

Women's journeys in psychology: Comparing Mary Whiton Calkins and Dr. Catherine Dianne Rawn



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Women's journeys in psychology:

Comparing Mary Whiton Calkins and Dr. Catherine Dianne Rawn

When I signed up to take introductory psychology in 1999 at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada, I had no idea I would soon be joining the ranks of hundreds of thousands of others interested in studying people using the lens and methods of psychology. Until very recently, I (b. 1980) knew nothing of the contributions that Mary Whiton Calkins (1863-1930) made to this dynamic discipline. Comparing our journeys offers a revealing look into how psychology and academia generally has changed, and what remains, across a divide of over a century.

Early life: Setting the stage for life in academic psychology

Mary Whiton Calkins was the first of five children—two girls, then three boys—born to devoted parents (Furumoto, 1980). Besides the fact that her father, Wolcott Calkins, was a Presbyterian minister who engaged actively in his children's education, little is known about her childhood. Yet her family has been described as “extremely close knit,” and a noted historian of women in psychology points out that she was “steadfastly devoted” to her mother Charlotte (Furumoto, p. 56). When Mary was completing her undergraduate degree, her only sister died of illness. This death affected Mary so greatly that she put her formal studies on hold, pursuing private tutoring in Greek from home for one year before completing her degree in classics and philosophy in 1884 (Furumoto).

Aside from her sister's death, Mary's early life seemed relatively stable. In contrast, my early life can be described as unsettled. [*Details removed.*] These early relationships and experiences were important in piquing my initial interest in psychology. Specifically, when my introductory psychology professor started lecturing about Attachment Theory (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978), and linking it to family dynamics, my life made sense in a way that it never had before. I was hooked. Unlike Mary, my first scholarly pursuits were in the discipline of psychology, but psychology was not a well-

developed discipline when Mary pursued her undergraduate degree. Eventually she came to study psychology after being invited to teach it, but her first scholarly pursuits were in Greek and the Classics.

Like Mary, my family was involved in my education. In Mary's case, her father taught her and then arranged for her a placement at Smith College, a women's liberal arts college near their home in Massachusetts (Furumoto, 1980). Instead of advocating on my behalf and pushing me to go further, my family lovingly praised my competence and was genuinely proud of my achievements. As a very young child I had learned that immersing myself in academics was a way to escape the chaos that often surrounded me; if I was doing homework, I would be left alone. This productive coping mechanism led me to receive high grades. It was high school teachers who first suggested I attend higher education. I had thought about it, but had never considered suggesting it at home. We had little money, and none of my family members had gone to university before; the option simply was not entertained. If I recall correctly, when I came home announcing I was going to university, my grandmother replied with genuine support yet surprise when she replied, "Ok! How are you going to pay for it?" I navigated the world of scholarships, bursaries and loans, the application process, the options available to me, and off I went, boldly going where no one—and yet, where Mary and millions—had gone before.

In 1886, when Mary was 23 years old, her family took a trip to Europe (Furumoto, 1980), which suggests her family was relatively wealthy. This trip included a sojourn in Leipzig, where Wilhelm Wundt was actively engaged in the first psychology laboratory (Schultz & Schultz, 2011). Based on research by Furumoto, it is unclear whether Mary encountered Wundt during her visit, although I suspect that if there were records of such an encounter they would surely be noted. Mary happened to meet with Abigail Leach (Furumoto), who was in Europe on leave from a new faculty appointment at Vassar College in Latin and Greek (Vassar Historian, 2005). Because Mary was, at the time, a budding philosopher and classicist, Leach invited her to travel with her to Italy and Greece. Mary went, and presumably learned much from Leach about her interest in the Classics. When I was 23 years old, I had moved across Canada and was half-way through my Master's degree in psychology at the University of

British Columbia (UBC). That year I also did something Mary never did: I began a marriage to my undergraduate labmate and sweetheart. It was simultaneously a joyful and stressful time, as we immediately faced Russell's search for employment and my doctoral studies. International travel was far off our radar then, and is just now starting to surface as a possibility in the near future.

