

INTRODUCTION

TEACHING DIVERSITY: What Can History Offer?

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To highlight how historical scholarship can be used to teach students about a range of topics in psychology, I have chosen three sample articles from the journal *History of Psychology* that address gender, race/ethnicity, and the intersection of sexuality and disability in historical perspective. I outline how these articles can be incorporated into courses across the curriculum to deepen students' understanding of how psychology and psychologists have grappled with these issues and how historical analyses can inform contemporary topics and debates. I suggest that historical scholarship offers a rich and often untapped resource for instructors who wish to engage students in critical conversations about diversity issues across the psychology curriculum.

Keywords: diversity, race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability

Psychology instructors are increasingly acknowledging the importance of incorporating diversity into their teaching. Gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, and ability status are all sources of human diversity and topics of psychological inquiry. But what can the history of psychology offer those teaching about these topics? Just as psychologists study all of these aspects of human diversity, so historians have analyzed the ways psychologists have studied gender, race, sexuality, and disability over the course of psychology's disciplinary history. The body of scholarship they have produced can be a rich resource for instructors hoping to develop students' critical engagement with contemporary research. This scholarship can be used as a springboard for sophisticated discussions in the classroom around power, difference, social responsibility, and the politics of knowledge. Although many textbooks offer a cursory, and

often celebratory, introductory chapter that recounts the origins of the particular subfield addressed by the book, there is now a large body of contextual, critical, historical work that is often overlooked when instructors sit down to develop their course materials.

In this introduction to a selection of articles from the journal *History of Psychology* that have been made freely available at the journal's website, my aim is to show how historical scholarship can be used in all kinds of courses (not just history of psychology!) to deepen students' consideration of gender, race/ethnicity, and the intersection of sexuality and disability. To do this, I have chosen three articles that I think are well suited to creating critical engagement with these topics that could be assigned at either the senior undergraduate or graduate levels in a variety of courses. I offer a general summary of each article, provide discussion and essay questions, and make suggestions for further reading. These suggestions highlight the content of the Society for the History of Psychology's journal, *History of Psychology*. My hope is that instructors will see that psychology's historiography offers rich and relatively untapped potential for creating productive dialogues about diversity.

Engaging Critically With Gender

The sample article I have chosen to deepen students' understanding of gender is Stephanie

The author is the 2013 President of the Society for the History of Psychology. This commentary is part of a presidential initiative to coincide with the 150th anniversary of the birth of Mary Whiton Calkins, who was denied her Harvard PhD because of her sex. Many thanks to Andrew Winston and Wade Pickren for their comments on this article.

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Shields's "Passionate men, emotional women: Psychology constructs gender difference in the late 19th century" (Shields, 2007). In this article, Shields analyzes British and American psychology's late 19th-century representations of emotionality in men and women. She argues that gendered interpretations of ideal emotionality in men and women served to keep women relegated to the domestic sphere and highlighted men's suitability for public and political life, thus serving an important power function. This article could be assigned in a variety of courses, including a range of gender studies courses, the psychology of women/gender, personality, individual differences, even introductory psychology.

Shields begins her article by outlining the commonly held popular and scientific belief in the complementarity of the sexes. This view held that the characteristic strengths and weaknesses of one sex (which were believed to be biologically based, selected through an evolutionary process) are compensated for or enhanced by the strengths and weaknesses of the other sex. For example, men's characteristic reasoning abilities, to be objective and abstract, were complemented by women's abilities to be intuitive, practical, and detail-focused. Thus, any differences in the treatment of men and women could be justified with respect to these supposed "complementary" strengths. But as Shields points out, "separate capacities did not mean equal capacities: The more valued cognitive capabilities were a male prerogative" (Shields, 2007, p. 97). If women were to evince interest and ability in science, for example, they were generally funneled toward the more passive observational sciences, such as astronomy and botany.

Shields then shows how the complementarity of the sexes served to validate male emotionality and devalue female emotionality. Feminine emotion was portrayed as an unstable sensitivity of feelings toward oneself and others. Women were portrayed as victims of sentimentality, a sentimentality which could at times overtake their rational capacities resulting in "out of control" emotion. Masculine emotion, however, was described as a passionate drive to achieve, create, and dominate and was not incompatible with rationality if it were well controlled. Arguments about men's and women's

suitability for various roles in society were once again based on these views.

When psychologists entered the scientific arena in the late 1800s, these beliefs, buttressed by evolutionary theory, were taken up wholeheartedly. When female psychologists challenged essentialist explanations of women's traits and abilities and pushed for a reexamination of the empirical evidence, they were met with considerable opposition. Shields concludes, "As in the 19th century, even today popular culture notions of gender and emotion creep uncritically into the scientific psychology of emotion" (p. 105). In the last section of her article, she considers the politics of emotion, and gives further examples of the way the discourse of "out of control" emotion has been used throughout history by ruling classes to subdue and dominate the less powerful.

