

1 Introduction

One of the most important tenets of postcolonial and multiracial feminist theory is that any understanding of gender must be based on an analysis of how categories such as “woman” or “women” come into being (and change) through particular relations of power defined by race, culture, class, history, and politics. That is, there is no unitary, homogenous, universal category of “woman” that is already constituted outside of these structures (hooks, 1981; Mohanty, 1988; Riley, 1988). That is, Culture itself is in gender, and gender is in culture. This invites a range of generative analytic possibilities for developing psychologies of gender. What are the relationships among gender, culture, and history? How has gender been socioculturally and historically constituted, and how has it functioned/does it function with respect to structures and relationships of power?

Some historians have been using gender, race, and class explicitly as categories of analysis since at least the 1980s (e.g., Scott, 1986). When gender is used as a category of *historical* analysis, the goal is to unpack how gender has functioned to materialize, configure, and enforce particular experiences, social organizations, and economic/political systems. Scott has argued that in reconstructing the past, historians must view sexual differentiation (as well as differentiation by race, class, ability, sexuality) as a primary way of signifying access to symbolic and material power.

Anthropologists (and some psychologists) have long studied the cultural constitution of sex-gender and sex-gender roles (e.g., Mead, 1935; Seward & Williamson, 1970). Sociologists, for their part, have studied how gender is generated and performed in social interaction within and across cultures and subcultures (e.g., West & Zimmerman, 1987). How have psychologists approached the relationship between gender and culture?

The answer to this question is complicated and to a large extent depends on the ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions underlying psychologists’ conceptualizations of culture and of gender. That is, what psychologists *mean* by gender and what they *mean* by culture will influence their related views about how best to study the relationship. Because of this, I start this Element with a section that provides overviews of the conceptual and definitional development of the terms “gender” and “culture” in psychology. I then move to an examination of how gender has been studied in cross-cultural and cultural psychology, respectively. Next I move to how the field of the psychology of women and gender as it has developed in the United States has grappled with culture, including its own (perhaps underacknowledged) cultural embeddedness. Finally, I examine the history, status, and contours of the psychologies of women and gender in three national contexts other than the

US context to further demonstrate how these fields are socioculturally embedded, particularly in relation to local women's movements, political systems, and gender studies more generally. What do research priorities, topics, and approaches look like in these contexts, defined by their distinctive histories and social and political ideologies?

2 Gender and Culture in Psychology: Conceptual Issues

To unpack the conceptual issues and debates in psychology about the categories of “gender” and “culture,” separately and together, would require volumes (e.g., Magnusson & Marecek, 2012). Here, I start with a selective review of the emergence of the category of gender in the social sciences, largely in the Global North, and to its trajectory in US psychology specifically. I note how it was originally differentiated from sex, how this differentiation has been approached in psychological research, and how, more recently, the strict differentiation between sex and gender has been challenged by feminist theorists and some psychologists. I then discuss the postcolonial critique of gender generated by feminist postcolonial scholars and Third-World feminists that has identified and disrupted the imposition of First-World perspectives on woman, gender, and feminism onto women living in other parts of the world. I conclude by reviewing decolonial feminist approaches that theorize the coloniality of gender.

I then move to the concept of culture to explore the various definitions and conceptual issues that have been discussed in psychology, noting the challenges of adopting and operationalizing some of these definitions in psychological research. The distinctions between cross-cultural and cultural psychology are reviewed, and critiques of these fields from a decolonizing perspective are outlined.

2.1 Unpacking Gender in Psychology

Gender operates in psychology on multiple, dynamically interacting levels. Psychologists have genders; they work in cultures saturated with various beliefs about gender; they take gender as an object of direct study (i.e., they construct theories about the very nature of gender, how it develops, and how it functions); and they conduct empirical studies to identify differences and similarities among genders. These studies often have intended and unintended social repercussions, thus feeding directly back into the cultures from which they originate. Drawing on the notion of the science/gender system as outlined by feminist scholars such as Evelyn Fox Keller (Keller, 1985) it is clear that psychology as a discipline and a body of knowledge both draws on and

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reproduces (and only occasionally disrupts) the gender system (see Rutherford, 2015, 2020; Rutherford, Vaughn-Johnson, & Rodkey, 2015).

