

FOREWORD

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At the celebration of my 40th birthday this year, I was with some relatives and developmental psychologists who seemed to think it was time for my life review!! I was asked about the various positions I've held and what, if anything, I miss about being in academia full time.

I remember saying without hesitation that I missed teaching the Psychology of Women course at Hunter College, for it was there I got spoiled. My friends and family thought it was a peculiar comment to make and wanted me to explain. I began my answer by noting that at Hunter 73 percent of its nineteen thousand students are women, and 54 percent of the student population are minorities, with the largest minority representation being African American non-Hispanic, with Hispanic and Asian or Pacific Islander next. I then went on to tell my guests how concerned I was when I went to Hunter in the fall of 1986, following my being at Kent State University: The text and readings I had ordered for the Psychology of Women course had nothing to do with the lives of the women who were sitting with me around the circle. These women, and the hundreds of women who participated in my Psychology of Women courses for six years at Hunter, taught me the real Psychology of Women.

They taught me to question paradigms in my own research on women's career development, especially sexual harassment, and to work with them to re-envision a diverse reality. As a requirement for the course, I would often ask students to write a term paper on an issue related to the diversity of women's experiences and then compile their papers into a textbook that was

given to all students at the end of the semester. Many women students who had this “textbook” on the “real psychology of women” have written to me over the years to tell me how this collection of term papers has served as a resource guide, a “paper mentor,” a help to them when they were going through various life stages and experiences, especially concerning their career development, relationships with women and with men, and changing relationships with their aging parents.

In my work as a consultant to businesses and campuses, I have been working on balancing policies, grievance procedures, and curricula for diversity. And, as a Legislative Advisor on Women’s Issues to a member of the New York State Assembly, I try very hard to be vigilant in remembering all that the women minority students at Hunter taught me about race, class, and ethnicity when I share opinions, research findings, and theories of an issue related to a bill currently under debate.

Joan Chrisler and Alyce Hemstreet have provided us with a wonderful opportunity to rethink the psychology of women with their edited volume, *Variations on a Theme: Diversity and the Psychology of Women*. This text is written with caring and compassion for women that nurtures our spirit. It will serve as a useful guide for understanding similarities and valuing diversities, or as Johnetta Cole’s book states in its title, “the ties that bind and the lines that divide.” Chrisler and Hemstreet’s text asks us to decenter from our own perspectives and life stages and recognize the needs and rights of all women. Their book brings us closer together, teaching and learning from each other in a cooperative process. This book represents what womanist education is all about.

I applaud Joan and Alyce and all contributors to this volume. I was especially honored to have been asked by them to co-author a chapter (with Darlene DeFour) for this volume. I am thrilled at their invitation to write this foreword. And, I am most pleased they decided to publish this book in the SUNY series on the Psychology of Women, of which I am the editor. This book enriches the series, and it will enrich all of our lives.

INTRODUCTION

Everywhere one goes these days the talk is about diversity—its value, its importance, its contribution to scholarship and academic life. Feminists are wondering, as Beverly Goodwin and Maureen McHugh put it, “Who is the woman in the psychology of women?” and are taking steps to broaden our perspectives. The addition of information about diverse populations should be done not just because we believe it’s right (or politically correct) to do so, but because it is good science and essential for an accurate psychology of women.

How are we doing so far? Not very well, as you shall see. Each chapter in this volume reviews the literature in some area of importance to women’s lives. The authors present an analysis of the state of the field and point out gaps in information or services. There are plenty of gaps, and, therefore, plenty of work for all of us to do!

We begin with a look at women’s physical and mental health. Joan Chrisler and Alyce Huston Hemstreet examine selected issues in women’s health to see whether the diversity of women’s needs is being met. Unfortunately, the answer is no. There is almost nothing written about the health needs of Native American, Asian American, and poor, rural women. There is more, albeit insufficient, information available about black women, Latinas, lesbians, and elderly women, but the more we know, the more we realize how little we’re doing to provide adequate health care for all women.

Martha Banks, Rosalie Ackerman, and Carolyn Corbett argue convincingly that women have not received proper treatment for brain injuries caused by accidents, rape, or other physical assaults. When women report neurological signs and symptoms, their complaints are often minimized by physicians who assume the women are hysterical or attention-seekers. The authors describe common neurological problems associated with vari-

ous traumas, with a particular focus on rape-related injuries. They present the fascinating case of a deaf woman of color who has a seizure disorder and a history of abuse and neglect, and show how her communication problems and low tolerance for frustration make her a special challenge for psychotherapists.

In their chapter Geraldine Butts Stahly and Gwat-Yong Lie discuss the frequency and variety of domestic violence in women's lives, which has created a health crisis that physicians have been reluctant to confront. Battering relationships are found among both heterosexual and lesbian couples. Although there is a growing literature on both types of couples, Stahly and Lie point out that the literature has not been integrated, nor have the community services for battered women, which cater to the needs of women battered by men. With all we do know, we still lack a unified theory that can explain and predict domestic violence.

The next three chapters discuss topics all women have in common and consider the different ways we experience them. Suzanna Rose reviews the literature on women's friendships and describes the central role these relationships play in our lives. Friendships between women are different from those between men or between a woman and a man. Rose compares and contrasts friendship patterns and shows how women's friendships influence and are influenced by particular communities. Read this chapter with a friend.

Whether we've embraced religion or discarded it, we've all been influenced by the religious traditions of our society. Rachel Josefowitz Siegel, Sudha Choldin, and Jean Orost have long been interested in the effect of religion on women's psychosocial development. However, they had never met each other until the editors invited them to work together on their chapter. They developed a remarkable working relationship, and we think you will be fascinated by what they have to say about the impact of three of the world's great religions (Judaism, Hinduism, and Christianity) on women's lives.

Darlene DeFour and Michele Paludi have taken a comprehensive look at women's achievement needs and experiences that can enhance or block their fulfillment. How do women's achievement needs change with age? How do sexual harassment and mentoring affect women's careers? You will find the answer to these questions and more in this chapter.

Women's careers often get their start in college, and the two final chapters consider issues in higher education—first the needs of students, then those of faculty. Lillian Holcomb and Carol Giesen combine their expertise on women with disabilities and older women to argue for better services that will help these women cope with the challenges of higher education. They describe clearly the similarities and differences in the college experiences of older women and women with disabilities, and urge their readers not to think of these women as coming from discrete populations. After all, the older we are, the more likely we are to experience disabilities.

Although feminists agree on the necessity of adding diverse views to the psychology of women course, we may be confused about how to manage without the support of adequate textbooks. What's a professor to do? Ann Marie Orza and Jane Torrey share their combined forty years of experience teaching the psychology of women and provide many helpful suggestions. After a review of the development of the field, they describe pedagogical techniques they have used, and include a reading list of novels that can help students better understand the lives of women who are different from themselves. We bet you'll want to read every book on their list!