would not represent their interests, the group sent Millicent Pond, an industrial psychologist from Connecticut, to plead their case directly before the ECP. Pond was listened to sympathetically, but again with no results. Instead the committee casually admonished the women "to be good girls . . . and wait until plans could be shaped up to include [them]" (Schwesinger, 1943, p. 299).

Although the group temporarily acquiesced, as the emergency situation intensified, so did their desire for action. Women psychologists realized that, while they were told to find *volunteer* work in local communities as an outlet for their patriotic zeal, large numbers of male psychologists were finding *paid* employment in the military and federal bureaucracy. At the next AAAP conference in September 1941, protests against this discrimination escalated. With a rapidly expanding market for applied psychology in the government, the women were determined to assert their established expertise. Brotemarkle met with the group once again. Anxious to stem the tide of discontent, he adamantly denied any discrimination existed in civilian emergency appointments and pleaded with them to be patient (O'Shea, 1941a; Schwesinger, 1943).

The women reluctantly agreed to wait but, by now more skeptical of the intentions of the ECP, they also organized an informal Committee on the In-

terests of Women Psychologists to act as an information clearinghouse and to explore possibilities for wartime service. Under the chairmanship of Harriet O'Shea, a school psychologist at Purdue University and president of the Indiana Association of Clinical Psychologists, the committee began a letter-writing campaign. Not only were Brigadier General Frederick Osborn, chief of the Morale Branch, and Brigadier General Wade H. Haisilip, assistant chief of staff approached about military opportunities, but Eleanor Roosevelt, an active women's rights advocate, was informed of their quandary (O'Shea, 1941b).

### *NCWP*

When by November the requested progress report was not forthcoming, the women finally lost patience with the tactics of ECP. Throughout the fall of 1941 a group of about 50 New York women psychologists had been meeting sporadically to discuss their role in the national emergency. With its high concentration of women psychologists, New York was perhaps the only place where such an ad hoc group could form. Deciding that they could (or would) no longer wait for action by the ECP, on November 11, 1941, 13 of these women met in Alice Bryan's Manhattan apartment to map out strategy for a New York chapter of what they hoped would evolve into a separate and national organization for female psychologists (O'Shea, 1942). Using O'Shea's committee, they polled women in both the APA and AAAP to determine interest and support for a professional women's group. The purpose, they claimed, was less to protest their continued exclusion from mobilization committees and government positions than to promote specific projects for women psychologists. This action marked the first serious break from male dominance of professional activities (Schwesinger, 1941).

Two weeks later, on November 29, and fully a year after the original request, the Emergency Committee appointed a subcommittee "to investigate the possible activities or services of women psychologists in the national emergency" (Tolman, 1943d, p. 53). Whether galvanized by the threat of a splinter group beyond their direct control or not, the ECP action came too late to appease women psychologists now bent on a national organization. News of Pearl Harbor, coming shortly after the initial momentum, further strengthened the women's resolve. On December 8, a call letter went out to local psychologists; on December 15, approximately 50 women met and voted to officially organize the NCWP (Armstrong, 1946; Schwesinger, 1943).

Over the next few months the Organizing Committee was actively engaged in developing a national membership, in nominating officers, in drafting a preliminary constitution, in soliciting local chapters, and in general planning an agenda for the growing society. But the spontaneous feminist impulse that prompted the group's founding was soon tempered by the realities of the status

hierarchy of the psychological profession. Men's peacetime domination of the profession was significantly enhanced in wartime through their virtual monopoly of important advisory and supervisory posts in military and civilian government agencies. Adopting a conciliatory strategy, the women leaders stated that "this organization should not be militant-suffragist in tone . . . [and] without stress on the fact that it is a one-sex group" (Schwesinger, 1941).

This policy was implemented, at least in part, with the selection of Florence Goodenough (1886–1959) as the first president of the NCWP. Goodenough, a respected child psychologist at the University of Minnesota and protégé of Lewis Terman, was a zealous worker whose career had followed the "Madame Curie strategy" of overcompensation. Fortunate to obtain academic employment, she not only became an excellent teacher but pursued an extensive program of research, concentrating on clinical methods and techniques. Her widely used Draw-A-Man Test, and unique position as the only active female psychologist starred in *American Men of Science*, contributed to her formidable scientific reputation. Goodenough's election as president served a dual purpose: her high professional visibility and outstanding reputation could give the new group scientific legitimation, while her accommodating manner and nonmilitant views made her a noncontroversial choice (A. I. Bryan, personal communication, January 18, 1984; Wolf, 1980).

