

# Gender Psychology and the Three Feminist Movements in History

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the historical development of gender psychology through the lens of three feminist movements, highlighting its evolution alongside shifting social ideologies. Beginning with the male-centered psychology of the Victorian era, the paper examines the biases inherent in early theories, such as Freud's psychoanalysis and Hall's variability hypothesis. The first feminist movement brought women into psychology, challenging stereotypes and expanding the field with empirical research. The second wave advanced critiques of traditional theories, introduced the concept of gender as separate from biological sex, and laid the groundwork for queer theory. The third wave embraced intersectionality, non-binary identities, and performative gender, broadening the scope of gender psychology. By tracing these milestones, the paper underscores the reciprocal influence between gender psychology and feminist thought, emphasizing its growing inclusivity. Future research directions are proposed, particularly regarding non-binary genders and the intersection of gender with culture, neuroscience, and social constructs.

**Keywords:** Gender psychology; Queer theory, Intersectionality; Sexual Minority Studies; Feminist movements

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## Introduction

According to the American Psychological Association, gender psychology explores the binary gender temperament as well as the concept of gender, examining how these different gender-based concepts influence people's lives and psychological processes, and how such concepts affect social constructions; in this context, binary gender temperament refers to masculinity and femininity; but in addition to studying differences in binary gender and gender temperament, gender psychology also examines more diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. The establishment and development of the psychology of gender has constantly expanded the breadth of the study of gender psychology, which has developed in parallel with social ideologies through different periods of history; the history of gender psychology is not limited to psychology, but is also the history of the feminist and multigender movements that have accompanied the entry of women into the field of psychology: According to Yoder (1999), the development of gender psychology can be divided into three phases; the first phase is the establishment of male-centred psychology and the awakening of female consciousness from the late 19th to the early 20th century, a historical period considered the first feminist movement; then, the second feminist movement in the 1960s brought more female scholars into psychological research and began to expand the plurality of psychological research; the third feminist movement in the late 1980s expanded queer theory and made the study of gender psychology less limited to the binary gender.

## 1 The Establishment of Male-Centered Psychology In the Late Victorian Period

Victorian women were family oriented and married women were expected to bear children for their husbands as well as take care of the household; they could not initiate a divorce and would lose their property in the event of a divorce (Buckner et al., 2005). In addition to this, society, influenced by ritual, was extremely demanding in terms of the image of women, and this demand was based on chastity and care for the family nucleus (Cunnington, 1990). During the Victorian period women did not have the right to vote, the right to sue and the right to property. In this social context, there were serious stereotypes and prejudices against women in general. Against this background, Darwin's *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation*

to Sex was published in 1871. In this book Darwin focused on the origins of mankind, and the description of the theory of sexual selection. The book was greatly influenced by Victorian society, in which Darwin argued that women and men of other races were intellectually inferior to white men; and that men eventually became superior to women through years of evolution and selection of tools (Darwin, 1900).

Later, in 1879, psychology became more systematic and scientific and its researchers were predominantly male and also carried a Victorian bias against women (Sternberg et al., 2019). The most famous of these was the early view of gender in 1892 when the Freudian school of psychoanalysis was founded. Freud proposed that personality is composed of three elements as: the first is the id which is directly influenced by the physiology and is the driving force of life; the second is the ego, which sets limits to the id; and the third is the superego, which is the criterion for socialization (Hyde et al., 2011). The id must pass through five stages in order to reach the stage of ego and superego: when the third stage, the "genital stage", is reached, the fear of castration makes the boy repress his desire for his mother and identify with his father, thus developing the ego, superego and male personality( Hyde et al., 2011). As girls do not have this stage of development, they are only jealous of the boy's penis, so they are unable to develop a superego and meet the criteria for socialisation, leaving them ethically and morally very low and dependent on the male (Hyde et al., 2011). It can be seen that Freud's theory fits well with the Victorian view of gender: men were active and independent, while women were passive and dependent (Shields, 2007). In the 1970s, Freud's psychoanalytic theory's bias against women gave rise to feminist psychoanalysis, which will be described in more detail later in this paper.