Interestingly, Furumoto (1980) does not mention the influence Leach may have had on Mary, nor does Mary herself list her as a mentor in her own autobiography (Calkins, 1930). Leach was just eight years older than Mary, and was already a leader in women's access to higher education, including fighting against gender discrimination in order to study at Harvard (Vassar Historian, 2005). Because of these qualities, I suspect that Leach may have influenced Mary's determination to fight for access to education as well. If I am correct on this point, I liken Mary's serendipitous enriching encounter with Leach to my serendipitous enriching encounter with Dr. Kathleen Vohs, who is a social psychologist and currently a professor of marketing at the University of Minnesota. For two brief years—the two years of my Master's degree—she was an Assistant Professor at the Sauder School of Business at UBC. The professor who was officially my advisor, Dr. Darrin Lehman, introduced me to Kathleen, and soon thereafter she became my unofficial but true academic mentor. Approximately eight years older than I, Kathleen has advised me on professional issues for years, and has offered me a role model of a brilliant, dedicated, strong, driven, career-focused woman who continues to achieve remarkable scholarly feats (e.g., over 140 published articles and chapters, plus 8 edited books since 1999, see Vohs, 2012). I admire Kathleen and have greatly valued her guidance. Similarly, I would be surprised if Mary was not influenced by Leach's attention, but I admit this is conjecture.

Early Career: Getting Started in Academic Psychology

My interest in psychology developed by taking courses in the discipline as an undergraduate. When Mary was an undergraduate, psychology courses were scarce. Instead, she was lured in to studying psychology because she had proven herself an excellent teacher of Greek and related subjects at Wellesley College (a

job her father helped her arrange). The Department of Philosophy was seeking someone to teach a course in this new subarea of psychology, and recruited her (Furumoto, 1980). Like Mary, I was invited to teach psychology full time because I had demonstrated my strength as a teacher; unlike Mary, I already had received an undergraduate and two graduate degrees in the subject, whereas she needed to begin studying the topic before she could teach it (Furumoto).

Critical differences between Mary's life and mine are readily apparent when we compare our searches for graduate-level instruction in psychology. For me, I was encouraged by my (male) honours supervisor to apply to various schools, and he was confident I would be accepted. I grew up in a time when my biological sex did not affect my access to formal education, a fact which starkly contrasts with what Mary endured. Nonetheless, when I arrived at UBC in 2003, all faculty and graduate students who I met in the social/personality area were men. Although all four members of our incoming class were women, I felt disappointed at the dearth of women role models and I recall being excluded from social events with the men. As this example hints, women are still not fully equal members of the academy, although this difference appears in more subtle ways than in Mary's time (Bakker et al., 2011).

Despite the fact that psychology was a relatively early leader in opening doors to women scholars (Milar, 2000), Mary fiercely battled widespread stereotypes about the inadequacy of women for higher education in society generally (Furumoto & Scarborough, 1986), as well as throughout academia (Furumoto & Scarborough; Russo & Denmark, 1987). After attempting to decipher which schools would allow her to study at all, let alone receive a degree, Mary decided to study at Harvard because she felt she needed to be well-versed in physiological psychology and there were few such labs in the United States. Harvard granted a petition by Mary's father and the President of Wellesley College that allowed her to sit in on classes with James and Royce, although she was never allowed to register as a student (Furumoto, 1980). In contrast, I was able to sit in on any class I wished but I failed to realize this fact as a privilege. Moreover, unlike Mary, I failed to realize the advantages of a breadth of knowledge until after I began teaching the introduction to psychology course. I have been catching up ever since.

In her autobiography (Calkins, 1930), Mary cites three mentors as influential to her early psychological thought: William James (for his vision of psychology and self), Edmund Sanford (for his experimental introspectionism and their dream-themed collaboration), and Hugo Münsterberg (for embracing her as a scholar without concern for her sex). I suspect it is a testament to the hostile environment that she endured as a woman scholar that what she wrote most about her mentorship from Münsterberg was how welcoming he and his graduate students were to her. Likewise, I have mentors who largely honed my intellect through challenging discourse (Drs. Dov Cohen, Mike Ross, John Holmes, Kathleen Vohs) as well as those who helped me define my career as a psychology teacher and researcher (Drs. Jeremy Biesanz, Eric Eich, and Kathleen Vohs). I imagine that forty years from now, these psychologists, as well as my introductory psychology professor Dr. Chris Burris and a few key high school teachers, would each be featured in my autobiography.

