UNFAMILIAR FEMINISMS: REVISITING THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN PSYCHOLOGISTS

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Second-generation women psychologists lived and worked between the two waves of organized feminist protest in the United States. This period is usually described as a time when feminist activity was suppressed or put on hold, and women psychologists from this period are often depicted as being collectively nonfeminist in orientation. In particular, historical accounts of the National Council of Women Psychologists (NCWP), formed in 1942, call the strength and value of members' feminist activism into question. Recent scholarship on interwave feminist activity in the United States has offered a new way of looking at the NCWP, and exploring feminist historiography and using archival data, we suggest that women of the NCWP used a variety of strategies appropriate to their zeitgeist to improve the standing of women in psychology. Some of these strategies do not map well onto post-1960s' definitions of feminist activism and so their effectiveness may not be easily recognized. We argue that the NCWP provided a platform for second-generation women psychologists to document gender-based disparities, debate strategies, and raise awareness of women’s contributions to the field. In doing so, the NCWP prepared the ground for second-wave feminist organizing of the 1970s. We suggest that a close look at the struggles and strategies of the NCWP offers important lessons for contemporary feminist organizations in psychology.

Historians often organize the history of American feminist activity around two surges of activism—the first corresponding to the women’s suffrage movement in the late 19th and early 20th century and the second occurring during the 1960s and 1970s (Rosenberg, 1992). The years in between were difficult years for feminist activity; the economic depression and second World War shifted public awareness away from women’s issues and “the feminist idea that there was unity in gender began to erode” (Rosenberg, 1992, p. 92). Scholars tracking the history of women in psychology have articulated a similar model (see Scarborough, 1992), noting the groundbreaking work of the early women pioneers (1892 to 1921) and the later (1970s) explosion of interest in gender equity concerns and women-focused scholarship. Scarborough labels the intervening years the “nadir for women” (1992, p. 312), noting the professional marginalization of women psychologists during this period and lack of support for unified feminist action.

In recent years the nadir model has been questioned and modified; research suggests persistent interest in activism by some women during this interwave era, usually sustained through the forming of all-women organizations (Meyerowitz, 1994; Rupp & Taylor, 1987). This scholarship offers a model for thinking about the interwave period as a “link in the chain” (Rupp & Taylor, 1987, p. 7), connecting interwave women’s rights organizing to the post-1960s feminist surge and foregrounding the important ways interwave women’s groups prepared the ground for later developments. The National Council of Women Psychologists (NCWP) was one such organization. Although not formed specifically to advance women’s status in psychology, we argue that it effectively kept alive interest in women’s issues and concerns about discrimination within a professional climate that strongly discouraged any kind of feminist activity.

The story of the NCWP has been featured in a number of contemporary historical analyses of 20th-century women’s participation in science (Capshew, 1999, Chapter 3; Capshew & Laszlo, 1986; Katz, 1991; Napoli, 1981; Rossiter, 1995; Walsh, 1985). In addition, some original participants have published firsthand accounts and histories (Armstrong, 1946; Bryan, 1983, 1986; Carrington, 1952;
Portenier, n.d.; Schwegner, 1943). A list of women psychologists discussed in this article appears in Appendix A (of the online Supporting Information). A short history is available in a publication by the International Council of Psychologists, the current incarnation of the NCWP (see Cautley, 1992). In this article we discuss aspects of feminist historiography relevant for understanding the NCWP. We offer a brief retelling of its history, focusing on how participants perceived the group’s goals and engaged in debates over its purpose. We examine how historians have evaluated the success of this organization and offer an alternative view. Finally, we suggest that a closer look at this group offers some important lessons for contemporary feminist psychology organizations.

The NCWP was established in the early 1940s as the first all-women organization in the field. It was not organized around a feminist mission, and some historians examining the group seem troubled by a lack of resistance to entrenched masculine dominance in the profession among its members. Rossiter (1995), for example, in her widely cited work on American women scientists, describes this group critically while documenting its eventual demise: “their consciousness was so low that they lost control over the one women’s group in the field. Something in their personal or professional socialization held them back from militancy and confrontation” (p. 346). Capshew (1999; Capshew & Laszlo, 1986) credited the group with “vocalizing concerns about gender discrimination that had long gone unstated” (Capshew, 1999, p. 89) but concluded that their feminism fell short. The NCWP’s “failure to effect lasting structural changes” (Capshew & Laszlo, 1986, p. 177) was interpreted to result from the ambivalence of their feminism, described as a “gentlewomanly protest against being ignored as professionals. As such, it formed the reluctant and ambivalent core of an effort to reform psychology along feminist lines” (Capshew, 1999, pp. 88–89).

Embedded in these historian’s critiques are contemporary expectations regarding appropriate levels of feminist consciousness and feminist activism that do not match the intentions and goals of the original NCWP’s members. Further, the NCWP was founded in an era that did not reward or nurture the development of feminist consciousness, nor did it offer structural supports or resources for feminist activism. In a post-second-wave study, Gurin’s (1985) definition of feminist consciousness in terms of four components: identification with women, discontent with women’s lack of power, assessment of gender disparities as illegitimate, and collective orientation. Gurin’s (1985) finding that only those women who closely identified with their gender reported strong legitimacy perceptions sheds light on the obstacles to feminist consciousness for women of the NCWP. Historians have noted the presence in 1940s psychology of professional norms dictating that women psychologists give priority to professional identification over gender-based identification (Capshew, 1999; Russo, 1988). As NCWP member Leona Tyler recalled in 1988, gender-based solidarity, an outgrowth of identification, was “a feeling that was foreign to most women of my generation” (1988, p. 53). As a result, women of the NCWP, even while recognizing their subordinate status in a male-dominated field, did not always see their status as illegitimate or search for structural solutions. To apply contemporary standards of feminist consciousness and activism to women of the NCWP without considering the different circumstances of their organizing makes them appear ineffective. Instead we will argue that the NCWP succeeded on its own terms, by giving women psychologists a way to contribute to the war effort and by providing a platform for women to organize, network, and debate the issues of their day.

**SOME CHALLENGES OF FEMINIST HISTORIOGRAPHY**

In undertaking our research on mid-20th-century women psychologists who participated in the NCWP, we were mindful of Rosen’s (1971) discussion of the tendency to divide historical female figures into two categories: “docile servant” (those we perceive as being insufficiently feminist) or “rebellious feminist” (those who more closely fit our expectations). This falsely divided dual constitution obscures our view of the nuanced and complex lives of these women and may lead us to neglect the significant contributions made by those who do not appear qualified, from our contemporary vantage point, to serve as feminist role models.

In our study of second-generation American women psychologists’ oral history interviews, autobiographical accounts, and private correspondence (see Johnston & Johnson, 2008), we have repeatedly noted that expectations of a “familiar feminism” and a focus on oppression do not fit well with the way that many women in our cohort defined themselves and their experiences in psychology. This discrepancy can be seen vividly in correspondence involving clinical psychologist Molly Harrower,1 a psychotherapist specializing in psychodiagnosis (Dewsbury, 2000). Harrower was still active professionally in 1977 when she received a letter from a graduate student asking about her experiences as a woman psychologist and wondering if she felt she was accorded equal status with her male peers. Harrower responded, “Frankly, I have never felt that being a woman had anything to do with the question. I have followed my intense interests into various fields, and have always been rewarded by being able to pursue these interests” (Harrower to J. Anderson, October 19, 1977). After recounting her surprise at being excluded from the faculty club at McGill University in the 1930s, she noted that the ban was eventually lifted and concluded:

Hope that helps! (I am, incidently [sic], strongly in favor of equal pay for equal work, etc etc) but for scientists I dont [sic] think the question has much
meaning. Its [sic] the work that counts. No application of mine has ever been rejected, no publication rejected (Harrower to J. Anderson, October 19, 1977).