There is little evidence that Goodenough was particularly interested in the NCWP and its activities—indeed she even hoped for its "early demise," since psychologists should not be differentiated by sex. Goodenough's greatest concern was that the organization might be perceived as "advancing the cause of WOMAN, come hell or high water." Although willing to lend her name to an action group that would sponsor psychological services in neglected areas, she was not interested in promoting women's issues. Goodenough's high level of professional achievement may have shaped her uncompromising stance towards claims of sex discrimination in psychology. Eminently successful herself, she was unwilling or incapable of recognizing a sex bias, often stating, "I am a psychologist, not a *woman* psychologist" (Goodenough, no date; Stevens & Gardner, 1982, p. 195).

Not all NCWP members shared Goodenough's attitude regarding professional discrimination. Many women psychologists in the early 1940s were beginning to recognize the subtle and not so subtle discriminatory practices in academic appointments and professional life. The pointedly exclusionary wartime practices, however, served to transform isolated grumblings into a call for feminist action. Unlike Goodenough and her supporters, this core group of activists wished for an organization that would represent women's causes.

The differences of opinion among the women are evident in discussions about the goals and agendas of the NCWP. Although the purported aim of the new organization was to offer the *wartime* services of women psychologists,

particularly to local communities, some of the members sought a more expanded role for their frustrated energies. Thus when the NCWP constitution and bylaws were subsequently drafted, fully 20% of the women refused to accept a clause calling for the group's disbandment after the war (Armstrong, 1946). Their concerns transcended the immediate problems of mobilizing women psychologists and addressed the wider issue of their role within the scientific community. The action was especially significant because it implied that the "woman problem" was not simply a product of the unusual emergency conditions; it was equally problematic in peacetime.

Despite the ambivalence concerning roles and functions, the NCWP quickly gained prominence as a national organization. By the middle of 1942 the group had approximately 234 female members, all with doctorates, and four local chapters in New York, Rockland County (New York), Philadelphia, and Boston. Its political power was also acknowledged later on by invitations to send delegates to the Intersociety Constitutional Convention, engaged in reorganizing the APA, and to the powerful Emergency Committee in Psychology (Armstrong, 1946; Schwesinger, 1943).

The NCWP clearly posed a challenge to the hegemony of the predominantly male experimental establishment. If not exactly threatened by a women's group that focused attention on the question of discrimination, male psychologists were certainly made uncomfortable. While it would be overstating the case to argue that a concerted strategy was developed to counter the women's attack, the unofficial diplomacy that did evolve was aimed at deflating the issue. As it turned out, one of the most effective avenues for expressing the male viewpoint was through the Subcommittee on the Services of Women Psychologists.

### *The Subcommittee on the Services of Women Psychologists*

The Subcommittee was headed by Ruth S. Tolman (1893–1957), wife of prominent CalTech physicist Richard Chace Tolman, and a psychological examiner for the Los Angeles County Probation Department prior to the war. Like many other female psychologists, Tolman's career evolved in slow stages. After receiving a baccalaureate from the University of California in 1917, she spent the next 15 years teaching psychology in a succession of small colleges in the Los Angeles area. In middle age she returned to Berkeley for graduate work and received a Ph.D. in 1937 in the department headed by her brother-in-law, psychologist Edward C. Tolman. She moved to Washington in 1941 with her husband who was vice-chairman of the powerful National Defense Research Committee, and subsequently obtained employment with social psychologist Rensis Likert in the Department of Agriculture's Division of Program Surveys. Her Washington location, and more important, her moderate stance made Tolman a natural choice to head the subcommittee (A. I. Bryan, personal communication,

January 18, 1984). Chauncey M. Louttit, who offered Tolman the chair, confirmed this impression: “. . . she has no personal axe to grind nor is she neurotically concerned over the supposed discrimination” (Louttit, 1941).