When her interpersonal demeanor is mentioned at all in historical works, it is Mary's characteristic frankness and determination when faced with sexism that is featured. After studying for years with James, Münsterberg, and others at Harvard, she famously declined a PhD from Harvard's women's affiliate, Radcliffe College (American, 2011; Schultz & Schultz, 2011). Despite Münsterberg's urging, as well as pressure from the Dean of Radcliffe and awareness that three other women had accepted this consolation prize, she refused on principle because she had earned a Harvard degree (Furumoto, 1980). Despite others' attempts to petition on her behalf, she never received one. Without exceptional fanfare, debate or petitions, on Thursday 26 November 2009 I received my PhD from UBC, where I studied. Printed alongside my name in the program are seven other psychologists (University of British Columbia, 2009). Seventy-five percent of us who received a PhD in psychology that day were women, representing specializations in social, clinical, and cognitive psychology. Like many modern women psychologists (Scott et al., 2012) I pondered my personal achievement that day, rather than the privilege to stand and receive an honour I earned. Mary never had that experience, but because she and others fought for women's right to education, I did.

Unlike mine, which were largely focused within social psychology, Mary's early interests in psychology were broad, including animal consciousness, colour vision, emotion, associative learning, and, especially, the self (Calkins, 1930). This generalist expertise seems common among early psychologists (Schultz & Schultz, 2011), and contrasts with the distinct specializations that we modern psychologists declare early in our study. The focus of Mary's graduate work was association, although she had initially suggested to James studying attention. He had grown tired of the topic and therefore encouraged her to pursue association instead (Calkins, 1930). I had a similar experience with Kathleen. After becoming interested in cultural psychology as an undergraduate student, she suggested I consider my career and instead study something more mainstream and employable, like self-control processes. After having seen so many self-control failures in my youth, while exerting such high self-control to achieve what I had, this topic immediately fascinated me and became the focus of all my graduate work.

Some historians argue that Mary's tight family ties and religious upbringing eventually influenced her later work on self-psychology, which emphasized morality and the importance of social relationships in defining the self, as well as her later philosophical writing on ethics (Wentworth, 1999). However, others argue that her later emphasis on morality may have been influenced by the times in which she was raised (Russo & Denmark, 1987). In the late 1800s women were respected for their high morality and motherhood, all the while being derided for their lack of intellect. It is likely that Mary's self-psychology was influenced both by her early upbringing and her times. When I consider my interest in self-control, my upbringing definitely influenced my attraction to the area. Yet it seems something bigger was happening as well. Of the 2067 peer-reviewed articles that appear in PsycINFO with a simple *self-control* keyword search, 1048 (51%) of them have been published in the last 10 years, since Kathleen first suggested I research that topic. In the two preceding decades, only 356 (17%) and 337 (16%) articles, respectively, were published. I, the field, and perhaps broader society, were all ready to understand self-control in 2003. The United States had just invaded Iraq after two years of reaction to the terrorist attacks of 2001; perhaps the uncertainty of the times drove people to seek to understand control over oneself.

Building a Career as a Psychologist: Immediate Impact

Despite being denied her PhD from Harvard, Mary's work had immediate impact on the field. After one year of study in psychology, she taught Wellesley's first course on psychology to fifty undergraduate students (Furumoto, 1980). By comparison, the first introductory psychology course I taught had 500 students enrolled, and was but one of many simultaneous sections. In total, I have taught over 2500 students about the scope of psychology, its methods and analyses, social and personality psychology. By teaching introductory courses in psychology, both Mary and I have influenced some students toward becoming psychologists and helped many others to explore what our field has to offer.