Harrower’s decoupling of science from gender considerations was typical of her generation. Prominent child psychologist and NCWP president Florence Goodenough famously declared, “I am a psychologist, not a woman psychologist” (Stevens & Gardner, 1982, p. 195), illustrating vividly what Cott (1987) termed the “double consciousness of oneself as a woman and as a professional” (p. 233). Seen frequently among women professionals of the early 20th century, this mental framework was “the legacy of nineteenth-century presuppositions about the different temperaments and social roles of men and women” (Cott, 1987, p. 233). The separation of gender from one’s professional identity also led women psychologists to resist being cast as a feminist role model. Personality measurement expert Jane Loewinger2 reported that being asked to serve in that capacity was “painful and uncongenial to me” (Loewinger, 1982, p. 1). We have noted the same reluctance to be identified as an exemplary woman psychologist in many oral histories of second-generation women conducted in the wake of the second-wave feminist movement (e.g., Anastasi, 1983; Gibson, 1976).

This reluctance of second-generation women to see themselves as the object of sex discrimination is an example of the common process of minimization of discrimination that has been explicated in the work of Faye Crosby and colleagues (Clayton & Crosby, 1992; Crosby, 1982; Crosby, Cordova, & Jaskar, 1993). Denial of personal discrimination (where women readily acknowledged the existence of discrimination against women as a group but are reluctant to apply that label to their own experience) is a paradoxical yet quite widespread phenomenon, even in contemporary times. Given the continuing relevance of this issue, close examination of the arguments and rhetoric of second-generation women proves illuminating.

We approach the study of the NCWP in a way that respects members’ heterogeneity and allows their differences and disagreements to emerge. To do so, we have chosen to pursue the strategy articulated by historian Leila Zenderland (2001), who advocates “allowing members of an earlier generation to debate their own issues in their own terms—to frame their own questions, to find their own answers” (p. 13). Examining internal debates about the purpose and status of the NCWP affords an opportunity to clarify the heterogeneity evident among women psychologists of this era. Women of the NCWP differed widely in their views of feminism and its usefulness—or its dangers. In addition, meanings given to the term “feminism” in the culture at large shifted subtly along with women’s roles and opportunities in the United States during the postwar years. Thus, it is “feminisms” that we explore in our study. Following Lerner’s lead, our historical inquiry aims toward “a discarding of old categories and a painstaking search of known sources for unknown meanings” (Lerner, 1969, p. 62). Although their feminisms might not be familiar or radical ones, they did have an impact as professional women and effected lasting changes in the role of women in psychology.

The suffrage victory did not signal a widening of feminist consciousness in American culture, but rather led to retrenchment in the 1920s. In the 1930s, the Depression and, later, the specter of a second World War overshadowed concerns about gender equality. Making things more challenging for women activists of the 1930s and beyond was the common belief that gender equality had already been achieved. As Freedman (1974) notes, the portrayal by historians of the 1920s as a period of full equality “when in fact discrimination . . . was abundant, has perpetuated a myth of equality” (p. 393), which in turn helped undermine the development of group consciousness. In that context, continuing attempts at feminist activism were viewed as expressions of a disgruntled, frivolous, and possibly unpatriotic minority. Although it was the first all-women group in the history of American psychology, the NCWP was not a product of female solidarity or group consciousness, as we currently define those terms.

**THE NCWP**

**Background, Goals, and Transitions**

The NCWP was formed by a group of women psychologists based in New York in 1941 as a vehicle for women psychologists to get involved in the war effort. It arose as a direct result of being excluded from the all-male Emergency Committee in Psychology (ECP), formed by several prominent male psychologists in 1940 to promote the services of psychologists in wartime (see Capshew, 1999; Capshew & Laszlo, 1986; Napoli, 1981). When some women protested the exclusion, “we were told that our job was to keep the home fires burning . . . In other words, women were allocated to a pre-Victorian position with respect to the war” (Schwesinger, 1943, p. 298).

During the joint annual meeting of the American Psychological Association (APA) and the American Association of Applied Psychologists (AAAP) in 1940, it became clear that women’s potential contributions were being ignored. In response, women AAAP members and officers, calling themselves the “Evanston committee of five” (Harriet O’Shea, Chair, with Alice Bryan, Edwina Cowan, Elaine Kinder, and Millicent Pond), sent a letter to Robert Brotemarkle, the AAAP representative to the ECP. Explaining that they were “eager to be of service to their country during the present national emergency,” they clarified that they were contemplating pursuit of a one-gender group only with reluctance:

The women psychologists of the country have no wish to be considered as a separate group but it is, on
the contrary, their particular hope that they will be neither favored nor excluded from service because they are women. They wish to avail themselves of all possible opportunities to serve their country as psychologists (Ives, n.d., O’Shea to R. Brotemarkle, September 17, 1941).

Skirting the edges of radicalism (by 1940s standards), the group pointed out: “women are being systematically excluded from the service of their country. It is their hope that such discrimination against women psychologists can be eliminated in so far that it may exist” (Ives, n.d., O’Shea to R. Brotemarkle, September 17, 1941). The last qualifying phrase could be read as a polite concession to male leaders of the ECP, who persistently denied the existence of discrimination and counseled the women to be patient (Capshew, 1999; Capshew & Laszlo, 1986). It should be noted here that the denial of discrimination put these women activists in a curious double bind: Motivated by being excluded from the ECP on the basis of gender, they were compelled to protest in a way that downplayed both their gendered status and the existence of discrimination. In spite of their marginalized position, they felt the need to clarify that they were not requesting special favors based on gender.

The difficulties that the “Evanston committee of five” faced in expressing their discontent illustrate well the professional culture operating in 1940s psychology, which included the implicit belief in gender parity. Women psychologists, along with their male peers, adopted the view that the field offered an egalitarian set of opportunities—evidenced by the small number of women who managed to gain high-status academic positions and occasional placement on powerful committees. Using terminology coined by Bourdieu (1977) and applied to feminist analysis by Moi (1991), professional psychology in the 1940s was a “doxic” society, that is, one in which the established order is seen as “a self-evident and natural order which goes without saying and therefore goes unquestioned” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 166). The existence of gender-based discrimination could be ignored, even by women, so long as those in power could point to the tiny number of exceptional cases—what Bourdieu calls “miraculous exceptions” (Moi, 1991, p. 1026)—as evidence of meritocracy. As Moi summarizes, in such a society “everybody has a perfect sense of limits” (p. 1027). To challenge the “doxa,” as the Evanston five did, was to commit heresy and place one’s professional credibility at risk. Their recognition of the potential danger ensuing from such a challenge is implicit in their concessionary language.

The ECP leadership remained adamant about maintaining an all-male membership even while deflecting charges of discrimination. Yet, Schwegener (1943) recalled, “We would not take no for an answer” (pp. 298–299), so a group of women psychologists met in New York City in the fall of 1941 “to take matters into our own hands” (p. 299). Pearl Harbor accelerated their motivation; the day after, “a call letter went out to all qualified women psychologists within easy reach of New York City, inviting them to meet a week later” (p. 299). In November of 1941, 13 women met in Alice Bryan’s Manhattan apartment to make plans for a national organization (Bryan, 1983). By August 1942, there were 253 charter members in 37 states. (A list of charter members is included in Appendix B of the online Supporting Information.)

Their primary purpose was not to highlight exclusion, but the Council inevitably ended up doing so. The original constitution illustrates their intent to keep their public mission gender-free. The purpose of the organization was “to promote and develop the services, other than those connected with the armed forces of the republic, which properly trained psychologists can perform in community and nation in time of war” (NCWP Constitution and Bylaws, 1942, p. 1). Clarifying the original mission and purpose of the Council is important because contemporary historians often evaluate its accomplishments against the assumption that it was organized to strengthen the status of women (e.g., Capshew & Laszlo, 1986; Rossiter, 1995). No such yardstick was in effect at the time. The name, however, revealed a gender-based purpose for organizing and would prompt charges of anti-male discrimination later. A subset of its membership wanted to expand the mission of the group to include addressing women’s causes more directly. Original member Mildred Mitchell commented later that the NCWP was founded “in part to fight the prejudice against women in top jobs” (International Council of Psychologists Annual Business Meeting Minutes, September 7, 1959, p. 3), but others argued vehemently against such a focus on women’s status. This debate revealed deep divisions among members.