In addition to Freud, G. Stanley Hall's research was heavily influenced by Victorian beliefs and Darwin's hypothesis of variability. The variability hypothesis refers to the idea that all characteristics of men, such as height, IQ, etc., have greater variability than women; so there will be many dumb men who also have high IQs, while women are more distributed in the middle range with less variability. These men with high IQs or more variability will promote evolution (Johnson et al., 2008). Hall believed that the emotional changes experienced by Caucasian boys during adolescence stemmed from their different Caucasian ancestral lineage: during this time teachers should encourage boys to relive their ancestral "strengths" and stimulate better traits to be passed on to the next generation, whereas females do not have access to better traits and cannot pass them on to the next generation (Hall, 1907) (Bederman, 1995). In addition to this, Hall believed that educating young girls would cause blood to rush from the genitals to the brain and cause their reproductive organs to develop abnormally (Hall, 1907).

## **2 First Feminist Movement, Women Entering the Field of Psychology**

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, with the end of the Victorian era, women's rights activists began to emerge and express women's claims to rights, and women's social visibility was enhanced; at the same time, women psychologists gradually entered the field of psychology and began to question and challenge the previous findings of gender psychology. In 1896, Mary Whiton Calkins criticized her colleague Joseph Jastrow's claims about the differences between men and women in the "community of ideas" through a sophisticated arrangement of empirical studies (Calkins, 1896). Joseph believes that males have better associative abilities than females, and that males can associate more words with the same stimuli; Mary replicated the experiment and found that this difference between males and females was "unnecessary" (Calkins, 1896). Mary Whiton Calkins was denied a doctorate by Harvard University because of her status as a woman, and in 1905 she became the first woman president of the APA. In 1903, Helen Thompson Wooley conducted an empirical study on gender differences and her findings showed that there were no significant differences in thinking, intelligence and mental processes between males and females, except for motor and physical differences. In addition, she also mentioned in her work that the differences between males and females may only stem from environmental differences rather than innate differences, and that males and females should enjoy the same living environment and educational resources (Thompson, 1903).

Later, in 1914, Leta Stetter Hollingworth showed through empirical research that menstruation did not affect women's mental and motor abilities, especially women's learning and decision-making abilities (Hollingworth, 1914). This research attacked the social belief that women were unfit to be leaders due to their weakened state during menstruation (Hollingworth, 1914).

After these women psychologists continued to challenge society's false beliefs about women through their research, women were given the right to vote after the 19th Amendment in 1920. In 1921, Margaret Floy Washburn was elected the second woman president of the APA and was the first woman psychologist to be awarded a doctorate.

In 1936, Lewis Terman and Catharine Cox Miles developed scales and tests of masculinity and femininity by integrating previous research on gender differences. They then generalized the characteristics of masculine and feminine gender temperaments: for example, masculine gender temperaments are more assertive and rude, while feminine gender temperaments are more empathetic and timid (Terman et al., 1968). Their findings divorced gender temperament from sex, and their results provided models of feminine masculinity and masculine femininity for subsequent psychology of gender on diverse genders (Terman et al., 1968).

### **3 The Creation of the Sexual Minority Studies Line and the Second Feminist Movement**

In the 1940s and 1950s, Alfred Charles Kinsey ventured into the systematic study of human sexuality, a groundbreaking study that significantly challenged traditional public perceptions of sex, gender, and sexual orientation (LeVay et al., 1997). The Kinsey Report consists of two books, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, in which Kinsey analyzes the effects of age and social status on sexual behavior within gender, and also compares patterns of sexual behavior between the sexes. In addition, the Kinsey scale has also studied sexual orientation, and the results of this study are controversial: Kinsey states that 46% of men are physically responsive to both homosexuals and heterosexuals, and 37% have had same-sex sexual experience (Kinsey, 1948). Kinsey also established the famous Kinsey scale to measure a person's sexual orientation, which is divided into seven levels: where 0 represents absolute heterosexuality, 6 represents absolute homosexuality, and the remaining other option represents no interest in either homosexuality or heterosexuality (Drucker, 2010); scholars later called sexual orientation with no interest in either homosexuality or heterosexuality as asexuality. Although Kinsey's study is highly controversial, Kinsey's findings illustrate the prevalence of different sexual orientations and inspire more future research on sexual orientation.

