

Preface

The Psychology of Gender Through the Lens of Culture is the most welcome addition to the growing literature in gender studies. It is a unique volume as it integrates three important fields of study that are not often addressed in combination—psychology, gender, and culture. Safdar and Kosakowska-Berezecka are to be commended for assuming such a novel perspective. They have indeed produced a valuable volume, bringing together an impressive group of scientists from a large number of cultures. Those readers interested in cultural diversity will find a great deal of it here. Those interested in understanding gender relations and gender dynamics will find insights into these. And finally psychologists and others interested in psychological analyses, above and beyond sociological, economic, and other social science perspectives, will benefit greatly from reading this volume.

In their introductory chapter Safdar and Kosakowska-Berez provide a general orientation to the main topics and issues covered in the chapters. The range of topics is remarkable. On the one hand, we find the analysis of complex ideological structures and political change as they impact gender in culture. On the other hand, we are informed about the developmental psychological mechanisms underlying the formation of gender stereotypes and prejudice. On the one hand, theoretical perspectives such as “ambivalent sexism” informs a number of chapters, on the other hand empirical studies provide valuable information and implications for applications to mitigate gender prejudice. Several chapters tend to include similar theoretical views even though they originate from studies in very different socio-economic-cultural contexts.

Among these, one particularly absorbing ideological (as well as cognitive and attitudinal) point of theoretical debate concerns the construal of gender equality versus gender complementarity. As noted by anthropologists, this differentiation has a long history and emerges basically from gendered division of labor in human groups. Through time, it has been established in religions and traditions. The view that the two genders are, by definition, different (not equal) but complementary is endorsed by a more traditional, conservative world view that purports *different* and *separate* spheres of action for men and women, the public and the private, with extensive implications for social and economic policies. The opposite view, claiming the equality of genders, in contrast, calls for *shared* spheres of action. From a

history of race relations (in the USA) we have learned that *separate* but *equal* is actually *never equal*. The implications for “gender—in culture” dynamics are enormous. This issue is relevant for a number of the chapters; it is indeed a key issue in the world today.

Ambivalent sexism is another theoretical perspective which has informed research. The developmental trends in sexism from childhood to adulthood provide psychological insights into the emergence of ambivalent ideologies of paternalistic and hostile sexism, involving positive and negative attitudes toward women. It is shown, for example in Spain, that though apparently benevolent, paternalistic sexism also tends to perpetuate rather than eliminate status inequalities between men and women. Thus it is important to study the mechanisms underlying complex sexist beliefs, their causes, and their behavioral and ideological outcomes.

With regard to social and political factors impacting gender issues there is great diversity. At times ironic trends are also noted, for example in Turkey and Hungary, pointing to *increase* in traditional gender relations following democratization. Such phenomena point to the limitations of structural changes in forming gender equality and draw attention to the significance of underlying cultural factors. Clearly, concerted efforts are needed particularly in education, both formal and nonformal. In particular, reaching children early with perspectives of human rights and gender equality and persistently continuing such efforts are called for.

In conclusion I can say that this is a “must read” for anyone interested in gender issues. From South Asian to Polish, from Chinese to Mexican, with studies and observations carried out in 20 nations and ethnic groups, this volume indeed presents a global portrait of gender. The reader benefits greatly from this joint effort in gaining knowledge and understanding into gender dynamics and gender problems to be solved. Given our overarching goal of promoting gender equality in the world, we learn a great deal about the psychological, social, cultural, and contextual factors that are promising toward contributing to the realization of this goal. Nevertheless, ours is a long path, requiring patience and persistence in addition to knowledge and understanding.

Psychology, Gender, Culture
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Theories and Applications

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