This divide was immediately made plain in an early vote regarding the proper duration of the Council. As Mitchell (1951) observed: “The life span of the Council of Women Psychologists has been a point of disagreement from the very beginning, even among the charter members” (p. 193). The original, proposed NCWP constitution included the following clause: “At the first annual meeting of the organization following official declaration of peace, steps shall be taken leading to the disbanding of the organization” (NCWP Constitution and Bylaws, 1942, p. 1). This clause was voted out by a majority of the membership (Armstrong, 1946), but the vote was a close one (almost a tie) and many members, like newly elected president, Florence Goodenough, continued to feel that “once the war is over . . . the NCWP should disband” (Goodenough, 1936–1959, Goodenough to E. Heidbreder, September 11, 1942). Continuation of the Council beyond its wartime purpose would widen the gender partition among professional psychologists, in Goodenough’s view, further marginalizing women: “I feel very strongly that women could make no greater mistake than to try to continue with an organization which suggests that sex is something that takes precedence over
the professional field” (Goodenough, 1936–1959, Goodenough to E. Heidbreder, September 11, 1942).

In the 1940s, those professionals who held power in the field were able to keep a meritocratic doxa alive by framing concern with women’s issues as advocacy for gender segregation; gender segregation, in turn, was pitted against “professionalism” or a commitment to furthering the field as a whole. Some prominent male psychologists promoted this viewpoint in a way that raised the possibility of backlash. In the early days of NCWP organizing, Robert Yerkes (Goodenough, 1936–1959, Yerkes to F. L. Goodenough, July 26, 1942) sent a personal note to Goodenough, stating that a committee devoted to women’s issues would, in his view, be particularly damaging to women: “I should fear that a segregation of the sexes in our profession might prove on the whole disadvantageous to all—but especially to women . . . We certainly should go forward cautiously as well as courageously . . . it is discouragingly easy to make false moves” (pp. 1–2). The irony and disingenuousness of Yerkes’s statement becomes clear in light of the sex discrimination he practiced in his own laboratory; for example, Eleanor Gibson described her dismay at learning that Yerkes would not accept women graduate students in the 1930s (Gibson, 1980).

NCWP organizing went forward in spite of Yerkes’s fear-mongering. By 1946, the Council had successfully implemented several wartime initiatives—preparing a lecture series on topics related to coping during wartime, offering consultation services to local government and military organizations, serving as a clearinghouse for job opportunities for women in psychology, conducting public opinion polls, carrying out research on gender roles, and examining the problems of Black women in Harlem (Schwesinger, 1943). Yet when the war ended, questions of disbanding arose again. As Alice Bryan would later suggest, “[d]uring the war we clearly had a distinctive purpose; now we are groping toward a function” (International Council of Women Psychologists [ICWP] Newsletter, December 5, 1949, p. 3). In line with reconstruction efforts following World War II, some of the members had become interested in international issues, particularly the status of women and children abroad. In 1946, “it was decided to reorganize the group into the International Council of Women Psychologists in order ‘to promote psychology as a science and as a profession, particularly with respect to the contribution of women throughout the world’” (Carrington, 1952, p. 100). With five years of solid accomplishment behind them, the members felt secure enough to inject attention to the “contribution of women” into their public mission.

Yet, even with their enhanced global perspective and a doubling of membership in 1949, some ICWP members persisted in the call to disband, staging a perennial “protest against its continued existence as a one-sex organization” (Mitchell, 1951, p. 193). In 1949, ICWP members debated the pros and cons of pursuing affiliation as an APA division; to do so would require removing the word “women” from their name because APA refused to consider for affiliation any group limiting membership due to gender, race or creed. As a gesture toward affiliation, the ICWP began admitting men as full members in 1951. (They had been admitted as associate members before that time.) It is significant that they did not succumb to pressure from without and within to remove “women” from the group’s name at this point. Despite dissent within the group, there was enough support for those who chose to retain a focus on women while widening the scope of the organization beyond the United States.

By 1959, however, the tide had turned; a majority of the voting membership (Fellows) voted to change the name to the International Council of Psychologists (ICP). In a recent organizational history published by contemporary members of the ICP, this vote is described as “unanimous” (Cautley, 1992, p. 5)—a good example of the way historical accounts often edit past events to fit the outcome. In reality, the vote again revealed deep disagreement among members; when the results were announced at the annual business meeting, some clearly felt it was a wrong move. For example, Harriet O’Shea feared that a sudden claim to a complete international focus would seem presumptuous and, by overreaching, they would appear trivial: “We are not a trivial group. As long as we had the protection of the word ‘Women’ we were free to do as we pleased” (ICP Annual Business Meeting Minutes, September 7, 1959, p. 3). O’Shea and Alice Bryan argued to take the vote back to the full membership in hopes of reinstating the word “women,” but Lillian Portenier put an end to the discussion: “We’d really be ridiculous to put it to vote again . . . Let’s do something positive now, rather than negative” (p. 3). By 1973, men constituted 43% of its membership and had taken over many of the leadership positions (Rossiter, 1995). Theodora Abel, an original NCWP member and its first treasurer, wrote in the 1960s of this last transition in ways that provoke comparisons to current postfeminist perspectives: “Historically, ICP spent some time in the latency period, where girls and boys remain separate . . . Fortunately, ICWP grew out of this, realizing that men as well as women can be psychologists ‘with a heart’” (Abel, n.d., p. 9).

Gender and Rhetoric: Women’s Assets and Handicaps

In the rhetoric used by women both to support and undermine the idea of organizing can be seen a deliberate unlacing of the personal—gender, in this case—from the professional. To be a professional psychologist required, in the 1940s, tacit acceptance that science could be value free and gender free. On the other hand, the existence of career tracking and obstacles to full employment for women made the salience of gender painfully obvious to anyone examining the role of women. Leaders of the NCWP attempted to reconcile these opposing strands in a way that would not alienate their male colleagues and thus provoke a
reversal of gains made by women up to that point. By making society the culprit for women’s lost opportunities, these leaders rescued the profession from blame and preserved their tenuous status. Their stance distinguishes the strategies of second-generation women from the more overtly activist approach of the women who later formed the Association for Women in Psychology (AWP), demonstrating against job discrimination in psychology at the 1969 and 1970 APA conventions (Walsh, 1985).

In a description of the Council’s “History and Philosophy” published in a short handbook celebrating its 10th anniversary, the benefits of a women’s organization are described:

By uniting, professional women feel they can more adequately and successfully cope with problems which they share in common but which are not shared by men. They can concentrate on areas of professional service which draw on their womanly assets in a maximal way; also they can avoid areas which may call their liabilities into play” (NCWP Tenth Anniversary Handbook, 1952, p. 4).

Professional service that draws on “womanly assets” refers to careers that fit with prevailing gender norms (e.g., working with children and families). Surveys from the 1940s confirm that women found it easiest to obtain work in clinical areas and as school psychologists and were frequently able to secure advancement there (Bryan & Boring, 1946; Fjeld & Ames, 1950).

The reference to “liabilities” can be clarified with an example from an article by Goodenough (1944) on postwar career opportunities for women psychologists. Here, she makes the argument that social “sex prejudice” may “militate against the usefulness of women for certain kinds of work” (p. 707)—as in the case of female vocational counselors trying to give advice to returning servicemen who would likely be “unwilling to discuss their personal problems” (p. 707) with a woman. “[W]omen would be severely handicapped in attempting to render such service, no matter what their training and ability may be” (p. 707). The handicaps or liabilities associated with being a woman were accepted as natural; psychology as a profession bore no responsibility for creating female handicaps or for remediating them, in this view. Instead, Goodenough counseled women to seek employment strategically, zeroing in on those opportunities that would not call forth their female handicaps and accepting the fact that men would receive preference in the postwar job market for many jobs. This formulation enabled individual psychologists to view the profession of psychology as free of both politics and gender, despite the fact that women psychologists had to deal with the very real gender politics of the professional world. Publications from that era on women’s status in psychology sometimes refer to “their double function as women and as professionals” (Carrington, 1952, pp. 100–101). In that charged historical context, it was safer to identify as a woman and psychologist than as a woman psychologist.