Shields' arguments, based on a historical case study and period, can be used to help students examine contemporary assumptions about the differences between women and men and how they operate to maintain power structures. Here are some examples of discussion questions/topics that flow from her analysis:

(1) At the beginning of her article, Shields states "Criteria for the "right" kind and quantity of emotion . . . are not inherent to the emotion displayed, but reflect cultural conventions and norms that are situationally negotiated and applied" (p. 93). What are some 21st-century cultural norms about emotional display? Do these norms differ for women and men? What function do these norms serve? How are they gendered? (Additional recommended reading: Held & Rutherford, 2012.)

(2) Although Shields focuses on *gender* and emotion, she alludes several times to the ways that emotion is also constructed through the lens of race and class. Can you think of examples, either contemporary or historical, where the discourse of "out-of-control emotion" has been used to control or subordinate members of different racial/ethnic and socioeconomic groups? (Additional recommended reading: Bhatia, 2002.)

(3) Shields' analysis highlights the process whereby "science borrows popular beliefs about gender to develop an explanation of the psychology of gender difference . . . and then uses that explanation to confirm the validity of the popular beliefs" (p. 104). Can you find contem-

porary examples of this process? Because psychologists, by virtue of their subject matter, often draw on common experiences and beliefs as the basis for their research questions, how can they guard against uncritically reinforcing these beliefs? (Contemporary example: Kret & De Gelder, 2012.)

Engaging Critically With Race/Ethnicity

Here I have chosen Layli Phillips' article "Recontextualizing Kenneth B. Clark: An Afrocentric perspective on the paradoxical legacy of a model psychologist-activist" (Phillips, 2000). Kenneth B. Clark is an important figure not only in the history of psychology, but in the social and political history of the 20th-century United States. His work with his wife psychologist Mamie Phipps Clark on racial identification and self-concept in Black children, and their citation of this research in the Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board* in 1954, stand as landmarks in the history of social science. Material about the Clarks and their work could be incorporated across a range of courses, including but not limited to social psychology, developmental psychology, psychology of race/ethnicity, political psychology, and even research methods.

In this article, Phillips positions Clark as an exemplar of an Afrocentric scholar, namely a scholar who places the highest priority on the development of positive interpersonal and intergroup relations, who begins his or her research from a place of personal experience and/or collective consciousness, who rejects the separation of scholarship from activism, and who aims for understanding rather than prediction and control. She uses this framework to reinterpret some of the controversy that accrued around Clark's personal and political stands on integration, Black Nationalism, and other issues. In doing so, Phillips provokes a number of important questions around the essentialization of identity and the (artificial) tension between scientific objectivity and engaged scholarship. Using Clark and his career as her example, she also exposes the deep challenges that a true multiculturalism brings to how we conceptualize—and diversify—the epistemological and methodological bases of psychology.

A number of discussion questions and topics emerge from Phillips' presentation. Here is a

sample that might be used to productive effect in the classroom or as essay questions:

(1) How does Phillips define an Afrocentric scientist/scholar? What does she see as the pros and cons of invoking this framework and applying it to Clark? How is Afrocentrism—as a concept that links particular practices and scientific values to a social identity (being African American)—similar to or different from the idea, introduced by feminist scholars, that women have unique "ways of knowing" that allow them to practice science in different ways? (Additional recommended reading: Wentworth, 1999.)

(2) Why is it important to be historically informed when evaluating critiques of the methods the Clarks used in their racial identification studies? What can we learn from Clark's commitment to engaged scholarship as we try to make psychology an effective force for positive social change in the present? (Additional recommended reading: Jackson, 2000.)

(3) Phillips uses a personal-historical approach to understand the evolution of Clark's own racial identity. Specifically, she applies Cross's nigrescence model of identity development to Clark's life. What is Cross's nigrescence model? What was the historical and political context in which African American psychologists began developing psychological theories based on the experiences of Black people? (Additional recommended reading: Pickren, 2004.)

(4) Clark attended Howard University for his undergraduate degree. There, he encountered many of the era's most prominent Black intellectuals, as well as the first African American to earn a PhD in psychology, Francis Cecil Sumner. Sumner held very different views on education than the ones Clark would come to hold. What were Sumner's views? (Additional recommended reading: Sawyer, 2000.)

(5) Phillips uses both interviews with Clark and an examination of his published writings to reconstruct him in an Afrocentric framework. Interviews are important data sources for both psychologists and historians. In 2010, a friend and City College colleague of Kenneth Clark, Lawrence Nyman, published an oral history he did with Clark in *History of Psychology*. What does it add to Phillips' interpretation? To your understanding of Clark and his work? (Additional recommended reading: Nyman, 2010.)