Given this, how have psychologists conceptualized gender and approached it epistemologically, theoretically, and methodologically? How has the contemporary notion of gender as distinct from, but in relation to, biological sex developed and been taken into account in psychological studies? This section provides a selective conceptual history of the evolution of gender in psychology, from an emphasis on sex roles to gender identity and to gender as process, concluding with an examination of the gender/power relationship as articulated in postcolonial and decolonial critique.

2.1.1 From Sex Roles to Gender

The emergence of the modern concept of gender in the US-based social sciences is often partially attributed to the work of cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead. Mead examined the cultural construction of sex roles across different “primitive” societies in New Guinea in the early 1930s (Mead, 1935). By observing the “temperaments” and attendant social roles of men and women of the Arapesh, Mundugumor, and Tchambuli tribes, Mead concluded that in each case the patterns were dissimilar from each other and from what was then typical of American society. Among the Arapesh, for example, both men and women occupied what Mead called the maternal or feminine sex role and temperament, while among the Mundugumor both men and women displayed a temperament and role that, in the United States, would be described as a rather violent and undisciplined masculinity. The Tchambuli, by contrast, did display sex role differentiation, but it was the inverse of the stereotypical American case. Tchambuli women were more often dominant, impersonal, and managerial, and Tchambuli men were less responsible and more emotionally dependent. Although Mead did not use the term “gender,” she clearly distinguished the expression of femininity and masculinity from sex itself, concluding that these temperaments and roles were cultural constructions unlinked to biological sex.

Building on Mead’s ideas but adopting an evolutionary perspective, US psychologist Georgene Seward published *Sex and the Social Order* in 1946 (Seward, 1946). This book, catalyzed by the immediate post-WWII context in which traditional sex roles had (at least temporarily) been challenged, Seward surveyed the sexual behaviors and social arrangements in animal species from fish to apes. She noted that these were quite flexible within and between species, with sex-role differentiation becoming more subject to cultural regulation the further one ascended up the phylogenetic scale. Building on this observation, she asked why we had come to so rigidly assign certain social roles to biological

sex in human societies. She was motivated to reimagine this sex-typed social order so that women and men were not constrained by traditional sex roles. Again, without using the language of gender, Seward was clearly decoupling social and cultural processes from biological sex (see also Rutherford, 2017).

In the same year as Seward's treatise, Austrian sociologist Viola Klein published *The Feminine Character: History of an Ideology* (Klein, 1946) in which she traced ideas about femininity and their association with the female sex throughout history and culture. Her conclusion that the feminine character is socially created and culturally and historically contingent was consistent with later notions of gender. Another early articulation of the cultural construction of womanhood was offered by French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir in her classic book *The Second Sex* (de Beauvoir, 1949), in which she famously cast the creation of woman as a result of her positioning as the "other" in relation to man. Woman is not born but becomes a woman through the process of subordination to, and differentiation from, the default sex that is man. All of these scholars were theorizing gender, without using the term, as the process whereby certain traits, social roles, and social arrangements accrue to biological sex (see also Tarrant, 2006).

2.1.2 Emergence of the Term "Gender"

The explicit use of the term "gender" in contrast to "sex role" (at least in the academic social sciences) arose in a particular historical and psycho-medical context. In the 1950s, US psychologist John Money was working in a clinic at Johns Hopkins University to develop a protocol for the "treatment" of infants identified as intersex. Gender studies scholar David Rubin has argued that "Intersex literally gave birth to gender" (Rubin, 2012, p. 904). By this Rubin means that the term "gender" was originally invented in the context of Money's attempts to make intelligible, organize, and ultimately manage bodies that presented as sexually ambiguous because of incomplete or inconsistent (according to binary conceptualizations) gonadal, hormonal, genital, or chromosomal sex in a cultural context that disallowed anything other than dimorphous sex (i.e., that one must be either exclusively male or exclusively female).

In his work, Money became dissatisfied with the terminology being used to refer to the "manliness" or "womanliness" of people born with "indeterminate" sex status and began to search for a new term. He felt that the term "sex" itself was imprecise because it referred both to the biological status of the body and to the act of having sex. The terms "sexual identity" and "sex role," he felt, were similarly inexact. Money wanted language to refer to a person's outlook, demeanor, orientation (including but not limited to their sexual orientation),

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and presentation as masculine or feminine. He chose gender as this term, often using “gender” and “gender role” interchangeably in his early work. Money defined gender role as “the overall degree of masculinity and or femininity that is privately experienced and publicly manifested in infancy, childhood, and adulthood, and that usually though not invariably correlates with the anatomy of the organs of procreation” (Money, 1995, pp. 18–19). Notably, Money believed that gender roles were learned and therefore not innately biologically sex-linked, but he nonetheless felt that gender roles and sex should align. This was the goal of his clinical protocol: to make an early decision, based on the viability of certain external sexual organs, whether a “sexually indeterminant” infant should be assigned biological maleness or femaleness and to instantiate the appropriate (congruent) gender role through strict socialization over the course of development.