Factions and Fears: Organizing as “Dynamite for Women”

Goodenough’s concern that the Council would be perceived as “an organization which suggests that sex is something that takes precedence over the professional field” (Goodenough, 1936–1959, Goodenough to E. Heidbreder, September 11, 1942) was shared by several other NCWP members, including Ruth Tolman (a clinician who held a number of clinical and research positions with the government during the war) and Helen Peak. A wartime analyst for the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey, Peak was one of the few women in the newly established survey research field. Well regarded by her peers, in 1950 at the University of Michigan, she was awarded an endowed professorship earmarked for a woman—the only position of its kind at the time. In a letter to Goodenough, Tolman suggested the existence of a coalition uniting Goodenough, Tolman, and Peak. Anticipating an upcoming organizational meeting to discuss the question of the ongoing status of the NCWP, Tolman alluded to a feminist “militancy” within the group (presumably those who saw a continued role for the NCWP after the war and wanted to address women’s equity issues) and the need to counter it with an alternative, narrowly focused mission for the Council—one that would guarantee its postwar demise:

What I don’t feel peaceful about is the NCWP. I agree with you that it is probably wise to defer the open issue on the permanent nature of the organization until we’ve had time to preseltyize (that’s not spelled right) a bit. But I am disturbed by the fact that the mood is what it is and for my own part I simply do not have the time or energy at this time to combat that kind of aggression . . . at the moment I feel that I ought to have greater richness and fertility of suggestions to give me proper bargaining power about the militancy. Do you see what I mean? (Goodenough, 1936–1959, Tolman to F. L. Goodenough, July 12, 1942).

Tolman added: “I do really feel that you and Helen Peak and I need each other, if you know what I mean! And I’d hate awfully to let you down, for I am sure that if I were in your place and you deserted me I’d just commit harikari” (Goodenough, 1936–1959, Tolman to F. L. Goodenough, July 12, 1942).

Goodenough, Tolman, and Peak clearly headed the group of “miraculous exceptions” within the NCWP (Moi, 1991, p. 1037). Women psychologists who managed to succeed in that era would be especially motivated to identify with meritocratic norms “as the enabling cause of their own success” (p. 1037). It is not surprising that these three formed an alliance to suppress feminist militancy in the NCWP, but less prominent members, conscious of male
peers’ judgments, also felt the need to be strategic about protecting women’s status in the field. When NCWP membership dropped sharply after the end of the war, Council Treasurer Katherine Greene, for example, suggested that there might be reason for “discussion of its present usefulness.” In this same letter and citing postwar antagonism toward an all-woman group, she feared that continuation could backfire on women psychologists:

There was a rather unpleasant undertone at the Cleveland A.P.A. meeting when the N.W.C.P. [sic] was mentioned, and several of the men that I know rather well joked about it. These were definitely not anti-feminists. I think that we may be playing with dynamite for women in the post-war relations when the competition [for jobs] will be keen enough so that anything may be used as a point against a woman in general and a woman psychologist in particular (Ives, n.d., Greene to C. Armstrong, February 17, 1945).

On the other hand, some members hoped the NCWP would focus on improving the status of women psychologists. When queried in 1944 about continuing the Council after the end of the war, some members sent comments that reflected familiar feminist themes. Dorothea Crook, an Associate Professor of Psychology at Skidmore College in New York, sent her views to NCWP President Clairette Armstrong:

In particular I feel that we need a strong organization to help us face the sexual discrimination that I am sure is going to occur . . . Already there is agitation for having women agree to give up their jobs when the men come home . . . by staying organized we can exert pressure to improve both our own status and that of women in general” (Ives, n.d., Crook to C. Armstrong, March 12, 1944).

Gertrude Schmeidler, later known for her experimental work in parapsychology, also wrote in favor of continuation: “if, at some time in the future, there should be need for a pressure group in favor of women and their rights in psychology—behold, the group will be ready” (Ives, n.d., Schmeidler to C. Armstrong, April 12, 1944). Notice the rhetoric of women’s rights employed in these archival sources that is not reported in any other historical studies of NCWP. By its very organization, the NCWP enabled some women to question the prevailing doxa and imagine organized protest. Debates among members about its purpose and continuation reveal deep divides separating women as well as the firm grip of meritocratic norms.

Debating Women’s Status with Research

Fueling debates within the Council about the need for a woman-focused organization was a series of publications between 1944 and 1951 reporting on surveys examining women’s careers in psychology and the status of women in the field. Best known are the three coauthored articles by NCWP member Alice Bryan and E. G. Boring (Bryan & Boring, 1944, 1946, 1947). It was an uneasy collaboration. Although initially Boring thought that they could “cancel out prejudices” (Boring, 1961, p. 72) through empirical study and reasoned discussion, he eventually conceded that he and Bryan could not resolve their fundamental disagreements.

In their first paper, they explored the growth of applied psychology and subsequent opportunities for women to find jobs—the kind that women get and take—the jobs that have to do with the welfare of other persons” (Bryan & Boring, 1944, p. 453). By 1947, Bryan and Boring were using the phrase “women’s work in psychology” (p. 11) to label this employment trend. In their 1947 paper, they reported that women psychologists were less likely than men to expect advancement in their professions, and they linked it to another finding: “29% of the women report that other interests are more important to them than their professional work. For the men this percentage is less than 2” (1947, p. 13). Analysis here remained at the individual level: “These women have made their adjustment in life, and a considerable part of their activities lies outside the profession. Presumably the greater portion of this outside interest is centered in the home” (p. 13). Incorporating a view popular at the time that linked feminist protest to maladjustment, the authors offered this interpretation of women who leave a professional career to pursue motherhood:

The mother, who now looks after her own children instead of administering tests to other mothers’ children, in general accepts the pattern which the culture sets her, regretting a little but not protesting too much. There are a few exceptions, but usually successful adjustment to reality means that you accept what you can not change and also that you grow to like it (Bryan & Boring, 1947, p. 13).

The theme of adjustment to reality also emerged in a study commissioned by the ICWP in 1947 and undertaken by members Harriet Fjeld and Louise Bates Ames (Fjeld & Ames, 1950) to “ascertain what women actually do in the field of psychology and what training is necessary for these occupations” (p. 69). Drawing from surveys completed by 393 women psychologists in a variety of fields, the authors documented the relative frustration of women in academic careers and the overall perceptions that “opportunities are better for men than for women, that chances for women are poor ‘at the top,’ and that salaries for women tend to remain low” (p. 87). In spite of that evidence of discontent, the authors offer a sanguine conclusion: “The respondents, taking full account of the difficulties, indicated, with some dissenting votes, that they had found psychological work a satisfying profession” (p. 93). The authors’ tone reflects written responses by those surveyed. One respondent noted, for example, that male employers can reasonably
expect that a young woman might leave the profession eventually to pursue homemaking: “he may . . . be forgiven for discriminating against her in promotions and in providing opportunities for special experience” (p. 90).

The findings of Fjeld and Ames (1950) motivated Gladys Schwesinger to report confidently in 1950 that the ICWP had completed its work and could disband, evoking a strong dissenting view from several members (Rossiter, 1995). Mildred Mitchell (1951) countered that view with a study of her own that examined gender proportions in each class of APA membership, officer roles, committee appointments, and editors. Although women composed almost one-third of the total membership by 1949, only 14% of women members held Fellow status (compared to 25% of male members). As officers and editors, women were almost entirely absent, yet “only as secretaries are they serving in proportion to their numbers” (Mitchell, 1951, p. 200).

She quoted the ICWP mission in her summary: “If status within the APA may be considered an adequate estimate of the achievement of women psychologists in America, then there still seems to be a need ‘to promote psychology as a science and as a profession, particularly with respect to the contribution of women’” (p. 200).

Although stopping short of suggesting systematic discrimination, Mitchell (1951) observed that women psychologists “still do not seem to be working to capacity” (p. 201), and she called for further research on “whether or not women are being considered on the same basis as men for top level jobs in universities, industries, institutions, and government” (p. 201). The idea that the profession might fruitfully engage in self-scrutiny on the issue of gender discrimination was unusual in 1951 when the success of psychologists was attributed to individuals’ ambition and willingness to work hard.