Engaging Critically With the Intersections of Sexuality and Disability

In his article, “Carney Landis and the psychosexual landscape of touch in mid 20th-century America” (Serlin, 2012), American studies scholar David Serlin approaches the intersection of sexuality and disability by examining the data provided by psychologist Carney Landis and Mary Marjorie Bolles in their 1942 book *The Personality and Sexuality of the Physically Handicapped Woman* (Landis & Bolles, 1942). In this book, Landis and Bolles reported findings from their interviews with 100 institutionalized women between the ages of 18 and 35 who identified as physically disabled. Landis and Bolles asked these women about their sex lives, sexual identities, and relationship to their bodies. Serlin then compares the interpretations and conclusions drawn by Landis and Bolles in their published study with their research notes on the interviews with the women themselves that are available in the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction. What he discovers is that Landis and Bolles’ published report was heavily imbued with the era’s widely held social and scientific beliefs about the impoverishment of physically disabled women’s sexual subjectivities despite the multiple allusions women themselves made to their own sexual agencies and the importance of erotic and sensual touch. He argues that preexisting assumptions about the nature of sexuality and disability made it difficult, if not impossible, for Landis and Bolles to discern the many nuances of disabled women’s sexual experiences.

As he reminds us, “Women with disabilities, and people with disabilities more generally, have been characteristically excluded from those populations studied explicitly as sexual subjects in their own right and denied—out of fear or ignorance—the opportunity to be seen as agents of their own sexual subjectivities” (Serlin, 2012, p. 210). Although the Landis and Bolles study stands as a notable exception to this outright exclusion, the document nonetheless provides an important window on the inability of psychologists to grapple with the complexity of their subject matter, namely, the sex lives of disabled women. Serlin demonstrates with specific examples how experiences that involved touch and other sensual pleasures that

did not conform to the era’s standard scripts for heterosexual practice were simply ignored or effaced by the researchers in the published study. He concludes by noting the power relations that are highlighted by histories of sexuality and disability: the researcher has the power to dictate not only the design of the study but also the reporting and interpretation of the results. In the case of Landis and Bolles’ research, the subjects speak for themselves only if one carefully retrieves their voices from the archives. Only then do their sexual subjectivities emerge.

This article could be used in courses on human sexuality, disability studies, the psychology of gender, and even research methods. Here are some examples of questions that might be used to stimulate discussion in the classroom or assigned as test or essay topics:

(1) Serlin notes that the sexualities of disabled people have not, in the past, been given much research attention by psychologists. Is this still the case? What research literature can you find on this topic since the 1940s? How do psychologists approach this topic now? Can you discern any preexisting assumptions that may guide their work? What were Landis and Bolles’ preexisting assumptions?

(2) Why might disability and sexuality have been regarded as incompatible, or even dangerous, in earlier times? What oppressive and inhumane practices were used to control disabled peoples’ sexualities? Do any remnants of these practices remain today? (Additional recommended reading: Barnes, 1997; Harris, 2011.)

(3) Serlin suggests that Landis and Bolles ignored or did not even perceive aspects of the sexual subjectivities of their interview participants because these aspects did not fit into the heteronormative scientific/social/sexual scripts available to the researchers in that time and place. This suggests that scientists more generally always bring a set of capacities for “seeing” data that are socially, culturally, politically, and historically contingent. What implications might this insight have for how you read the contemporary psychological literature on the topic of sexuality and disability, considered separately or together? (Additional recommended reading: Spurlock, 2002.)

(4) Serlin points out that methodologically, the Landis and Bolles study was innovative (although not original) in its use of interviews.

He also notes, however, that the potential richness of the interview data was masked by the researchers' professional convictions that cast disabled women as an "experiment in nature." What does Serlin mean by this? How might experimental and survey methods employed by today's researchers unwittingly "objectify" their research participants? What are some other ways of structuring the research relationship so as to minimize or avoid such objectification? (Additional recommended reading: Torre & Fine, 2011.)

Conclusion

The articles featured here to encourage the use of historical scholarship across the psychology curriculum demonstrate how history can facilitate forms of critical thinking that have the potential to make students better scholars and better psychologists. By encountering historical analyses that provoke critical questions about the relationship between science and culture, science and politics, and science and society, students develop the capacity to examine the preexisting assumptions that may creep uncritically into contemporary research. They develop the capacity to examine the role that psychology, as a powerful scientific and social institution, plays in our everyday lives. There is no reason that the development of these skills should be undertaken only in the history of psychology course. I hope this introduction has provided some ideas about how to use history to achieve critical learning objectives across the curriculum.

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Received August 13, 2013

Accepted August 14, 2013 ■