The other members of the subcommittee, purportedly chosen with a view to broad regional representation, included seven women and two men (Tolman, 1943d). Far from being a radical group, the majority of the female members, with the exception of Alice Bryan and Harriet O’Shea, both active leaders of the NCWP, were conservative psychologists who had openly voiced their reservations about a separate women’s organization. The two men, C. M. Louttit and Steuart Henderson Britt, were driving forces behind the Subcommittee on the Listing of Personnel in Psychology and later the Office of Psychological Personnel, which had been major points of contention in debates regarding the exclusion of women from mobilization efforts. When the subcommittee met for the first time in January 1942, almost two months after its founding, its main order of business was to obtain details about the agenda and activities of the NCWP, and to determine what relationship would exist between the two groups (Tolman, 1941). Since the NCWP was to be an action group, the subcommittee, not to duplicate efforts, regarded itself as a fact-finding and advisory organization—advisory especially with respect to the NCWP (SSWP, 1942). In many ways it would act as a watchdog group, and when necessary, interject a cautionary note into the proceedings of the more radical council.

The tensions generated by the charges of sex discrimination and by the establishment of a national women’s organization were readily apparent in discussions at the January meeting. Louttit, for instance, immediately sought to defuse the issue by emphasizing the local nature of the NCWP’s activities rather than its status as a one-sex group. Community work, he noted, could “be the implementation of a lot of things if it can get organized with the proper local representation.” Leaving no doubt as to his definition of “proper,” however, Louttit also counseled the NCWP to “welcome or even ask for help of the men in the local groups.” At every turn, the women were subtly discouraged from pursuing collective action. Even Ross G. Harrison, chairman of the National Research Council, while briefly attending the meeting, expressed his disapproval of separate women’s groups. Asked if women doctors were doing anything, he took the opportunity to admonish them: “I think not, except as doctors. I confess that when I first heard of this committee I was somewhat astonished, because I had thought of psychologists, both men and women, in these days” (SSWP, 1942).

The male committee members were particularly interested in deflecting accusations of sex discrimination. Having allowed the women’s grievances to escalate to the point of militancy, male psychologists were now forced, at least on the rhetorical level, to confront the issue. Although not a member of the subcommittee, Karl Dallenbach, chairman of the ECP, also attended the meeting

and boldly raised the subject for discussion. Defensive about attacks on the ECP, Dallenbach adamantly "insisted that there has been no discrimination against women and that the committee is dealing with psychologists regardless of whether they be men or women." Implying that the charges had grown out of ignorance, he announced plans for a circular letter to explain the functions of the National Research Council and its Emergency Committee in Psychology. Dallenbach saw no need for an national organization to deal with women's problems. Although his attitude was generally magnanimous, Dallenbach was not above hinting at the ominous consequences that would result from segregated activities:

If the women want it, let them have it. God bless them! But I think it is too bad, because I feel that there is no restriction on a woman anywhere in the profession. I think you are raising a sex difference that is bound to have reverberations. Once you set up the difference, it will have to be accepted. (SSWP, 1942)

The remaining male committee member, Stuart Britt, when requested to address the group, also chose to speak on sexism. Britt had just come from a meeting considering wartime requirements for manpower in which, he pointedly added, "the term 'manpower' was used in the generic sense." His report specifically criticized women psychologists for their intemperate claims of discrimination:

During the last few weeks, since December 7th, the work of our Subcommittee on the Listing of Personnel in Psychology has increased enormously, so that hundreds of psychologists have written in, asking for advice. Most of these have been men and they have said, "What can I do?" We are not able to tell them specifically, but when we say the same thing to women, some of them claim that they are being discriminated against. . . . I have not seen any discrimination, except in the military situation, where women could not fit into the picture. . . . If we can work on our jobs during the emergency, I think it will have to be as *psychologists*. . . . I think sometimes women defeat their own purposes by speaking of themselves as women, instead of as scientists. (SSWP, 1942)

Britt had introduced a new dimension into the debate. Unlike the blustering denials of his colleagues, Britt invoked professional ideology as a means of maintaining the status quo. By appealing to the women's identity as scientists, he was skillfully pressuring them to rise above divisive polemics.

