Gender and Culture in Psychology

*Gender and Culture in Psychology* introduces new approaches to the psychological study of gender that bring together feminist psychology, sociocultural psychology, discursive psychology, and critical psychology. It presents research and theory that embed human action in social, cultural, and interpersonal contexts. The book provides conceptual tools for thinking about gender, social categorization, human meaning-making, and culture. It also describes a family of interpretative research methods that focus on rich talk and everyday life. It provides a close-in view of how interpretative research proceeds. The latter part of the book showcases innovative projects that investigate topics of concern to feminist scholars and activists: young teens’ encounters with heterosexual norms, women and men negotiating household duties and child-care, coercion and violence in heterosexual encounters, the cultural politics of women’s weight and eating concerns, psychiatric labeling of psychological suffering, and feminism in psychotherapy.

**Eva Magnusson** is Professor of Psychology and Gender Studies at the University of Umeå, Sweden. She is also affiliated with the Centre for Gender Studies at the University of Umeå and has been a director of the Centre.

**Jeanne Marecek** is William R. Kenan Professor Emerita of Psychology at Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania, USA, where she also has been a member of the Program on Gender and Sexuality Studies and the Asian Studies Program.
Gender and Culture in Psychology

*Theories and Practices*

Eva Magnusson and Jeanne Marecek

Cambridge University Press
Contents

Preface page xi

1 Gender and culture in psychology: a prologue 1
   The roots of the new psychological scholarship on gender and culture 2
   Gender and culture in psychology: three kinds of issues 4
   Aims of the book 5
   A road map for reading 6

2 Categories and social categorization 9
   Sex categories and gender categories 11
   Ethnic groups, “races,” and racialization 12
   From ethnicity to racialization: the invidious uses of “nice” words 13
   Social class 14
   Sexuality and sexualities 15
   Heteronormativity 16
   Who defines heterosexual sexuality? 17
   Intersectionality: the interrelationship of social categories 18

3 Laying the foundation 19
   Culture and human psychology 19
   Defining culture 20
   People as meaning-makers 21
   Ordinariness, deviations, and narrative 21
   Cultural psychology 22
   Who holds the power over meanings? 23
   Dimensions of power 24
   Power and knowledge 24
   Knowledge as social artifact 27
   Constructionism in psychology 28
   Making language an object of study 29
   The historical and cultural specificity of knowledge 29

4 Theories of gender in psychology: an overview 31
   Setting the stage 31
   The power of situations 32
   Toward a cultural psychology of gender 33
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Femininity and masculinity</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gendered identities: mastery, appropriation, and change</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Power, gender, and psychology</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asymmetries, differences, and thinking from the outside</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thinking intersectionally about psychological gender and identity</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language and gender</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>A turn to interpretation</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What does “interpretation” mean in research?</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The history of interpretative research</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meaning-making always takes place in a social context</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual meaning-making is always situated in cultural systems</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Researchers’ knowledge is always perspectival</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A focus on reasons and interpretations</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Where and how do interpretative researchers look for knowledge?</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Doing interpretative psychological research</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The landscape of interpretative research</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews and interviewing in interpretative research</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Narratives, rich talk, and interview guides</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creating a good interview situation</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to ask questions in interviews</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Historical truth and narrative truth in interviews</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Refining the questions and topics as you go</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The participants in interpretative research</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The grounds for selecting participants</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Selecting and engaging participants</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Listening, reading, and analyzing</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analyses, rereading, and searching for patterns</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The ethics of interpretative research</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflexivity in research</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal reflexivity</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Methodological, procedural, and epistemological reflexivity</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflexivity in interaction</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trustworthiness and generalizability in interpretative projects</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Generalizing beyond a research project</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Discursive approaches to studying gender and culture</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discourse and discourses in psychology</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discourses and psychology</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is discursive psychology?</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thinking and talking</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critical discursive psychology</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feminism, discursive psychology, and sex differences</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language, action orientation, and meaning</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal order and the “stickiness of identity”</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doing discursive research: some analytical tools</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ideological dilemmas</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contents

- Interpretative repertoires 80
- Subject positions 81
- Subjectification, self-regulation, and productive power 82
- Identity practices: constructing one’s individual psychology 83
- Accountability management 84
- From theories and methods to research illustrations 85

8 Gender and culture in children’s identity development 86
- Thinking about children’s development in gendered and culture-specific contexts 87
- Girls making themselves into teenagers in multiethnic Oslo 88
- From little girl to teenager: heterosexuality as normative development 90
  - Framed by heteronormativity 91
  - “Popular girls” 92
  - “Ordinary girls” 93
  - The invisible dominant heteronormativity and ethnification 93
  - The later teenage years: bodily practices and normative heterosexuality 94
- Making oneself into a “bigger” boy or a young man 95
- Finally: young women, young men, and heterosexuality 96

9 Identity and inequality in heterosexual couples 98
- Heterosexual family life and individual identity projects 99
  - Studying couples’ narratives about equality and everyday life 99
  - Themes of equality and inequality in Nordic couples’ talk 100
  - Parenthood, fatherhood, and motherhood 102
  - Internal limits and boundaries in modern heterosexual couples 102
  - The different meanings of gender 104
- Taking stock: what can interpretative research tell us about identity and power in heterosexual couples? 105