Although Money introduced the term “gender,” psychiatrist Robert Stoller’s articulation of gender *identity* as being separate from biological sex even more forcefully distinguished the two (Stoller, 1968). Stoller was a psychoanalyst who formed the Gender Identity Project at the University of California Los Angeles Medical School in the late 1950s in order to study what was then called “transsexualism.” In working with patients whose sense of themselves as male or female did not match the biological sex they were assigned at birth, Stoller proposed the term “gender identity” as the psychological self-understanding and awareness of oneself as male or female, whereas gender *role* was the awareness of the behavioral and social expectations associated with belonging to a gender. According to Germon (2009), this allowed Stoller to separate the psychological (gender identity) from the cultural (gender role) and to then focus on the psychological, which was congruent with his training as a psychoanalyst and with his clinical focus. Focusing on gender identity also allowed him to free gender from the biological trappings of sex and thus to conceptualize transsexualism as a “mismatch” between assigned sex and gender identity (for histories of the psy-disciplines’ involvement in regulating transgender experience, see Meyerowitz, 2002; Riggs et al., 2019; Stryker, 2008).

Stoller’s conceptual separation of gender identity and role from biological sex became highly useful for subsequent feminist theorizing in psychology. By drawing a clear line between sex as a biological and corporeal phenomenon and gender as a psychological and social one, it became possible for feminist psychologists to analyze social and political inequalities between men and women in terms that were free of the biological determinism that had been used so pervasively to justify sex differences earlier in the century. As Viveras-Vigoya (2016) has written, “By demonstrating that the biological and the social belonged to distinct domains, and that social inequalities on the

grounds of sex were not ‘natural,’ feminist works sought to disrupt notions that power inequalities between men and women derived from anatomical differences” (p. 854).

In some respects, this fueled an incredibly productive line of thinking about gender that was completely untethered from its association with a corporeal body. Gender – and gendering – could be thought of as a social and cultural process that was continuously unfolding and changing. This process could then be subjected to analysis and interrogation for the ways it was used to enforce relations of power. In other respects, however, the untethering of gender from the body set up the overly simplistic dichotomy of “sex equals biology” and “gender equals culture,” a dichotomy that has proven difficult to sustain (a topic to which we will return; see Grosz, 1994; Wilson, 2004).

With gender thus defined as a psychological experience and a social expression that is not given at birth but that develops and is reinforced in particular sociohistorical and cultural contexts, scholars began to explore a range of questions. How does gender take on different meanings and expressions? How do bodies become gendered and how does gender function to regulate access to power and status? How does gender interact with other social formations such as race/ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation to affect people’s experiences in the world?

2.1.3 Gender Takes Hold in US Psychology

In 1978, psychologists Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna continued the “denaturalization” project by undertaking an ethnographic analysis of how gender is established, expressed, and maintained. In their groundbreaking study *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach*, they immersed themselves in the lives of members of the transgender community to illuminate the day-to-day processes through which members of this community went about expressing and enacting their desired genders. As Kessler and McKenna showed, acquiring and maintaining a gender involved following strict rules requiring, at least for a time, constant vigilance in order to successfully “pass” as a man or a woman (e.g., maintaining “proper” talk, gestures, responses, gait, etc.). Although the “rules” of gender were put into stark relief due to the challenges faced by transgender people in acquiring a new, socially accepted gender, these rules also reveal the myriad ways gender is performed by virtually everyone, all the time, to maintain the “natural” appearance of masculinity and femininity (Kessler & McKenna, 1978; for a historical analysis of racial “passing” see Hobbs, 2014).