It is difficult to gauge what impact the men's words had on the women, or what indirect effect it had on the policies of the NCWP. At the time, however, Theodora Abel agreed that with so much work waiting to be done, it was "unfortunate to spend any time in the matter of discrimination" and Helen Peak conceded that "it might be better . . . including men for action organization." Even Alice Bryan, the *de facto* spokesperson for the NCWP, kept reiterating that it was solely an emergency organization that would disappear after the war (SSWP, 1942).

Given the conservative leanings of most of the women members, and the active discouragement of the male members, it is hardly surprising that the subcommittee accomplished little in the way of redressing the status of women psychologists. The subcommittee served mainly as an information clearinghouse, collating data on work being done, investigating areas in which women psychologists could potentially be utilized, and appointing special committees to develop war-related psychological materials. In this they relied heavily on the womanpower of the NCWP. By August 1943, feeling they had discharged their duty and believing their function no longer necessary, the subcommittee recommended its own disbandment (Dallenbach, 1946; Tolman, 1943e).

The NCWP thus became the only group devoted to the professional advancement of women psychologists throughout the war years. As it turned out, however, the projects promoted by the group fell short of many of the original aspirations. By electing to concentrate on civilian work, the women had delimited the arena of their possible activities to the margins of war preparation. This of course should not detract from the valuable contributions made. Cooperating closely with local agencies, the women coordinated their efforts in a variety of areas, including psychological testing for local selective service boards, provision of child care for working parents, mobilization and training of nursery school workers, evaluation and placement of volunteers in civilian defense agencies, occupational testing, and the selection of women officer candidates. The NCWP also provided lecturers to interested lay audiences and developed channels of communication as well as resources for those on the home front. For instance, the NCWP Committee on Publications issued numerous, widely circulated course guides and outlines for public consumption. Like most NCWP projects, the outlines were aimed at solving community problems such as training leaders of discussion groups, countering the emotional strain in school teachers, encouraging babies to eat normally in wartime conditions, and giving "Psychological First Aid" to civilians (Armstrong, 1946; Schwesinger, 1943; Tolman, 1943b, 1943c).

On the other hand, various areas of endeavor that could have expanded the women's professional role were neglected. Because they preferred a simple, flexible organization that could quickly act as needed, psychological research projects were, for the most part, tabled. For similar reasons the NCWP leaders decided not to protest women's continued exclusion from War Department work. But more damaging perhaps, in terms of postwar employment status, was the NCWP's inability to place women in jobs vacated by male academics and clinicians. As growing numbers of male psychologists entered the armed services, women eagerly anticipated stepping into positions and roles previously denied them. Unfortunately, this major priority became increasingly subsumed in the hectic schedule of civilian service. So although women found an important

niche in wartime activities, as an organized group their expertise remained restricted to the traditional sphere of women's work.

### *Individual Responses*

Collective action, however, was just one avenue explored by women psychologists in their attempt to mobilize for war. On an individual basis they continued to confront the status quo. Working independently, some women tried to change the system through timely research projects and direct action.

Georgene Seward, for example, used her research to buttress arguments against gender-role stereotyping and sex discrimination. Her scientific work on sex roles and behavior followed an established tradition of feminist scholarship, especially in the field of sex differences pioneered by Helen Thompson Woolley and her former Columbia professor, Leta Stetter Hollingworth. Seward's feminist concerns had earlier led to a series of studies on the female menstrual cycle and its effects on performance (Seward, 1934). With the influx of women workers into the labor force during the war, substantial concern was expressed over their fitness to perform men's work, particularly during the menstrual cycle. Defending women's new roles, Seward made an exhaustive survey of the scientific evidence and came to the conclusion that there was little demonstrable relation between menstruation and efficiency. The effects that had been observed, she argued, were based on cultural stereotypes of female behavior, not on physiological or psychological evidence (Seward, 1944b).

Other women psychologists, preferring direct participation, daringly challenged and entered what was perhaps the most traditional male institution in American society—the military. One of the first to do so was Mildred Mitchell, by then an experienced combatant in gender politics. In 1942 Mitchell, an employee of the Minnesota State Bureau of Psychological Services, took the first Women's Army Corps examination offered in the state. Discovering that she would not be called up immediately, she looked instead to the Navy. Mitchell was allowed to enlist, but not without prejudicial treatment; while she was commissioned as a lieutenant, her former male student colleagues at Harvard and Yale were commissioned as lieutenant commanders. Mitchell's wartime work in clinical and personnel psychology in various Navy departments made her part of an extensive and increasingly significant network. After the war Mitchell was able to translate her experiences into higher status positions as a senior psychologist in various Veterans Administration centers. Her postwar career clearly highlighted the importance of military and government service roles in the professional development of psychology (Mitchell, 1983).

