

Changes in Psychology of Women and Psychology of Gender Textbooks (1975–2010)

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Abstract In this section, four authors contributed their thoughts on how writing textbooks on the psychology of women and gender has changed over the last 35 years. The introduction summarizes common themes in these reflections: the explosion in research and theory about women and gender; increased inclusion of diversity and intersectionality; increased appreciation of the power of the social context and power itself; the challenge of keeping a feminist perspective; changes in the student population; and changes in the publishing industry. Some comments about the future of the field are included.

Keywords Gender · Feminism · Teaching · Activism · Textbooks · History

In honor of the 35th anniversary of *Sex Roles*, I asked four authors of psychology of women and gender textbooks (Hilary Lips, Margaret Matlin, Rhoda Unger, Jan Yoder) to reflect on how their books and the field have changed over that time period. Specifically, I asked each to answer the following questions:

- Why (and when) did you first write your textbook?
- How often (and/or how many times) have you revised your text?
- How has your textbook changed over time?
- What do you see as the biggest changes in the field over the last 35 years?
- What are the biggest challenges you face as a textbook author in this field?
- What changes do you foresee in the field in the next 35 years?

What follows are four very thoughtful reflections, each written in the author's unique voice. Unger's (2010) article, in particular, provides a very useful history of textbooks in this field. Despite the individualized perspective, there are several common themes. My own experience publishing three editions of a textbook on gender (Basow 1980, 1986, 1992) supports these themes.

The first theme is the enormous increase in research studies and books on the psychology of women and gender. Every author comments on the explosion of research in this area, and the attendant challenges of keeping up with the literature. As Matlin (2010) notes, from 1975 to 2009 the number of publications on the psychology of women and gender have increased 10-fold. When I was writing my first textbook on gender in the late 1970s, I felt that I was abreast of the field. By the time of my 3rd edition in 1992, I no longer could possibly read all that had been written. Indeed, this increasing volume of research was a major reason I decided against doing a 4th edition; I simply couldn't keep up.

Another common theme among the authors in this section is the increased recognition and appreciation of diversity. The early textbooks reflected the research base and focused mainly on white heterosexual women. Over time, that focus has broadened and deepened in recognition of the diverse aspects of individual identity: race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and so on. Unger (2010) points out how early texts, if they included information on non-majority women, put that information in separate chapters. Current texts attempt to integrate diversity throughout the chapters. Still, as many authors note, the field still has a long way to go to be truly representative of the diversity among women.

Related to the increased recognition of how gender intersects with other aspects of one's identity is the increased appreciation of the power of the social context,

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and the ways in which gender itself is associated with power. Although only two of the authors in the group were trained as social psychologists (Lips, Yoder), the other two clearly developed a social psychological perspective. While early texts often focused on internal causes of gendered behavior, later ones increasingly emphasized the importance of social factors. This was reflected in the shift from using “sex” to using “gender” to refer to comparisons between men and women. Due to Unger’s influential 1979 article, the term *sex* was mainly used to refer to biological distinctions, while *gender* referred to the social meaning of the biological distinction. This changing emphasis in the field can be seen in my book titles: my 1980 book was titled, *Sex-Role Stereotypes: Traditions and Alternatives*; the 2nd edition (1986) was titled, *Gender Stereotypes: Traditions and Alternatives*; and the 3rd edition (1992) was titled, *Gender: Stereotypes and Roles*. Lips (2010) describes moving from her first title, *The Psychology of Sex Differences* (Lips and Colwill 1978) to her later title, *Sex and Gender* (Lips 2008). Indeed, publishers may even have insisted on adding the term “gender” to traditional psychology of women textbooks to broaden their appeal (Yoder 2010).

A fourth theme is the effect of the author’s own feminist beliefs in the decision to write a textbook and the form such a book would take. All of the authors in this section were part of the second wave of the women’s movement that swept the country from the late 1960s to the late 1970s. Most were teaching courses on the psychology of women and/or gender in the early 1970s. For all of us, writing a textbook on the psychology of women and/or gender was an attempt to effect social change in society by debunking gender stereotypes and promoting the equality of women and men. Yoder (2010) is particularly clear about the importance of incorporating a social change perspective in her textbooks.

Student populations also have changed in the last 35 years. Lips (2010) describes changes in students’ preferences for accessing information (e.g., electronically) as well as a decrease in students self-identification as feminists and a tendency to see gender-based discrimination as a thing of the past. Yoder (2010) emphasizes these differences in the student population as well, using empirical data to suggest an increasing focus on individual rather than collective empowerment among students.

The publishing world also has changed dramatically in the last 35 years. Not only has the digital revolution

affected textbook sales, but it also has led to a demand for ever more ancillary material (powerpoint slides, websites, links, activities, study guides, test questions) and more frequent revisions. Larger companies have taken over smaller ones, bringing with it decreased attention paid to authors and their individual works. Several writers (Lips 2010; Matlin 2010) describe working with a constantly changing cast of editors. In several cases, publishers were disinclined to encourage future editions (Lips 2010), or requested changes to make them less “political” (Yoder 2010). For example, my publisher (Wadsworth) rejected my attempt to subtitle any of my texts “*A Feminist Perspective*” for fear of losing adoptions.

In the next 35 years, the field is likely to further emphasize intersectionality (Matlin 2010; Unger 2010), interdisciplinarity (Lips 2010), and a cross-cultural perspective (Unger 2010). Ensuring that the psychology of women and men continues to include a feminist perspective and an appreciation of how power is interwoven with gender assumptions will continue to be a challenge (Unger 2010; Yoder 2010). Because the struggle for equality is a long-term one, it is important to celebrate small victories, as Matlin notes. Among them is the 35th anniversary of this journal. Congratulations, *Sex Roles*!

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