Boring (1951) responded to Mitchell’s critique, summing up his views on the topic and dismissing her call for professional self-scrutiny. Boring claimed that men held a disproportionate share of status and power in the field because women pursued, to their disadvantage, their interest in “the particular, and especially . . . in the young, helpless and distressed” (1951, p. 680). Prestige, he argued, required writing books that deal with “broad generalities” (p. 680) as well as “job concentration” (p. 680), or an intense round-the-clock dedication to career. If women find this demand more difficult than men, it is the fault of the culture, not the profession, according to Boring (1951). Any individual woman with “[i]ntelligence and special abilities” (p. 681) could, with effort, overcome cultural norms and compete with men on a level playing field. Once again, women were advised to be realistic, to adapt to the status quo, and address perceived inequity with individual effort. Boring’s (1951) view summed up the doxic view of the time, but the very fact that he was compelled to spell out and defend the individualistic, meritocratic worldview shared implicitly by many suggests that the challenges of protesters like Mitchell were becoming difficult to ignore.

Audience and Strategy: Navigating the Meaning of Feminist

Rossiter (1995) suggests that Boring’s paper “served to hasten the declining feminism within the ICWP” (p. 48), and certainly the Council did move away from its earlier focus on promoting work for women toward international concerns in the 1950s. But applying the term feminist to these women is complicated, due to their diverse personalities and lack of consensus within the group. Women of the NCWP rarely applied the word feminist to themselves, even when their beliefs and actions might seem to warrant it (from our contemporary perspective). Dorothea Crook, quoted above decrying “sexual discrimination” in employment opportunity, described herself as being “of a slightly schizophrenic mind about a feminism point of view” (Ives, n.d., Crook to C. Armstrong, March 12, 1944). Mitchell acknowledged that some NCWP/ICWP members pushed for disbanding because they were “fearful of being dubbed ‘feminists’” (Mitchell, 1951, p. 193). Women psychologists were acutely sensitive to the ways their own actions and labels would be construed by men in the profession, especially because men held virtually all leadership roles.

The issue of audience is an important one to consider when attempting to understand the complex attitudes toward feminism and activism held by second-generation women psychologists. Fear of retaliation was realistic, and women psychologists were forced to be vigilant about how their actions would be perceived. Biographer Laurel Graham illustrates this aspect of the professional context in her work on Lillian Gilbreth, whose career spans the period about which we are writing, but who began her work earlier (earning her Ph.D. in psychology in 1915) (see Graham, 1998, 1999). Gilbreth’s pioneering work as an applied domestic engineer is well known. When she dared to suggest in the late 1920s that women seeking to combine a career with homemaking could be assisted by husbands who were willing to make some accommodations at home, she was vilified in the press for promoting a radical shift in gender roles. The backlash was severe enough that Gilbreth eventually retracted her argument (Graham, 1999). Gilbreth learned to “tailor her words for the particular audience at hand” (p. 658), and Graham points out that this tailoring “makes it difficult to categorize her gender politics definitively or consistently” (1999, p. 658).

The same can be said regarding women of the NCWP. When member Catharine Patrick, an experimental psychologist who studied creative thinking, lobbied for group endorsement of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in 1943, President Florence Goodenough expressed her reservations in correspondence with Secretary Gladys Schwesinger. Admitting that, if pressed to vote, she would personally “probably be on the affirmative side” (Ives, n.d., Goodenough to G. Schwesinger, February 16, 1943, p. 1), she expressed concern about the consequences of group endorsement: “I am becoming increasingly doubtful about
this whole affair of endorsement by the society... I think it might leave a bad smell which would do the society more harm than good” (p. 2). Schwesinger replied that group discussion of the ERA and possible endorsement might provide the opportunity for Council members to discuss and clarify “the matter of policy and scope for NCWP activities” (Ives, n.d., Schwesinger to F. L. Goodenough, February 24, 1943, p. 2). Without such clarification, she feared, “we seem headed for relative inaction, which would make us something of a laughingstock” (p. 2). At the same time, she expressed her own misgivings about taking a public stand on the ERA issue, confiding to Goodenough: “I do not have the stomach of a militant feminist” (p. 2). Concern about perception of the group fueled discussion of the ERA issue (there would be no group endorsement) and also debates regarding purpose, longevity, and its single-gender status.

The social and professional contexts within which these women operated placed constraints on the strategies available to them. Some appear highly conservative from our present vantage point, but these “unfamiliar feminisms” nevertheless promoted change and set the stage for the more obvious feminist victories of the 1970s. Several different strategies for enlarging women’s opportunities emerged during this time and laid the groundwork for the more clearly activist period of the 1970s.

**Strategy: Adapt and evolve.** Concern about effective strategy is seen vividly in correspondence between Goodenough and Edna Heidbreder. Goodenough, a perennial protestor against NCWP continuation, believed that women could achieve more through forming local chapters and disbanding the national organization, which antagonized so many powerful men in the field. Heidbreder, a one-time colleague of Goodenough’s at the University of Minnesota who spent most of her career at Wellesley College (and published the famous history text, *Seven Psychologies*, in 1933), was not inclined to align herself with the militant faction within the NCWP. Considering the question of forming a local NCWP chapter in the Boston area, Heidbreder noted the sexism prevalent at Harvard. In a letter to Goodenough she wrote: “You know, of course, that Harvard is not particularly enthusiastic about accepting the cooperation of women in any field” (Goodenough, 1936–1959, Heidbreder to F. L. Goodenough, September 7, 1942, p. 1). Yet she added that women were making progress there and at Radcliffe by being asked to serve on some committees: “This may not seem very revolutionary to a member of a state university but apparently in these parts it represents real progress” (p. 1). She predicted that establishing a local NCWP chapter would destabilize the slow progress women were making, and feared that other NCWP members “might be in favor of revolution rather than evolution” (p. 2). Goodenough responded affirmatively: “Like you, I am inclined to think that evolution is generally better than revolution” (Goodenough, 1936–1959, Goodenough to E. Heidbreder, September 11, 1942, p. 1).

Goodenough accepted the invitation to run for NCWP president reluctantly, telling her mentor Lewis Terman: “Under the circumstances I felt that I could do nothing but agree so I did, hoping that I would not be elected, but alas, I was” (Terman, L. M., 1910–1959, Goodenough to L. M. Terman, June 21, 1942, p. 2). Entering psychology relatively late in life and completing her PhD with Terman in 1924 at age 38 after a short career as a school psychologist, Goodenough was 56 when she became NCWP president. Coming of age professionally in the 1920s, she was subject to the norms governing entry of women into the professions – to succeed as professionals, women were expected to “leave behind the sex loyalty that was a prerequisite for feminism” (Cott, 1987, p. 238) and to align themselves instead with their male peers.

At the same time, Goodenough used her leadership position to think strategically about how best to secure successful careers for women during the volatile, postwar years when workplace gender roles and expectations were being renegotiated. In the 1940s, psychologists were enjoying a cultural niche as expert engineers of human welfare, and a major realm of oversight was the home. Women psychologists often found careers in professions that allowed them to serve as experts in home life and child rearing, particularly during the era of the parent education movement (Cahan, 1991). Women psychologists held 60% of the positions in schools, clinics, and guidance centers, while making up only 30% of the field (Bryan & Boring, 1946). Laying claim to these jobs involved perpetuating tacit acceptance of the doctrine of separate spheres; they could argue, as Goodenough and others did, that work with children and families made good use of their assets as women. (See Harris’s [1984] account of John Watson’s endorsement of the separate spheres doctrine.)

Their situation was analogous to that of early women physicians, as described by historian Regina Morantz-Sanchez (1987): “they argued that mothers and wives needed expert advice to perform their roles properly. Women doctors could provide this aid by linking the advances of science to the everyday lives of women” (p. 46). Goodenough made a similar claim in 1944: “Logically it might be argued that if women’s place is in the home, then women psychologists may be better suited than are men to solve problems related to the home” (Ives, n.d., Goodenough to G. Schwesinger, May 15, 1944, p. 1). Goodenough sought to expand women psychologists’ opportunities in ways that would capitalize on the status quo rather than undermine it. A consequence of what she did not anticipate was that women psychologists, by taking on new roles as home-life experts, quietly weakened the boundary separating public and private spheres and contributed to redefining domestic life during the early- and mid-20th century.