Mitchell was one of the fortunate few. By the end of the war in 1945, less than 40 women psychologists had served in the U.S. armed forces, compared to

over 1,000 of their male counterparts. Of those women, only 20 were used as military psychologists (Andrews & Dreese, 1948). Women psychologists did find a niche for their professional expertise in war service—one largely confined to the home front.

### Confronting the “Woman Problem”

Despite many trials and tribulations, female psychologists prevailed in drawing attention to their professional role and status. As the war progressed, the behind-the-scenes dialogue evolved into a public debate spearheaded by the unlikely duo of Alice Bryan and Edwin Boring.

Bryan had achieved striking personal success early in the emergency. Her reputation as a team worker and her network of professional contacts combined to make her one of the most highly visible women in psychology’s professional affairs. Not only had she served as executive secretary of the AAAP since 1940, and as a member of the NCWP governing board and the Subcommittee on Services of Women Psychologists, but she also became the NCWP’s elected representative to the ECP. In 1942 Robert Yerkes invited her to serve on the ECP Subcommittee on Survey and Planning that orchestrated the reformation of the American Psychological Association; Bryan was the only woman in this powerful group. It was through her work in this committee that she became acquainted with Boring.

Boring and other male committee members had been piqued by Bryan’s repeated assertion that women did not have proportionate representation in APA offices. After a careful examination of membership data, however, he admitted to Bryan that “the table bears out your original thesis, contradicting the prediction of Britt, Marquis, [both of the Office of Psychological Personnel] and me” (Boring, 1944a). Although it would be difficult to portray Boring as a reformed character, on an *individual* basis at least he was more sensitive to the plight of female professionals than he had earlier demonstrated in the case of Mildred Mitchell. In the intervening years Boring had seen his wife, a Ph.D. in psychology, subordinate her career to his, and was deeply affected when his older sister Alice, a teacher, returned to the United States from enemy Japan with no prospects and her life’s work destroyed (Boring, 1943). Yet Boring was also psychology’s self-appointed gadfly: extraordinarily concerned with the discipline’s public image, no professional or scientific issue escaped his consideration. His interest fully aroused, Boring asked Bryan to collaborate on an empirical study of the activities and status of women psychologists. Their research resulted in three key articles published between 1944 and 1947 (Bryan & Boring, 1944, 1946, 1947).

While Bryan and Boring both agreed that “something ought . . . to be done

about women in American psychology," they approached the problem from opposite perspectives (Bryan & Boring, 1944, p. 447). In his autobiography Boring confessed that

I initiated that [collaboration with Alice Bryan] because she was a feminist who saw women as denied their professional rights, and I was on the other side thinking that women themselves for both biological and cultural reasons determined most of the conditions about which she complained. I thought that joint study by the two of us was the way to cancel out prejudices and leave the truth revealed. (1961, p. 72)

Given Boring's stated bias, it is not surprising that he saw his responsibility in this partnership to "tone down" Bryan's feminist vehemence into "humorous description" (Boring, 1944b).

According to Boring, he and Bryan made a very good team—she had "indefatigable drive" for the topic and he could effectively moderate her position (Boring, 1944b). Drawing on data obtained from an Office of Psychological Personnel questionnaire to over 4,500 psychologists they found, among other things, that full-time employment of women psychologists did not increase during the war, and that unemployment actually increased. Contrary to popular opinion, women did not replace men in teaching positions: although there were some 400 fewer male university and college teachers in 1944 than in 1940, the number of female professors remained almost static. Furthermore, while male Ph.D.s retained a median salary advantage of 20% over female Ph.D.s during the period, the salary gap between male and female non-Ph.D.s increased. In concluding their second article, Bryan and Boring suggested that complaints of sex discrimination are based more on "monetary compensation than upon the nature of the jobs in which they find themselves" and claimed that proper compensation would dissolve sex prejudice. They sidestepped the issue of why certain jobs were better paid than others and how women were tracked into them by citing sex differences in occupational interests formed by tradition and culture (Bryan & Boring, 1946).