10 Coercion, violence, and consent in heterosexual encounters 109
- From technologies of heterosexual coercion to the cultural scaffolding of rape 109
  - Studying technologies of heterosexual coercion and their psychological effects 110
  - The tyranny of “normal” heterosexuality 111
  - Is it possible to say no? 111
  - What happens if the woman refuses? 112
  - Men as “needing” sex and women as nurturant – or pragmatic? 113
- Discourses of male (hetero)sexuality and the cultural scaffolding of rape 114
  - From cultural scaffolding to individual psychology 115
  - The sexual revolution and modern women’s heterosexuality 116
  - From complementary heterosexuality to complementary femininity and masculinity 117
- Conclusions from interpretative research about heterosexual coercion 117

11 Women’s eating problems and the cultural meanings of body size 119
- Eating problems: setting the stage 119
- Feminist approaches to women’s eating problems 121
Contents

Interpretative research on eating problems: some examples 123
  Probing the relational context of white women's eating problems 123
  Looking beyond white, middle-class women 125
  “Body aesthetics” or “body ethics”? 127
Stepping back: what can interpretative research uncover about women’s body projects? 129

12 Psychological suffering in social and cultural context 131
  Psychiatric diagnosis 132
  Diagnostic category systems 134
  The power of social and cultural contexts 138
  Taking the long view 141
  Conclusion 143

13 Feminism and gender in psychotherapy 145
  Feminist protests against psychotherapy and psychiatry 146
  Feminists as theorists and practitioners of psychotherapy 147
  Gender, power, and ethics in psychotherapeutic relations 149
  Power on the inside 150
    Shifting the role of the therapist 151
  The outside of therapy: an ethics of resistance 153
  Discourses in the mirrored room: productive power in therapy 155
  Conclusion 157

14 Comparing women and men: a retrospective on sex-difference research 159
  “Differences” in the history of gender in psychology 159
    Early evolutionary theory 160
    The early women’s movement 160
    Early psychology and difference thinking 161
  Contemporary psychological research on differences between women and men 162
    Are there psychological differences between women and men, and boys and girls? 163
  Results of research on psychological differences between women and men 164
    Cognitive sex differences or similarities: the case of science and mathematics 167
  Critical opinions of sex-difference research 169
    Falsely inflated claims of difference incur serious costs to both individuals and society 170
    Other difference-producing mechanisms are confounded with sex category 172
    Focusing on individual differences draws attention away from group inequalities 173
    A finding of a male–female difference has no meaning in and of itself 174
    The risk of disregarding variations among women and variations among men 174
  Biological explanations and scientific reductionism 175
Contents ix

15 Psychology’s place in society, and society’s place in psychology 178
  Disciplinary reflexivity 179
    Scrutinizing one’s own discipline 180
    Feminist disciplinary reflexivity close-up 183
  Being a critical psychologist: psychology and social justice issues 185
  The future of gender and culture in psychology 186

References 188
Index 219
Preface

We wrote this book to place the psychology of gender in conversation with the knowledge about gender and sexuality produced in other disciplines. In our view, gender is best understood as a social practice that is embedded in culture. This book illustrates how psychologists can make use of this way of understanding gender in theoretical work, in research projects, and in applied work and clinical practice.

We are teachers and researchers in psychology. We also count ourselves as members of local and international communities of gender studies scholars. Over the past forty years, these multidisciplinary communities have offered trenchant analyses of social life and have pioneered innovative methods of inquiry. One of our goals is to bring this work into the purview of psychology. We also have worked as professional psychologists, engaging issues of gender, sexuality, and social justice in our work. This has brought us face to face with the vicissitudes of mundane and institutional power. Another of our goals is to argue that a psychology of gender must attend to power in its many forms.

Our collaboration crosses national boundaries: One of us works in Sweden and the other in the USA. Both of us also have spent a good deal of our professional lives working in countries other than our own. Our collaboration and our experiences in societies outside our own have persuaded us that psychology – whether as discipline, profession, or body of knowledge – is indelibly marked by its cultural surround.

Our ideas have been developed in conversation with colleagues and students in psychology, gender studies, and other disciplines. We thank feminist scholars in psychology and in other fields for work that is both inspired and inspiring, as well as for stimulating conversations. We thank the many critical psychologists, theoretical psychologists, and historians of psychology whose close scrutiny of the discipline has spurred our own scrutiny. Over the years, many psychologists who were not specialists in the psychology of gender have called on us to explain it to them. We thank them for their questions, which have compelled us to clarify
our thinking. We are especially grateful to our students. Many of the ideas in this book had their origins in conversations about their research projects or in the classroom.

We thank Umeå University and Swarthmore College for providing intellectual environments that enabled us to grow as scholars. We thank the Centre for Advanced Study at the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters, where we were appointed as Fellows in 2011. Lena Albinhn at Natur & Kultur Press provided valuable advice and support on the earlier Swedish version of this book. Finally, we thank Hetty Marx and her staff at Cambridge University Press for their support.

Eva Magnusson
Umeå, Sweden
Jeanne Marecek
Colombo, Sri Lanka