Goodenough (1944) elaborated her ideas about expanding the postwar roles for women in psychology, but her work to secure professional space for women also included...
personal efforts to place her graduate students in good jobs. As one of the very few women training graduate students at a major research university, she was a significant figure in the job networking system that was dominated by prominent male psychologists like Boring, Woodworth, and Terman. Almost all of Goodenough’s students were women, and her students had a remarkable success rate for placement in academic positions. Of the 46 second-generation women psychologists who trained at the University of Minnesota, 12 (of 23 whose careers are documented) established full-time academic careers, and 10 of these 12 reached full professor status (Johnson, 2006). Another 11 women from the Minnesota cohort went on to prominent applied careers in government settings and in the private sector. In a behind-the-scenes fashion, Goodenough engineered a variety of careers for second-generation women; her alignment with powerful male peers permitted participation in the mostly “old boys’ network” that led to job placement for women students. For Goodenough, successful evolution meant placing skilled women in academic positions where they would demonstrate their competence and thus pave the way for more women in the academy and in applied settings.

Goodenough’s views illustrate the complex gender politics negotiated by second-generation women: Single and without children herself, Goodenough frequently advised students to adjust their expectations about gender roles in the home to make possible the combining of motherhood with full-time work (Johnson, 2006). Like Gilbreth, she envisioned a larger role for men in the domestic sphere. At the same time she publicly endorsed traditional gender roles to argue for women’s unique fit with particular applied professions.

The question of whether Goodenough qualifies as a feminist in contemporary terms is a difficult one. She was, one could argue, an inadvertent feminist, promoting feminist aims of equal access and gender-fair participation in both the public and private spheres, but couching her arguments in ways that fit the professional doxa of her day. She clearly acknowledged the existence of gender-based discrimination; for example, reflecting on the ERA she observes that “There can be no question that women are discriminated against in many occupations where such discrimination is neither necessary nor desirable” (Goodenough, 1936–1959, Goodenough to E. Woodyard, March 10, 1943, p. 1). In another letter, she writes: “I have never been a militant feminist but I believe thoroughly that everyone should be given an opportunity to do the kind of work for which he is best fitted” (Goodenough, 1936–1959, Goodenough to E. M. Carrington, 1944, p. 1). As Gurin (1985) has suggested, feminist consciousness requires the perception that inequities are illegitimate, and Goodenough (along with many women psychologists of her day) did not always share that perception. The action she advocated was for women psychologists to demonstrate competence through productive scientific work.

By constitution, Goodenough was conservative and highly pragmatic. She was not comfortable with confrontation, and she was not idealistic enough to imagine a social shift toward egalitarian gender roles, unlike her colleague Georgene Seward (discussed below). She was not a feminist by contemporary standards, but her “adapt and evolve” strategy can be viewed as an unfamiliar form of feminism that made possible some “small wins” for women (Walsh, 1985), particularly in the employment area. Adapting her views to fit her audience, Goodenough used her power to promote careers for women—both publicly through publication (Goodenough, 1944) and privately through job placement and referral. In her mentoring relationships, she helped to re-write expectations about how professional women and men might combine work and family—paving the way for further progress in the 1960s and beyond.

Strategy: Protest from within and without. Although the NCWP was not organized explicitly to address discrimination, many members harbored concerns over the status of women in the field and discussed issues and strategies privately in correspondence. The professional climate for these women did not support openly challenging gender bias; to do so would result in being labeled a “militant feminist” (or “militantly feminist”) or being derided as a “suffragette”—terms Goodenough and others used frequently in correspondence.

Even so, some NCWP women did speak out. These women’s strategies seem more familiar to contemporary feminist psychologists, but even among themselves, they did not always agree. Harriet O’Shea, for example, was willing to step forward as leader of the “Evanston Committee of five” and authored a letter to ECP leaders openly raising the discrimination issue. Alice Bryan served on high-profile committees during the 1940s and was a key negotiator in the 1944 merger of AAAP with APA (Bryan, 1983; Napoli, 1981). Her repeated raising of complaints about the under-representation of women in APA leadership roles got Boring’s attention and resulted in their publishing collaboration. Yet in a retrospective account, Bryan distanced her efforts from the more “militant” approaches used by colleagues:

Among the women, views differed as to the most effective strategy for achieving our objectives. O’Shea believed in militant action. I preferred to work within the “system,” bringing pressure when and where it appeared most likely to effect constructive change, taking a stand when I had sufficient facts to support my position. If asked whether I considered myself a “conservative” or a “radical,” I would have replied that those terms had no meaning for me. (1986, p. 184).

Mildred Mitchell made her feminist leanings clear in her 1983 autobiography (Mitchell, 1983); she was one of...
the militantly feminist NCWP members that raised the ire of those pursuing the “evolution” strategy. Less genteel than many of her women colleagues in recounting experiences of discrimination, Mitchell offered in her autobiography scathing accounts of E. G. Boring’s maneuvers to block her progress as a graduate student in his Harvard program. She eventually switched to Yale (which proved to be a more hospitable setting), where she worked with Clark Hull, who emerges as a supporter of women’s psychological careers in a number of second-generation women’s accounts. Mitchell (1951) was instrumental in arguing for the postwar relevance of the NCWP with her analysis of women’s limited opportunities for APA leadership, summarized earlier. Her wartime experience as one of the few women psychologists to serve in the military and her frequent encounters with gender discrimination in her clinical work at Veteran’s Administration centers sensitized her to patterns of gender discrimination in male-dominated institutions (Mitchell, 1983).

**Strategy: Challenge the status quo with research.** Georgene Seward is another clear candidate for one of Goodenough’s “militants.” Seward was one of the few experimental psychologists to focus on the topic of gender roles in the 1940s, for which she has been recognized as an isolated pioneer by later feminist historian-psychologists (Morawski, 1994; Morawski & Agronick, 1991; Unger, 2001). Earlier pioneers like Helen Thompson Woolley and Leta Hollingworth used newly emerging mental testing techniques to challenge assumptions of female intellectual inferiority (see Rosenberg, 1982; Shields, 1975). Once inaugurated, however, the tradition of using empirical research to advance feminist aims in the field went underground in the 1920s and 30s. Seward’s attempts to revive that tradition have gone largely unheralded in historical accounts of the psychology of sex differences (e.g., Lewin, 1984).

In the 1930s, prominent IQ researcher Lewis Terman and his student and colleague Catherine Cox Miles produced their normative masculinity-femininity scale (Terman & Miles, 1936). Their work was widely accepted as proving, as one reviewer summed up: “There are sex differences. There are an astonishing number of them in twentieth-century America” (Hartmann, 1937, p. 106). Lewin (1984) points out that their approach (adopted by subsequent psychometric researchers) served mainly to validate highly traditional Victorian gender roles; for example, the “feminine person” in this model was “timid, obedient, and good” (p. 163). Further, the infusion of both psychoanalytic and behaviorist ideas during this era gave scientific validity to the doctrine of “separate spheres” and promoted the belief that healthy adjustment required acceptance of one’s scientifically ordained gender role (see Harris, 1984; Shields, 1975). Given this scientific and cultural context, Seward’s use of research to challenge the gendered status quo and her temporary success in generating support for her efforts are remarkable.

In the parlance of the time, Seward was one of the more feministically minded of mid-century women psychologists as evidenced in her incisive critique of contemporary American social arrangements. Hers was a feminism inspired by Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Emma Goldman—emphasizing economic independence for women, challenging traditional domestic roles, and calling for a new social order. She was also influenced by social psychologists such as her teacher Gardner Murphy, who saw a place for scientific psychology in promoting democratic ideals (Murphy, 1945). On the basis of her own questionnaire studies of college-aged women, Seward (1945a, 1945b) produced an analysis of the cultural conflict inherent in contemporary gender arrangements, contrasting the independence of single women with the socioeconomic parasitism of married women. Eschewing the professionalism/feminism dichotomy, Seward emphasized the scientific basis for her call to social change (Seward, 1946).