The divergent viewpoints of Bryan and Boring, never fully acknowledged in the articles, help account for the inconclusive and dispassionate tone of their analysis. In private, at least, the partnership was increasingly fraught with tension. Just three weeks after writing that the joint venture "had worked splendidly," and that they were ready to make a definite statement regarding women's professional status, Boring confessed he was running into criticism from career women, including Bryan (Boring, 1946b,c). At root of the controversy was Boring's strongly worded and widely circulated draft of the woman paper, known as the "purple copy" because of the color of its mimeograph ink (Boring, 1946a). Women psychologists accused Boring of only presenting material that would support his conservative theories while ignoring opposing evidence; he charged them with emotionalism and lack of objectivity (Boring, 1946c). The

controversy split along gender lines and even sympathetic male psychologists like Robert Sears sided with Boring:

Having been married to an active professional wife for fifteen years, and having been thoroughly sympathetic with women's problems during that time, and during the last four years having been director of an organization [Iowa Child Welfare Research Station] which is heavily loaded with women on the professional and student staff, I still think you have stated the situation very soundly. (Sears, 1946; see also Sherif, 1979).

The outcome of this conflict was that Boring and Bryan edited the paper and toned down its scientific ideology. Surprised at the compromise, Dael Wolfle, editor of the *American Psychologist*, apparently called Boring to ask if Bryan was "double-crossing" him (Boring, 1946d).

Boring had constructed a scientific rationale based on cultural and biological determinism to account for and legitimate women's lower professional status. He and other male psychologists were unwilling to view the "woman problem" in terms of discrimination, which they vigorously and persistently denied. Instead they saw the unequal representation of women in high-status positions as a function of the relative lack of prestige of professional work compared to scientific work. Since status is dependent on prestige, Boring argued, and for biological and cultural reasons women do not have the qualifications for gaining prestige, then in a meritorious system such as science they will remain in lower level positions (Boring, 1946a, 1951a,b; Handrick, 1948).

Boring later acknowledged that his plan—that "by intimate discussion" he and Alice Bryan should "come into agreement" regarding women's problems—had not worked. Both had remained steadfast in their values and positions, with the result that their papers lacked decisive explanations and conclusions. Although they conveyed the magnitude and complexity of the problem, their fundamental disagreement forced them to "compromise or retreat to description of fact" rather than propose any specific solutions or recommendations (Boring, 1961, p. 185). Boring was "still crazy to do something positive on this issue," especially in light of the emotion it had generated (Boring, 1946d). Dissatisfied with the outcome of the project, he arrogantly concluded: "The truth, however, was still left masked by compromises, until, some time after the collaboration was over, I published my own paper on the woman problem and felt that I had now said my own last word, even if not the very last one" (Boring, 1961, p. 72).

Boring's 1951 paper, prompted by Mildred Mitchell's (1951) feminist diatribe about the status of women psychologists, presented his previous theories in their unadulterated form. Conveniently broadening the debate from one affecting only women to one of social dynamics, Boring linked women's issues to the "great man in history" problem. By pointing out the universality of history's injustice to rank-and-file scientific workers, he may have intended to lessen the significance (and consequently the impact) of the women's complaints. In his

inimitable style Boring also offered an explanation for the continuing low status of women in the profession, emphasizing their lack of productivity and inability to work the legendary 80-hour work week that he considered the Harvard norm. The woman problem was thus a problem of "job-concentration"; it existed because of the competition of "fanatics" (i.e., workaholics). This was not sex prejudice at all, he claimed, but realism. Boring's parting advice to women seeking higher prestige and status was (1) to write books, preferably with general not applied themes; and (2) to consider the effect of marriage. Although in his paper Boring carefully implied that marriage may not be an asset to the professionally ambitious woman, he was devastatingly blunt in private:

If married, they have more divided allegiance than the man. If unmarried, they have conflict about being unmarried (although I did not say that. It seemed too infuriating to say.) (Boring, 1951c)

For Boring, the woman problem hinged not on any identifiable discrimination but on mechanisms of acquiring prestige: although women faced some cultural limitations, these were not insurmountable (Boring, 1951a).