In 1979, feminist psychologist Rhoda Unger published a widely read article “Toward a redefinition of sex and gender” in which she defined sex as a stimulus

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variable that, as used in psychological research, reflected one's presumed biological maleness or femaleness. Gender, by contrast, was the socially constructed sets of characteristics, qualities, and traits associated with maleness or femaleness. She argued that the focus on sex differences that had characterized so much of psychological research should be abandoned for at least three reasons: (1) Questions about sex differences usually took the male as the standard and examined women's deviation from this standard as a problem and, as such, were fundamentally not very feminist questions; (2) these studies diverted attention from the fact that the sexes shared many more similarities than differences; and (3) they obscured consideration of the social constraints and conditions that regulated gender (Unger, 1979). Despite Unger's call for an abandonment of sex differences research, this research has continued relatively unabated. It is now often called "gender differences research" with gender simply standing in as the stimulus variable. Clearly, Unger's call was for a different research paradigm altogether based on viewing gender as a process that is socially and culturally mediated. This orientation to gender has been taken up by many feminist psychologists, but not all.

Further to this, in 1987 sociologists Candace West and Don Zimmerman's formulation of "doing gender" also highlighted that gender is enacted continuously in everyday social interactions (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Their formulation moved explicitly beyond theories of gender socialization, which posited that girls and boys, by the time they reach a certain age, have internalized a learned set of gendered norms that will remain relatively invariant throughout their lives. Doing gender, they argued, was a dynamic, ongoing, continuous aspect of everyday life.

On the basis of this work, and in tandem with postmodern critiques of psychology more generally (which tend to emphasize the roles of social interaction, language, and discourse in the constitution of psychological categories, see Gavey, 1989; Gergen, 2001), gender moved beyond the status of a variable that divides the world (or the research sample) into male, female, or other and became a category of analysis in and of itself. Notably, feminist philosopher Judith Butler's work on gender, which has been foundational to queer theory, has also been drawn upon by some feminist psychologists to recognize the role that language and action play in producing and reproducing gender, and specifically the gender binary. Butler argues that gender, and indeed the (sexed) subject who performs gender, has no a priori status outside language. Gender is not simply an agreed-upon system of meanings imposed onto bodies with a predetermined sex; rather, gender is the very apparatus by which the sexes themselves are produced. As Rubin (2012) has put it, according to Butler, gender is "a generative technology that naturalizes the illusion of a prediscursive sex" (p. 890). Gender, in

Butler's formulation, is an ongoing process; the gender system is continuously being produced and reproduced through the very acts that are usually assumed to merely express it. This is what is meant by gender as *performative*.

Further, Butler contends that the maintenance of the *binaries* of sex and gender and their correspondence (male sex = masculine gender, female sex = feminine gender) is being constantly reinforced (and thus made to appear natural) by the "restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality" (Butler, 1990, p. 141). That is, this process is constantly taking place within frames that limit its expression and possibility. Butler's work troubles the binary framework, exhorting readers to examine other possibilities, transgress gender norms, and create room and viability for a range of gender expressions.

This perspective has been taken up by critical feminist psychologists who focus on the roles of discourse and language in producing and regulating gender and gender relations (for an overview see Gavey, 1989). In this view, discourse is a broad term defined as "a way of constituting meaning which is specific to particular groups, cultures, and historical periods and is always changing" (Gavey, 1989, p. 464). Language does not simply reflect the underlying "truth" of a participant's experience; accounts of experience are themselves produced within sets of discourses that make certain accounts of experience more intelligible than others and that, in turn, reinforce and reproduce the discourses in which they are embedded. Feminist discursive psychologists focus on gendered dimensions of language and experience, and how these both reflect and reproduce gendered power relations and social inequities. Notably, discursive approaches to gender have been taken up more extensively by scholars in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and to some degree Canada, than in the United States. A discursive approach necessarily attends to culture and historical period, and does not assume that discourses of gender are universal or ahistorical, though there may be similarities across cultures.

Although the conceptual distinction between (biological) sex and (sociocultural) gender has been useful to feminist theory and to feminist psychology, this distinction is not as straightforward as it might seem and has been difficult to maintain. Some feminist science studies scholars have pointed out that the biology of sex is not impervious to the influence of cultural conceptions of gender. That is, biological (genetic, hormonal, reproductive) theories are themselves suffused with cultural gender conceptions (Findlay, 1995; Martin, 1991; Oudshoorn, 1994; Richardson, 2013). Others argue that the emergence of sexual dimorphism, which insists that every "normal" – that is, medically and culturally intelligible – body is either unambiguously male or unambiguously female, is itself a specific cultural and historical production (Laqueur, 1990). It obscures the actual biological

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variability of sex categories (Fausto-Sterling, 2000) and the fact that gendered experiences feed back to influence the biology of sex (Fausto-Sterling, 2012).