Not only was Seward devoting her own professional activity to women’s issues during this period, but she also was engaged in organizing group efforts on the study of gender roles in postwar reconstruction. In her 1943 account of the formation of the NCWP, Schwesinger stated: “Dr. Georgene Seward is initiating a comprehensive piece of research on the relative roles of men and women in the postwar world. This she is prepared to divide among interested collaborators” (p. 300). Seward submitted a plan for this research to NCWP President Florence Goodenough, whose response of July, 1943 reveals something of the tense dynamic between them: “The general plan is, I think, an excellent one. However, I am not entirely clear as to whether the major purpose is that of propaganda or of unbiased inquiry” (Goodenough, 1936–1959, Goodenough to G. Seward, July 7, 1943, p. 1). Goodenough was calling Seward’s professionalism into question with the use of the word “propaganda,” a term that must have been particularly galling to Seward who valued the staunchly empiricist training she received from her Columbia mentor, Robert Woodworth. Although Goodenough urged Seward to go ahead with the plan, she cautioned her not to “ignore actual differences in the interests and attitudes claimed by the two sexes. . . . Sex differences are real and I would personally not be greatly in sympathy with any attempt to reason them out of existence” (p. 1). Goodenough, like Catherine Cox Miles, was one of Lewis Terman’s star graduate students and maintained close ties to him, both professionally and personally. She cited the Terman and Miles’s (1936) research in her response to Seward as evidence of actual differences and, not surprisingly, resisted Seward’s vision of empirical work in the service of challenging norms.

Perhaps this lukewarm endorsement by the NCWP president is what encouraged Seward to garner additional support from the Society for Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI). In 1944 she published a report described as the first stage in the joint activities of the Committee on the Roles of Men and Women in Postwar Society of SPSSI.
and the Committee on Postwar Planning for Women of the NCWP (Seward, 1944). Seward’s report made it plain that the committee was calling for a radical restructuring of conventional gender roles through sharing of domestic and outside work roles. This call for social reform was part of a democratic rhetoric yoking feminism with postwar reconstruction, an idea fully realized in Seward’s monograph Sex and the Social Order, published the next year.4 Seward’s retreat from gender roles research during the cold war years is not surprising, Harris (1980) cites evidence that several SPSSI members suspected of communist leanings were investigated by the FBI starting in the 1930s and suggests that research on social issues “became more conservative and more accepting of the status quo” (p. 1142) as an indirect result.

Although Seward could gain support from sympathetic SPSSI colleagues and other militantly feministic women of the NCWP, her vision of postwar gender role transformation was clearly at odds with the views of other influential psychologists. Her progressive views on gender relations made her ineligible for inclusion in the group of miraculous exceptions. As a result, Seward struggled professionally, losing jobs because of anti-nepotism rules and finally shifting her focus to research on clinical work.5 Even so, she can be credited with furthering the tradition of harnessing empirical psychological methods to questions of how to challenge accepted gender norms. Seward’s work can be viewed as a bridge between the early feminist research in psychology inaugurated by Hollingworth and Woolley and the later burgeoning of interest in gender roles and gender differences set in motion by second-wave feminism.

### LEGACY OF THE NCWP

Whether working to undermine orthodox views of gender difference (Seward), quietly promoting women’s career opportunities (Goodenough), or openly critiquing the exclusion of women from top APA posts (Mitchell), these women drew from their NCWP membership to imagine a larger, more powerful place for women in psychology. The 1959 name change from ICWP to ICP marked the end of an organized group for women, and there would not be another until the 1969 founding of the AWP and 1973 creation of APA’s Division 35 on the Psychology of Women. Consistent with the pattern identified by Rupp and Taylor (1987), there is no identifiable overlap between AWP and NCWP such that the NCWP is mentioned only briefly as part of the background for the founding of AWP in a recent history (see Tiefer, 1991).

Still there was significant interwave activity keeping alive the interest in women’s issues supported by NCWP activity. The foundation laid for research on women and gender roles during the NCWP years sustained continued interest and publication throughout the 1960s. (A PsycINFO search produced over 400 journal articles, chapters, and books with “woman” or “sex roles” in the title and published between 1960 and 1970.) In addition, second-generation women were successful in seeking out and securing key roles so that when the feminist revolution in psychology opened more leadership possibilities, there were many women well situated to step up and serve. Anne Anastasi, for example, was chair of the psychology department at Fordham and past president of the Eastern Psychological Association when she was tapped for the presidency of APA in 1972, ending a 50-year masculine hold on that position. Leona Tyler was dean of the Graduate School at the University of Oregon and past president of the Western Psychological Association when she succeeded Anastasi as president in 1973. Tyler was a charter member of the NCWP, whereas Anastasi avoided single-gender groups (Anastasi, 1988). Other women held leadership positions in SPSSI (Unger, Sheese, & Main, in press).

Prominent NCWP charter member, Gestalt psychologist Mary Henle addressed the question of legacy in her 1983 autobiography:

> Has my generation left you any legacy? . . . I believe that we have. We have done it by quietly doing our jobs, not as women psychologists, but as psychologists. . . . Women are accepted in psychology as they were not forty years ago. I almost dare to say that the acceptance of women in psychology is the legacy of my generation to yours. (Henle, 1983, p. 229)

The NCWP legacy is a complex one; it did not revolutionize psychology but its presence facilitated a quiet transformation. Evidence of members’ feminist accomplishments is lost when historical accounts sum up the NCWP as an ineffective attempt at feminist organizing. Capshew (1999), for example, characterized the activity of the NCWP as “short-lived” (p. 88). This view was underscored by his inadvertent omission of the word women from his account of the group’s first name change in 1946 (Capshew gives 1947 as the date) from National Council of Women Psychologists to International Council of Women Psychologists, giving the impression that the organization’s focus on women ceased 13 years earlier than it did (Capshew, p. 88). (The actual decision to omit the word women took place in 1959.)

There also is evidence of a postwar drop in ICWP membership to just 106 in 1948 (Rossiter, 1995, p. 345). Yet, the intrepid Mildred Mitchell, chair of the membership committee from 1945 to 1959, energetically recruited new women members by sending out hundreds of applications to new PhDs and others recently added to the APA directory. Mitchell reported herself that “membership more than doubled in 1949” (1951, p. 193), reaching a high of 496 in 1958 (Rossiter, 1995, p. 345). Clearly, during this era the group thrived, and there were plenty of psychologists interested in an organization focusing on women and their professional opportunities.

Examination of the NCWP/ICWP newsletter suggests that the Council provided avenues of networking for women and facilitated connections. The newsletter documented members’ leadership achievements (e.g., Esther McGinnis’s directorship of the Merrill Palmer School...
[ICWP Newsletter, December 20, 1948, p. 3]), their military work (Mildred Mitchell’s appearance in a New York Herald Tribune article describing her lone female status as staff psychologist at the National Naval Medical Center [NCWP Newsletter, December 1, 1943, p. 1]), and their many publications. The Council surely served as a support system for second-generation women, many of whom had few female colleagues in their work as clinicians, testers, researchers, or as the sole woman in their academic departments.

Perhaps most surprising to those schooled in the belief in a pre-1970s “womanless psychology” (Crawford & Marecek, 1989, p. 149) is evidence in the newsletters in and around the 1940s of the wealth of woman-focused research projects and publications (e.g., on women’s mechanical aptitudes, women parolees’ outcomes, women’s vocational interests, and women’s scientific career paths). Members published research on women and gender issues regularly in prominent journals (see Appendix C of the online Supporting Information). As Napoli points out (in this quote also cited by Alice Bryan [1986] in her response to Capshew and Lazlo [1986]): “women’s place in psychology received more attention during the war than it had in all the previous fifty years combined” (Napoli, 1981, p. 124). This inclusion was undoubtedly due to the existence of the NCWP.

Membership in the NCWP/ICWP also ensured that women had a place on many of the most powerful committees inside and outside APA during years of significant transition in psychology. The Council had representation in the Intersociety Constitutional Convention of 1943 (to reorganize the APA), the ECP (the all-male group that refused to include women at their inception), and the National Research Council (Schwesinger, 1943). Members served on the joint APA–AAAP Committee on War Services to Children and on SPSSI’s peace planning committees (Schwesinger, 1943), and, as mentioned earlier, Georgene Seward forged ties between NCWP and SPSSI to promote research on postwar gender roles.