Mary's early research on association, including discovering principles of vividness, primacy, and recency as well as the paired-associates method for studying memory, fueled Müller's research and was cited by Titchener and Kline (Calkins, 1930). Impressively, this work continues to influence our field today (Madigan & O'Hara, 1992). In contrast, my initial empirical work included several studies yielding non-significant findings, and a few that were successful (see Rawn 2005, 2009 for examples of both). Some of my studies were published (Dar Nimrod, Rawn, Lehman, & Schwartz, 2009; McConnell, Dunn, Austin, & Rawn, 2011; Mead, Baumeister, Stillman, Rawn, & Vohs, 2011), but given their narrow scope I have no reason to suspect they will have longstanding impact on the field. My broad theoretical paper on the deliberate use of self-control to risk personal harm (Rawn & Vohs, 2011) is published in social psychology's most impactful journal, which may increase its reach. Like Mary, I have also written a textbook I use in one of my psychology courses. The research methods textbook I recently converted to a Canadian edition (Cozby & Rawn, 2013), may have farther-reaching influence on Canadian psychology, at least in how its methods are taught, due to the popularity of earlier editions.

As was common among influential women at the time, Mary used her methodological skills to combat the rampant stereotypes against women (Milar, 2000; Russo & Denmark, 1987). Mary and University of Wisconsin psychologist Joseph Jastrow debated in the literature whether women were less

creative in generating word lists than men. Mary challenged Jastrow's findings (Jastrow, 1891) when she failed to replicate his initial results and instead interpreted his original results as conflated with the role of environment (Calkins, 1896). Jastrow refused her replication on methodological grounds (Jastrow, 1896a), so she replicated again and tightened the methodology to more closely match his. Again, he stubbornly refused to change his original interpretation (Jastrow, 1896b). Nonetheless, she had publically made her point on strong empirical grounds. I am but two years younger than she was then. Instead of collecting data to back up my potentially unpopular views about some policies at my workplace, I have been largely (although not entirely) silent due to fear about how my career could be negatively impacted.

Like Mary, I have also begun to apply my knowledge for a greater purpose. Instead of applying it to combat stereotypes, I am using my knowledge of research methods and statistics to help academics from other disciplines evaluate teaching and student learning. For example, I have led three seminars and workshops to teach researchers from the physical sciences how to design studies and analyze data to test hypotheses about the efficacy of particular teaching methods. Many of these researchers have never considered small-sample statistics, or if they have learned statistics it was never in the context of human behavioural research. By improving their understanding of psychology's techniques, I am improving the scholarship of teaching and learning for the benefit of the broader academic community.

A Career Well-Lived: Longstanding Impact

Mary's colleagues clearly respected her empirical and theoretical work during her early career. By 1903 she was twelfth on Cattell's top fifty list of leading psychologists, and in 1905, at age 42, she became the first woman to be elected President of the American Psychological Association (Furumoto, 1980). While this election secured Mary a prominent place in the history of psychology (Furumoto, 1979; American, 2011), the scholarly contributions of some of our most important female psychologists have largely gone unnoticed (Bernstein & Russo, 1974). Calkins is no exception. Despite her varied empirical,

theoretical, and visionary contributions to the discipline, one prominent history textbook (Schultz & Schultz, 2011) ignores most of them, summarizing their rationale for including her in the book thusly:

We mention Calkins's experience as an example of the discrimination women faced in higher education, a condition that persisted well into the twentieth century. Even so, Calkins was fortunate compared with previous generations of women, who were not admitted to universities at all. (p. 141)

Undoubtedly, her case is evidence of sex discrimination in early academia. By the time psychology had moved to Canada in the 1920s and 1930s, work like Mary's had already proven to psychologists and the broader academic community that women can make meaningful scholarly contributions (Keates & Stam, 2009). When I think about my own potential for breaking through prejudice, I think about my role as a teaching-oriented faculty member at a research-oriented institution. The fact that I was paid a smaller starting salary than my research colleagues is but one signal of the double standard that exists. I have begun mobilizing members of our Instructor ranks by co-creating the Instructor Network that connects us across campus. Because of my passion for educating students, and my belief that it is valuable work, I envision myself working toward equality for Instructors at UBC and, through the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, across Canada. At a micro-level, I have promoted interest in teaching among graduate students in our department since beginning training and development initiatives in 2008.