### **The Politics of Gender**

Boring may indeed have had the last word on the subject. His article marked the end of a period of public discussion over the role of women psychologists that had begun over a decade before with the outbreak of World War II. This is not to suggest that the question had been resolved, but simply that it faded from professional consciousness. Between 1946 and the Mitchell-Boring finale in 1951, only two articles concerning women had appeared in psychological journals—one, a postwar survey of their "work, training, and professional opportunities" (Fjeld & Ames, 1950), the other, a sarcastic account of one woman's job search (Loevinger, 1948). After the war, the NCWP also receded from its coordinating role. Although a number of feminist psychologists pressed for its continuance, in 1947 the NCWP became the International Council of Women Psychologists, its purpose totally transmuted to "further international understanding by promoting intercultural relations to practical applications of psychology" (Portenier, 1967, p. 23; Carrington, 1952).

In analyzing women psychologists' short-lived response to professional discrimination, the NCWP presents certain contradictions. Why, for instance, did an organization committed to expanding the horizons of women psychologists choose to dedicate itself to what was obviously "women's work?" Although it is difficult to second-guess the motives of the NCWP organizers, several interpretations can be placed on their deliberately circumscribed role. A harsh critic could argue that rather than disclosing any feminist agenda, the group's policies betray a defensive mentality. With men entering applied fields

through government and military employment, the women may have simply been trying to protect their claims to such "feminine turf" (Finison & Furumoto, 1978). A generous critic might suggest that the NCWP had cleverly restricted its program to neglected and nonthreatening activities. Once established in wartime work—their foot in the door—the women could more easily infiltrate other areas. A third interpretation, and perhaps the most likely, strikes a balance between the previous two. The creation of the NCWP was a gentlewomanly protest against being ignored as professionals. As such it formed the reluctant and ambivalent core of an effort to reform psychology along feminist lines. With the onset of the emergency situation, the women asked only that they be treated as psychologists. But faced with the prospect of exclusion from significant war work and treated discourteously, they were swept into independent and anomalous action that had wider feminist implications. Looking back, Alice Bryan astutely noted that

had the dominant male members [of the AAAP and APA] been sufficiently skillful as psychologists, they would have kept the women informed, about progress toward organizing the profession to aid in the war effort, and assured them that they would be participants. Instead, the women were put off and told to be "good girls" and "to be quiet." (Robert Brotemarkle was the "representative" who mishandled this situation by putting the women off and putting them down.) If the women had been treated with proper deference and quickly given some low status appointments on the subcommittees of the EC, the National Council of Women Psychologists would never have been organized. (A. I. Bryan, personal communication, December 22, 1984)

The women's subsequent actions reflect a complex mixture of consciousness raising and conservatism. The fluid wartime environment had provided women with an opportunity to vocalize concerns about discrimination that had long gone unstated. Their ambivalence regarding this role, however, was expressed by limiting the scope of their work and in electing noncontroversial representatives like Florence Goodenough and Ruth Tolman. Tolman, in particular, may not have had a realistic understanding of the discrimination operating against many of her female colleagues. While she faced the indignity of a succession of low-paying positions in small colleges before achieving career stability and status in middle age, she was never at the margins of the scientific community. As the wife of Richard Tolman and sister-in-law of Edward Tolman, she developed intimate if "unofficial" contact with members of the scientific elite. Her central position in this stimulating environment may have given her a distorted perspective on the status of women psychologists. Tolman may in fact be the exception to Boring's rule that marriage hurts the careers of professional women. As chairman of the Subcommittee on the Services of Women Psychologists, Tolman worked conscientiously to promote projects for women. Nonetheless, habits of deference were hard to overcome and after the disbandment of the subcommittee she wrote Louttit: "I feel that your male influence probably saved us from many a folly!" (Tolman, 1943a).

But while this describes women's ambivalence during the war years, it does not explain it. To do so one must refer to the social and cultural context. Although the wartime environment had allowed American women access to many traditionally male occupations, it was seen as a temporary necessity. There was no awareness of women's rights and women were expected to relinquish their places to the returning servicemen. In this unresponsive atmosphere, women psychologists found little support or encouragement for a feminist agenda. Even SPSSI, the most activist group in mainstream psychology, failed to recognize the woman problem as a contemporary issue in need of social reform. Not until late 1943, after the repeated solicitations of its women members, did the group respond by forming a Committee on Roles of Men and Women in Postwar Society. This represented SPSSI's first foray into the area of gender issues; its previous programs had been focused around such social problems as labor unrest and racial prejudice.