In 1950s, John Money demonstrated through a series of studies on intersex people that gender is not innate but acquired. This historically groundbreaking research really led to the way the term Gender was used in psychological and gender studies (Sternberg et al., 2019) Money found through his research on intersex people that the personality of an intersex person lies in the fact that they were raised as either male or female (Sternberg et al., 2019). When he was writing his work, he found that sexual identity and sexual role were not accurately expressed: the use of the word Sex was very ambiguous, sometimes it could mean male or female, and sometimes it could mean sexuality or reproduction (Hyde et al., 2011). Money eventually chose and started using "Gender" to express a person's demeanor, to indicate being male, female or transgender (Sternberg et al., 2019). Money advanced the systematic and normative use of the term gender through his study of intersexuality, providing a valuable conceptualization of standards for future gender studies and psychological studies of gender.

Money's findings are consistent with Freud's theory of psychosexual orientation: it does not emerge naturally, but is internalized through acquired learning. And female psychiatrists of the same period began to criticize psychoanalytic doctrine for its unfairness to women. One of the most powerful criticisms came from psychodynamicist Kelen Horney. She pioneered the concept of womb envy in her work: men are jealous of women's wombs because they can't enjoy childbearing that they don't have a womb (Miletic, 2002). As for Freud's previous suggestion of penis envy, she argues that the penis is a symbol of male dominance in society accumulated over time by a patriarchal society, and that this dominance is the source of envy (Miletic, 2002). This psychoanalytically based feminist critique sparked a wave of thought in which female psychoanalysts of the period presented two main critiques of Freud's psychoanalytic theory: first, the deficiencies of women compared to men, as suggested by Freud, were due to society and culture, and various social and cultural restrictions on women led to women's inferiority (C. Thompson, 1953). Second, psychoanalysts began to question the "maternal instinct" and critically began to examine the rationality of society's treatment of mothering as an instinct as a natural fact (Chodorow, 1978). Chodorow (1978) noted that boys' gender role identity relies only on father acquisition, whereas girls rely on both father and mother, which gives rise to a psychological structure of girls as mothers.

Yoder (1999) notes that the 1960s to 1970s was a "compensatory" period in the history of gender psychology. During this period, more and more female psychologists began to emerge. Among others, Broverman's criticism points out that psychological research has been conducted on women using white males as a model (Broverman, 1970); for example, the criteria for mental health are based on male criteria, and women are alienated by male criteria in such research: "A healthy adult is a healthy adult male". In 1979, social psychologist Rhoda Unger noted that "studies of sex differences have always examined differences in women based on masculine criteria using masculine criteria" (Unger, 1979). As a response to concerns about the pressure on the women's movement and the status of women in the field of psychology and the content and practice of female psychology, the APA founded division 35: The Society of the Psychology of Women in 1973. In the midst of this critical trend, the object of gender psychology research and investigation began to shift from "women" to "gender".

This gender-based research model has led gender psychologists to revisit binary gender differences: in 1974, Eleanor Maccoby and Carol Jacklin generalized previous research on gender differences. They found previous empirical-based studies supporting that males and females show differences in four domains: boys have greater visual-spatial ability, math ability and aggression, while girls have better verbal skills (Maccoby et al., 1974). The differences noted in this study are illuminating, and researchers have probed more into the roots of these differences, such as the study of the roots of aggression. A 2018 study in behavioral neuroscience reported that differences in aggression were associated with hormone levels of testosterone and oxytocin in the body (Denson, 2018). Men's greater irritability and aggression may stem from higher testosterone levels, while women with higher testosterone levels are also more aggressive.