Yet, as Schultz and Schultz (2011) brush over in the quote above, Mary Whiton Calkins made substantive contributions to the field beyond her role in women's access to education. Madigan and O'Hara (1992) note that much of the breadth of her contribution to memory research has been ignored or attributed to others. Moreover, her system of self-psychology did not enjoy wide acceptance because it was out of step with mainstream views that the self could not be objectively studied (Wentworth, 1999; cf. Minton, 2000). Mary viewed the self as a multifaceted entity interconnected with others that could and should be studied scientifically (Calkins, 1915; Wentworth). Although her view of the self did not

ultimately integrate the various perspectives across psychology as she had envisioned (Calkins, 1926), its echoes emerged decades later as a dominant, longstanding focus of social psychology (Pepitone, 1981) and perhaps humanism (Strunk, 1972). Although James' ideas of the self are sometimes cited by modern social psychologists, Calkins' empirically-oriented extensions of those ideas are not.

After turning over her laboratory to Dr. Eleanor Gamble in 1898 (Calkins, 1930), Mary's scholarly work increasingly veered toward philosophy, where she gained prominence as well. Like Mary, I suspect the depth of my influence may not be to the discipline of psychology directly. Instead, it may veer toward higher education more broadly defined. Although my interest in exploring the broad discipline of psychology has increased since I began teaching introductory psychology, I also have growing interests in applying cognitive and social psychology to higher education. I am currently writing a paper that seeks to unite that literature supporting the efficacy of active learning techniques with basic cognitive processes, thereby building a more theoretically grounded case for classroom reform than currently exists. Moreover, I have begun measuring the impact of both my graduate student training initiatives and a course I developed that emphasizes applying social psychological principles to help students learn. Such extra-curricular work in the scholarship of teaching and learning, provided I couple it with continued success in my true passion as a classroom teacher, sets me on a path toward the ultimate faculty rank for those of us in the teaching stream at UBC: Professor of Teaching.

This kind of applied scholarship may serve to fuel others' interest in using psychology to improve higher education by emphasizing student learning. UBC's visionary document *Place and Promise* places student learning as a top priority, right alongside research and community engagement (see <http://strategicplan.ubc.ca/>), and many Canadian institutions are beginning to implement teaching-stream faculty positions (Vajoczki, Fenton, Menard, & Pollon, 2011). These kinds of changes suggest that institutions of higher education in Canada may be ready to make student learning a more prominent feature (c.f. Pocklington & Tupper, 2002). To the extent that student learning is in fact prioritized alongside research, my career as a teaching-stream faculty member, along with the kind of scholarship I

am beginning to pursue, may receive greater esteem than is currently the case. In contrast, if this movement fails to take hold, I may find myself forced to choose to pursue either my commitment to undergraduate education and students, or seek a more respectful work environment elsewhere. There are too many unknown variables to speculate which option I would choose, although I cannot imagine a life without teaching and learning in some capacity.

My career and interests in psychology will be impacted by many events, including the climate of academia as mentioned above, as well as personal ones. Like Mary Calkins, who was devoted to her mother, I have a very close relationship with my grandmother. Using evidence and thinking skills I cultivated throughout my studies, I have taught her to think more critically, to challenge assumptions about what she can and cannot do, and to reduce her prejudices. Simultaneously, she has taught me through countless hours of conversation and by her actions that advanced age can be a time of personal growth and discovery. I have known for years that her death will have a severe impact on me, and may cause me to re-evaluate my interests in psychology and career trajectory. I will undoubtedly take some leave, and I may develop interests in aging and dying, or revisit my earliest interest in family dynamics.

Almost a century ago, Mary Calkins proposed that the self is to be understood only as it is embedded in its dynamic physical and social environment (1915); by that measure, *her* self and *my* self are no different. When I consider all the challenges, moves, joys, and despair I will face in the future, as well as all the students and colleagues who will invigorate and challenge me to grow, it is clear to me that psychology really is a discipline that is *lived*.

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