Given the interdependence of sex and gender, some theorists, including some feminist psychologists, prefer to use the term sex/gender or gender/sex to signal this inseparability and to break down the assumption that one can neatly parse (biological) sex from (cultural, socialized) gender (see Hyde et al., 2019). Van Anders (2015) has argued compellingly that gender/sex is necessary to capture the myriad social locations and identities where gender and sex cannot be meaningfully – or logically – disentangled.

2.1.4 Feminist Postcolonial and Decolonial Critiques

So far, this review of the conceptual development of gender in psychology has focused on the work of scholars and psychologists largely in the United States (see also Rutherford, 2019). Starting in the 1970s, subfields of psychology that explicitly embraced feminist approaches to analyzing gender and gender relations were established, intellectually and institutionally, in the United States and in many other national contexts (see Rutherford, Capdevila, Undurti, & Palmay, 2011). Along with the emergence and evolution of feminist psychologies were, of course, developments in feminist theory more generally that would forcefully bring together considerations of gender and culture through a consideration of the impact of histories of colonization and the ongoing effects of colonialism. Postcolonial and decolonial feminist critique have influenced feminist psychology, but unevenly.

Starting in the late 1980s, feminist scholars began to critique Western feminism and Western theories of gender for their tendency to stereotype and “other” the experiences of non-Western women. Postcolonial feminist scholars from the Global South, for example, highlighted how Western feminist scholars have theorized Third World women as a monolithic, homogenous category that is already structured prior to any entry into social relations; namely, they are uniformly cast as uneducated, poor, powerless victims. This limits any consideration of the complexity of Third-World women’s lives and identities (a complexity that First-World women are presumed to have), their potential agency, and – importantly – the processes through which their lives and identities are constituted in and through legal, economic, religious, social, and family structures.

Postcolonial scholar Gayatri Spivak, in her analysis of nineteenth-century British literature, critiqued Western feminism for failing to see how its own construction of the (valorized) female subject (e.g., the eponymous protagonist in the novel *Jane Eyre*) depends on a collusion with colonialism and the

“worlding” of the Third World as a distant place whose cultural and literary heritage lie in wait for discovery and translation (Spivak, 1985). In her classic essay “Can the subaltern speak?” Spivak (1988) specifically called out how the discursive construction of the Third-World woman in Western scholarship effectively silenced her, performing an act of ventriloquism that reinscribed the dominance of the West over the rest as a form of epistemic violence. As Mendoza (2016) has put it, Spivak suggested that “every attempt to represent the subaltern woman was a way of asserting the West’s superiority over the non-West,” (p. 109) a form of colonizing the subaltern experience.

Chandra Talpade-Mohanty, in her article “Under Western eyes” (1988), extended this critique, demonstrating how dichotomous constructions of First-World and Third-World women homogenized both categories but specifically positioned Third-World women as abject others in need of the redemptive powers of their First-World counterparts and of Western feminism (Mohanty in turn has been critiqued for stereotyping Western feminism as homogenous). Other postcolonial feminists have taken up explicitly intersectional analyses to examine how gender, race, sexuality, and nationality structure power in colonial contexts (e.g., McClintock, 1995; Stoler, 2002).

In contrast to postcolonial theorists, whose original work drew largely from the context of the colonization of South Asia by the British and the French, decolonial theorists have drawn on the relatively longer history of the Spanish and Portuguese colonization of the Americas, which began in the sixteenth century and ended in the nineteenth century. They turn their focus away from the subaltern, who is silenced by the West, to the potential power of the subaltern voice, specifically the voices of indigenous peoples who have variously resisted and challenged colonization for centuries. In part because of the longer time span on which they draw, decolonial scholars also see capitalism – not as preexisting colonialism – but as dependent on it for its emergence and maintenance. Namely, capitalism required, and requires, the internal conditions of the colony to realize itself.

Given that capitalist systems demand that the freedom of some be realized and enacted through the subordination of others, there always exists a coloniality of power. Coloniality thus outlives explicit colonization and is deeply implicated in the formation of capitalist modernity. Coloniality also continues to permeate systems of knowledge production, such that knowledge produced by former colonizers continues to be regarded as superior to that of the formerly colonized and is thus imposed as hegemonic knowledge. This produces the ongoing epistemicide of indigenous knowledge systems and reproduces the ongoing coloniality of knowledge. Finally, coloniality extends to the psyche and social relations, producing what Nelson Maldonado-Torres calls the