#### **4 Queer Theory, the Third Wave Feminist Movement, and the Future of Gender Psychology**

In 1952, homosexuality was included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders as a mental illness due to social and cultural influences. The women-to-gender model of research has advanced the understanding of sexual orientation. In 1973 the American Psychiatric Association voted to remove the homosexual classification from the second edition of the DSM. The study of gender began to become more refined, and research began to examine and discuss sexual orientation, biological gender, and psychological gender as separate categories. The Bem sex role inventory (BSRI) developed by Sandra Bem in 1974 was used to measure different aspects of psychological gender characteristics (Bem, 1974). This questionnaire is divided into two parts to measure a person's masculinity and femininity and gives a value from 0 to 7 based on the measurement, if the value scores 4, then the person's psychological gender is considered to be androgynous (Bem, 1974). This work by Bem reinforced the separation of psychological sex and biological sex and laid some groundwork for the establishment of the queer theory.

Queer theory refers to the cultural theory that developed in the early 1980s based on sexual minority communities. This theory is based on the distinction between biological gender (or sex), and psychological gender (or gender): it assumes that gender identity and sexual orientation are socio-culturally defined (Hyde et al., 2011). This socio-culturally defined gender identity is divided into a combination of male gender temperament and female gender temperament, and it is the individuals outside of this binary gender theory that are explored by the queer theory (Hyde et al., 2011). This model of exploring non-binary gender can be considered to be inspired by Bem's measure of psychological gender traits. Queer Theory questions society's categorization of sexuality and gender in three main ways: 1. the duality of sexual orientation, which should not be limited to homosexuality and heterosexuality; 2. the duality of gender, where there should be other genders between males and females; and 3. the fact that sexual identity is changeable for a person over environment and time (Hyde et al., 2011). With the support of queer theory, gender psychologists can study gender and sex differences outside of the traditional gender paradigm (Cole, 2001). In 1990, Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* pointed out that gender studies should be based on the assumption of non-binary (Butle, 1990): under this theory, "gender is performative", people express masculinity and femininity through performance, and this performance gradually limits one's gender identity (Butle, 1990).

In addition to this, queer theory also posits intersectionality: when studying a person it is important to know that a person's experiences and identities are diverse, and the intersectionality of multiple identities, such as a person's social status,

sexual orientation, etc., should be considered when studying a person (Hyde et al., 2011). This intersectionality theory is also applied to the study of gender psychology. In examining gender differences, it is useful to review the findings of the female psychoanalysts who preceded this paper: women are considered to have a maternal nature that is shaped by society, family environment, and culture (Chodorow, 1978). Queer and intersectionality theories have driven the third feminist movement: a feminist movement that is no longer limited to biological women, but is joined by people of more diverse genders and sexual orientations, and that uses feminism as a lens to re-investigate the consequences of the simultaneous intersection of gender, race and socio-cultural influences on a person (Sternberg et al., 2019). This situation suggests that in the future the study of gender psychology may become more group-specific, especially for sexual minorities other than cisgender heterosexuals, and in this framework the study of gender psychology becomes more multidimensional and more flexible (Sternberg et al., 2019).

## 5 Conclusion

In general, psychological exploration of gender has evolved with social feminine ideology. The establishment of psychology and the study of women in the early Victorian period until the first feminist movement was accompanied by severe cultural bias from a male-dominated society, and psychological studies of gender from the 1800s to the 1900s argued that gender differences between men and women stemmed from the fact that women were fundamentally inferior to men. Then the first feminist movement of the early 1900s brought women into the field of psychology and critiqued and re-experimented with previous research on gender differences between men and women, which broke the social and cultural assumption that women were fundamentally inferior to men, confirmed women's leadership and promoted the implementation of women's right to vote. Under the second feminist movement, female psychoanalysts critiqued and reshaped Freud's early psychoanalytic theories to make them more inclusive of a more complete understanding of women; gender psychologists stripped gender from sexuality and analyzed human gender identity and gender temperament in more detail. This stripping away of the different components of gender for study helped to free homosexuality from stigmatization and led to the establishment of queer theory. At the same time, the ideology of queer theory contributed to the rise of the third feminist movement in the 1980s, which also broke gender down into more nuanced categories and provided direction for future research in gender psychology. The history of the development of gender psychology is also the history of the development of feminism; the development of social ideology is adopted by gender psychology, so that gender psychology as a psychology with the nature of social science is increasingly rigorous and inclusive; The discovery of gender psychology has contributed to the development of gender ideology in society, breaking down prejudices, stereotypes and discrimination in society and culture, and making more and more people being respected.

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