Mary Cover Jones: Feminine as Asset

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Mary Cover Jones has played many roles during her career as a psychologist—researcher, professor, wife of the eminent psychologist Harold E. Jones, and friend to some of the great names in the field such as Erik Erikson and Nevitt Sanford. Included in the paper is a discussion of three of her primary areas of research—the case study of Peter which provided a preview of behavior modification, evidence from longitudinal studies regarding the problems of early and late maturing, and work on personality antecedents in problem drinkers. In addition, her part in the establishment of the major longitudinal studies at the University of California is reported. Finally, her successful application of traditionally feminine strengths to these many professional undertakings is discussed.

At first glance, 82-year-old Mary Cover Jones attracts you with her warmth. As you get to know her she reinforces this impression with her thoughtfulness and the support she gives not only to long-time friends and associates, but also to those of us who are younger and newer in the field of psychology. These nurturing qualities are her most visible attributes.

At closer look, though, one finds not only a gracious woman, but also a distinguished psychologist. Author of over seventy publications, she is past President of Division 7 (Developmental) of the American Psychological Association (APA), a Fellow of both the APA and The Gerontological Society, and recipient of the G. Stanley Hall Award, the highest accolade given in developmental psychology. In

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1954 The American Psychologist (Kaess & Bousfield, 1954) listed her as one of the 26 most often cited authors in introductory psychology textbooks.

Mary Cover Jones pioneered several frontiers of psychology. While B. F. Skinner was still in high school, her research on children’s fears and her case study of Peter (Jones, 1924a, 1924b) introduced a technique that was later to evolve into a major component of behavior therapy. Along with her husband, the late Harold E. Jones, and other researchers she contributed greatly to the emerging field of developmental psychology through the establishment of the major longitudinal studies at the University of California. In 1952, when educational television was just beginning as a viable mode of instruction, she was teaching one of the first courses to be aired, a class in child development.

Perhaps it is this integration of major scholarly achievements with the traditionally feminine attributes of warmth and nurturance that makes Mary Cover Jones’ life so interesting to examine. She illustrates through her life and work that qualities such as these which are sometimes dismissed as irrelevant can, in fact, be assets for a woman wishing to succeed in the male-dominated area of behavioral science research.

Her contributions to psychology can be illustrated in four specific areas: (1) the case study of Peter, (2) the establishment of the Berkeley longitudinal studies, (3) research on the problems of early and late maturing, and (4) investigations into personality antecedents of drinking problems. These legacies to psychology represent the breadth of her interests, extending as they do over the length of her career, a span of more than 60 years. A review of her career confirms the successful integration of the dual traits described variously as agency and communion, masculine and feminine, achievement and affiliation.

VASSAR AND COLUMBIA

Mary Cover began her scholarly career with some stumbling as an undergraduate at Vassar. First, she failed Latin as a freshman; later she was denied entrance into Margaret Washburn’s psychology seminary, thanks to a “C” in a previous lab course (Jones, Note 1). Yet her Vassar years yielded two very important influences. The first was a system of values and expectations regarding family-career arrangements, evident at Vassar in 1919, when feminism was in full
flower. This early exposure to peer support for combining achievement with motherhood no doubt helped her to cope later when she opted to play diverse roles simultaneously.

The second outcome of her Vassar years stemmed from her budding interest in psychology. In a serendipitous series of events, she was present at a lecture by John B. Watson in New York City when he was describing his ground-breaking research with Albert (Jones, 1974, 1975). In this now immortalized experiment of coupling a loud sound with the innocent reach for a white rat, Watson and Rosalie Raynor had conditioned the child to fear the rat. Albert’s fear not only persisted after the sound was removed, but it eventually generalized to a fear of a white rabbit and other furry objects, even to a Santa Claus mask with a white fuzzy beard (Watson & Watson, 1921).

Listening to the charismatic Watson, the young Mary Cover was led to wonder whether this learning approach might not also be used to remove children’s fears (Jones, 1974, 1975), and so began the history of a new and positive approach to the use of conditioning.

One of the few Vassar graduates who went on for advanced study, Mary Cover entered Columbia University in 1919. In the six ensuing years she would meet and marry Harold Jones, give birth to two children, produce her study of Peter, and receive her Ph.D. degree.