The activities of this committee were coordinated with the NCWP's Committee on Postwar Planning for Women. Under the leadership of Georgene Seward, the nucleus of the group consisted of Catharine Patrick, Elizabeth Duffy, and Gertrude Hildreth (Seward, 1943). Despite Seward's ambitious plans and the committee's joint sponsorship, it retained low visibility. Gordon Allport, president of SPSSI, admitted to having no idea of the group's objectives (Allport, 1943). Seward continued to formulate the woman problem in scientific research terms. Convinced that the issue was "much broader and deeper than the old 'women's rights,' or jobs for women," its solution, she argued, would "rest upon changing certain entrenched social attitudes" (Seward, 1944a). Besides contributing a review of biological and cultural determinants of sex roles and behavior, Seward outlined desirable changes in postwar sex roles, including the restoration of the father as a functional member of the family, and an educational and cultural "renaissance" for women in society (Seward, 1944c). This article, however, was the sole tangible product of the committee. The committee disappeared without a trace after 1944, although Seward continued her own work on gender issues (Seward 1946; Seward & Clark, 1945; Stevens & Gardner, 1982). Even in a liberal association such as SPSSI, the postwar cultural milieu was uncondusive for the promotion of reforms affecting women.

But perhaps more than this negative climate, an entrenched professional and scientific ideology contributed to the ambivalence of women psychologists. Ironically, the low goals set by women's organizations during the war period may be taken as an indicator of their high degree of professionalization. Thoroughly socialized by an elite scientific and professional ideology, the majority of women psychologists found it more palatable to attribute their low status to low achievement than to any conscious discrimination. Since all "objective data" pointed to women's preference for applied work while the scientific value system accorded higher prestige to theoretical and experimental research, women psychologists

may have conceded a certain justification for their lower status. The women had yet to develop an identity for themselves as a group whose collective experiences would point to a pattern of professional discrimination. They would have had no difficulty with Tolman's comment that ". . . I always find it hard to abstract "being a woman" from being a particular woman and tend to hold responsible my particular idiosyncrasies rather than my sex for the arrangements of my life" (Tolman, 1946).

In this context Boring's treatment of the woman problem, with its conscientious development of a scientific protocol, merely served to remind women of what they had already internalized. Reinforcement for strict adherence to these ideologies and norms came from the women themselves. Hence Florence Goodenough berated her colleagues:

It seems likely that opportunities will not be lacking for women psychologists who take their profession seriously, who are willing to compete with men on an equal basis without demanding special consideration, and who will accept the fact that no amount of faithful work on problems of little importance can compensate for lack of major scientific contribution. Women must cease to rationalize about lack of professional opportunity and demonstrate their competence by actual achievement. Opportunities will expand for those who exert the necessary propulsive force. (Goodenough, 1944, p. 712)

Like Goodenough, many women psychologists were willing to believe that, in the value-free world of science, merit would be the only measure by which both women and men would advance. This idealistic doctrine consequently was a powerful mechanism for maintaining the status quo and limiting the agitation to a few radical women.

The women who raised their voices in protest deserve to be celebrated for their action. That they did so under adverse social and cultural conditions is to their further credit. But though they succeeded in highlighting the problems of women and in exposing inequities in professional appointments, these early feminists could not effect lasting structural changes. Without extracting a widespread commitment from the discipline to redress women's status, surveys and rhetoric could do little to solve the problem. The impetus to reform needed the challenge of more militant groups that would make feminist protest their first priority. In the supportive social context of the 1960s, with its growing emphasis on women's liberation, female psychologists founded the Association for Women Psychologists in 1969. Since then it has had a significant impact in eliminating the discrimination uncovered by women in the 1940s (Sexton, 1974). As to a final resolution of the woman problem, we should heed Alice Bryan's advice that "it has not yet been fully resolved in this profession and perhaps never will be as long as it is viewed under that rubric rather than as part of the larger issue of sex-related roles in a democratic society" (A. I. Bryan, personal communication, January 12, 1984).

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