During and after World War II, women psychologists’ large numbers may have, paradoxically, worked against them (Rossiter, 1995). In those years of job scarcity, the large presence of women psychologists augmented the perception that they posed a threat to their male colleagues. This intrusion, in turn, triggered a conservative impulse in many women psychologists. Women were reluctant to appear self-serving in an era in which patriotic self-sacrifice was expected. Patriotism simply trumped allegiance to women’s issues during the war years (Bryan, 1986). Capshew (1999) cites competition for jobs as a possible answer to the question of why the NCWP would “dedicate itself to what was obviously ‘women’s work’” (p. 88). “With men entering applied fields through government and military employment, the women may have simply been trying to protect their claims to such ‘feminine turf’” (p. 88). Capshew suggests, that “a harsh critic could argue that, rather than disclosing any feminist agenda, the group’s policies betray a defensive mentality” (p. 88). However, they may also be seen as a means of tailoring existing disciplinary ideology to legitimize women’s place in the field and for participating in defining its future.

Finally, much of the applied work being done by NCWP groups and individuals was innovative and progressive. Armstrong (1946), for example, reported that the Boston chapter had two groups: one charged with counseling returning veterans and their families and the other “with combating intolerance in children” (p. 403). Schwesinger reviewed work by Seward on gender roles and research on what women could do to promote passage of the ERA. NCWP psychologists worked with the Women’s Bureau in Washington to improve selection of women workers in war industries and trained nursery school teachers (Schwesinger, 1943).

As Rosenberg (1992) has noted, American feminism entered a quiet period after the 1920s: “The feminist idea that there was unity in gender began to erode, women turned inward to focus on their own private concerns” (pp. 91–92). As we have seen, an individualist ethos, fed by professional norms, ensured that attempts to organize as women professionals were difficult in the 1940s. The voices of those promoting feminist activism (like Mitchell, O’Shea and Seward) were subjugated to the general view that adhering to meritocratic standards and promoting individual effort would eventually win women a permanent place in psychology. In spite of this view, some women did challenge the status quo by forming networks, publishing studies focused on women, and paving the way for the women of the following generation. The dramatic upheavals in the 1970s were largely due to the surge of solidarity imported with second-wave feminism as it motivated collective action.

It is in this context that contemporary feminist psychologists can locate, in the history of the NCWP, valuable lessons for addressing our current situation. In particular, recent research on third-wave feminists indicates a return to a more individualistic conception of feminism. For example, for “many young feminists, the term sisterhood seems anachronistic” (Henry, 2005, p. 89), and for many younger women, feminism seems to lack personal relevance (Aronson, 2003).

Further, as women psychologists become more numerically prominent and take on leadership roles, they may become complacent about the need for solidarity and activism (also see Rutherford, Vaughn-Blount, & Ball, in press). In this context, the internal struggles of NCWP members offer a cautionary tale. Lack of solidarity among women can be seen as understandable in the context of the professional norms of the 1940s, but it would be unfortunate to see a return to individualism among contemporary women psychologists. A loss of solidarity could permit a dangerous inattentiveness toward equity issues and an inability to maintain the progress we have made through implementation of reforms during the 1970s and beyond. Complacency about equity is fed by the widespread perception that women have already achieved gender parity in the...
United States—echoing the “myth of equality” that worked against feminist organizing in the 1920s (Freedman, 1974). Finally, the current negative cultural climate for feminism may tempt women psychologists to resurrect the “double consciousness” described by Cott (1987, p. 233), separating gender considerations from their self-identity as scientists and professionals. The struggles of activists like Mitchell, O’Shea, and Seward stand as reminders of the importance of nurturing solidarity and a collective outlook.

Examination of public and private conversations about women’s place in psychology during the 1940s and 1950s demonstrates the wide variety of positions articulated. These women possessed multiple viewpoints, arguing passionately among themselves and with their male peers, using the best evidence available to them. Transforming the discipline was not a viable option in the 1940s, but focusing solely on the limits they faced diverts attention from the latent, creative, and sometimes inadvertent strands of feminist subversion evident in the research and organizing activities of the women of the NCWP. There were few docile servants among them, and documents of their day suggest that they were difficult to ignore. As an institution they did not endure into the second wave of feminist activism, but their demise as an organized group should not be used to dismiss their impact. Some historians have noted the tendency to describe the emergence of new movements within a discipline as revolutionary, creating an image of rupture rather than continuity with the past (Leahey, 1992). Shifting the feminist lens to permit perception of continuity linking the NCWP to later second-wave developments allows us to reclaim an era in American psychology that was complex but productive for women in our field. As sociologist Bridget Fowler (2004) points out, “where there is collective memory there is also organized forgetting” (p. 149). Second-generation women psychologists held diverse views on feminism and the place of women in psychology. Difficult to classify as a group, they should not be forgotten or underestimated by feminist historians seeking to place them accurately in our collective history.

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NOTES

1. Harrower had an interesting career. Educated in England, she took psychology classes from famed British psychologist Beatrice Edgell (Valentine, 2006) but never completed her degree. Nevertheless, through the patronage of a sympathetic male employer, she landed in the United States as an assistant to Gestalt psychologist Kurt Koffka at Smith College. Working in his laboratory, she became acquainted with a number of psychologists forced to emigrate from Nazi Germany, including Tamara Dembro and Eugenia Hanfmann. By bending some rules, Koffka eventually arranged for Harrower to obtain a Ph.D. at Smith even though Harrower (1983) herself admits that “Smith College was not a higher degree granting institution [and] I had taken no courses” (p. 156).

2. Loevinger’s Ph.D. training was delayed in part because she was denied entrance to the University of Minnesota graduate psychology program in 1937. Richard Elliott, the department chair, discouraged her from pursuing graduate work because, as a Jewish woman, he argued that there would be scarce job opportunities. He recommended that she pursue her interest in psychology by marrying a psychologist. Loevinger completed her degree at University of California, Berkeley (Loevinger, 1988).

3. Those presuming that this highly visible professorship would pave the way for more women faculty appointments would be disappointed. Rossiter describes Peak as a “staunch antifeminist” (Rossiter, 1995, p. 46) and points out that, “[u]nfortunately, the one chosen [for the endowed chair] was one of the least active in championing the cause of women in the field” (p. 40).

4. In addition, one other participant in the joint NCWP/SPSSI committee, Catherine Patrick, published a survey paper in the SPSSI journal expanding upon Murphy and Seward’s alignment of fascism with repression of women and communism/socialism with increased legal rights of women (Patrick, 1946). No other publications of the joint committee appear in SPSSI’s journal (Journal of Social Issues), suggesting that it might not have continued in the postwar years.

5. Seward and her husband, fellow psychologist John Seward, were ousted from their positions at Connecticut College for Women by the president who did not approve of married couples on the faculty. After a year in Boston, where Georgene Seward again encountered sexism in hiring, they moved to California, where she was hired as a professor of clinical psychology at University of Southern California, necessitating a shift in her research focus to clinical topics.

6. Journalist Susan Faludi (2007) recently offered an interesting analysis linking retreat from feminist commitments to periods of threat to national security in the United States. She demonstrates how, during times of war or threat (including the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks), there is evidence of cultural rejection of feminist aims in favor of a revival of traditional gender roles casting women as weak and vulnerable.

7. Although many of the programs sponsored by the NCWP/ICWP were tilted toward the progressive, individual members sometimes applied their expertise in ways that seem troubling now, particularly those who were active in eugenics organizations. Clairette Armstrong, for example, joined with other psychologists to oppose sanctuary for refugee children during the Nazi era, using eugenics-based arguments (Tucker, 2002, p. 85). Gladys Schwesinger, on the other hand, has been cited for supporting the 1930s trend away from hereditary conceptions of IQ that undergirded eugenics theories by promoting a balanced look at the relative contributions of nature and nurture in her 1933 book Heredity and Environment (Degler, 1992).

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**SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

The following supporting information for this article is available online at: http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/117988121/home

Appendix A: Second-Generation Women Discussed in this Article

Appendix B: Charter Members of the NCWP

Appendix C: Representative Pre-1960 Journal Publications on Women and Gender Issues by NCWP Members (arranged chronologically)