Sex and Acknowledgments:
A Nonreactive Study

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Two studies investigated the effect of author(s)' sex on acknowledgments. Study 1 compared 70 female authors of books in psychology with 300 males. While men acknowledged mainly other males' professional advice, women acknowledged advice by both sexes. The rate of mixed-sex advisors increased over time. No such effects were obtained in acknowledgments of clerical help: Over time and across the sexes predominantly female assistance was acknowledged. Separate analyses of acknowledgments of spouses showed women acknowledging their husbands' advice, and men thanking their wives mostly for manuscript typing. Study 2 surveyed acknowledgments in the 1959 and 1979 issues of eight psychological journals. Male acknowledgees outnumbered females, especially among male authors. The latter had also the lowest proportion of mixed-sex acknowledgments. Over time, the proportion of female and mixed-sex authors increased; so did the proportion of acknowledgments for mixed-sex professional advice. Each group tended to acknowledge clerical help by own-sex individuals. The proportion of both mixed-sex and all-female acknowledgments increased over time. The discussion deals with female advisors' availability and with authors' tendency to seek out same-sex colleagues.

A recent article by Denmark (1980) described the important and substantial contribution women have made to the discipline of psychology. I wish to draw attention to a rarely recognized aspect of such contribution: female participa-

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tion in the writing of books and journal articles. No one can fail to notice a type
of acknowledgment appearing in books that has nearly become a cliché: “Finally,
I wish to thank my wife, without whose support and encouragement. . . .”
Such acknowledgments often include the author’s gratitude for his wife’s skills
in typing, proofreading, and indexing, as well. But do spouses ever offer (and
are they then thanked for) their professional aid?

The ethical issues involved in the assignment of publication credits have
received attention in the past (Bridgewater et al., 1981; Spiegel & Keith-Spiegel,
1970). These works are based on surveys of potential authors who responded to
hypothetical situations. Using such data, Bridgewater et al. (1981, p. 525) con-
cluded that “gender . . . did not influence opinion concerning appropriate au-
thorship,” and this “despite a resurgence of the publish-or-perish syndrome.”
Hypothetical situations, however, tend to produce findings quite different from
real-life events (Moore, 1978). This difference may be due to the relatively low
experimental realism of the hypothetical situation; it is also likely to be related
to the demand characteristics of such studies. The use of unobtrusive and non-
reactive approaches in the study of socially sensitive issues will avoid these prob-
lems, and will provide a more realistic appraisal of the phenomena under investiga-
tion. The study at hand is aimed, therefore, at a nonreactive investigation of
various aspects of acknowledgments. The major questions that arise concern the
relative frequency of the two types of acknowledgments (professional vs. cler-
cal) and their utilization by male and female authors. A further issue of interest
concerns possible changes in the sex ratio of both acknowledgers and acknowled-
gees over time. To obtain information about this issue, data were divided into
two categories: pre- and post-1960. This division is intended to coincide with
an upsurge in the activity of women’s movements in the early 1960’s.

**STUDY 1**

*Method*

Books served as units of observation. The population from which selec-
tion was made may be defined as all the books found in the open stacks of a
large university library (containing over 1,000,000 volumes) between Library of
Congress call numbers BF1 and BF149, inclusive. These are books in the general
field of psychology and include biographies, texts on method, and texts of intro-
ductory and general psychology. The following criteria of selection were ap-
plied: single-author, non-edited books in English, published in this century, ex-
cluding dissertations, series, published lectures, and books published posthum-
ously. Excluded were also books whose author’s sex could not be ascertained.
When more than one edition of a book was available, the earliest one was se-