She met Harold, also a Columbia graduate student, at the New School for Social Research where they both were taking a history course from James Harvey Robinson. The two scholars quickly hit it off. She recalls his remark on her library when he first took her home, “I never thought I’d meet a girl who would have books like that.” She responded, “I’m glad to have met a man who let me put my own nickel in the subway turnstile” (Jones, Note 1). Within a year they were married, the ceremony being performed by Norman Thomas, the prominent socialist, whom they had met through Mary’s brother. At that time Harold was a prized student of Woodworth’s, heading toward a career in experimental psychology. Mary’s excitement regarding her own research with children has been credited with turning Harold toward developmental psychology (Sanford, Eichorn & Honzik, 1960).

**CASE STUDY OF PETER**

Over the course of her years at Columbia Mary came to answer that early question sparked by Watson. She had come upon three-year-old Peter, who had already naturally developed a fear of furry...
animals similar to the fear Watson had experimentally induced in Albert. Using Watson's procedures she deconditioned Peter's fear (Jones, 1924a, 1924b). Whether it is recognized as the beginning of behavior therapy (Wolpe, Note 3) or merely cited as an "anticipation" (Sarup, 1978), it must be acknowledged as a landmark study in psychology (Mednick, Pollio & Loftus, 1973).

Here, her personal convictions were already affecting her scientific contributions. Her quality of nurturance influenced her very choice of research. In recollection she could say, "It has always been of the greatest satisfaction to me that I could be associated with the removal of a fear... I could not have played the role of creating a fear in a child, no matter how important the theoretical implications" (Jones, 1974, p. 581).

Her own "patient, meticulous, painstaking procedures" used in the work with Peter she attributed to Watson, who consulted with her throughout the study (Jones, 1975, p. 182). One of the threads she sees in her life—that events often shape lives (Jones, 1974, 1975)—is illustrated in her association with Watson. He had left academic life following a "sensationally publicized divorce suit" (Woodworth, 1959, p. 302) and was living in New York. In what might be a glimmer of an "old girls' network," she and Watson were introduced by Rosalie Raynor, a Vassar classmate of Mary's, who figured in the divorce and became Watson's second wife (Jones, 1974). Mary's care and concern for others extended to Watson's reputation. Even though many years intervened and others, including Watson himself, have documented the "sensational" events leading to the divorce (Watson, 1936; Woodworth, 1959), Mary is careful to prevent any discussion about him from focusing on this part of his life (Jones, 1974, Note 2).

Despite the classic that the Peter study has since become, it was given little regard at the time it was undertaken and was dismissed as an unsuitable subject for her dissertation (Jones, 1975). She can afford to look back in quiet reflection, finding it amusing "that it has received so much attention more recently. I still have yellowed stacks of reprints. No one was interested in them at the time" (Jones, Note 1).

It is with developmental psychology, however, rather than behavior therapy, that Mary Cover Jones has been most closely identified. She left New York when her husband was offered a job at the University of California, Berkeley. Like many women, she had married a man slightly older than herself whose career was further along and who, therefore, got the more attractive job offers.

At Berkeley the Joneses were able to join in the beginnings of the new child development movement, formed outside the confines of
traditional psychology. Begun in the late 1920s at a time when money was available for research and when science seemed to have answers for the way to a better life, the newly developed discipline focused on the growth and development of children in the hopes of improving their care (Senn, 1975).

THE INSTITUTE OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

In 1927, the University of California became the site of one of the several institutes established across the country by the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Foundation to study child development. "We called it the Institute of Child Welfare to make it sound respectable, as well as helpful," Mary Jones recalls (Jones, Note 1). The very idea of studying children scientifically in those early days was not altogether acceptable to either the general public or to traditional psychology with its carefully controlled laboratory techniques. Senn (1975), for example, in his published oral history of the child development movement reports the reasons for a separate Child Study Department at Vassar in 1927. A donor had given money to the college to open a nursery school, and Margaret Washburn, head of the psychology department and Mary's erstwhile professor, said, "Over my dead body!" (p. 21). Mary remembers Washburn's vowing never to set foot in the nursery school (Jones, Note 1).

Although the move to Berkeley offered Mary Jones a job, it was as a research associate, while Harold became Director of Research. He was, by all accounts, a very supportive leader, and yet the relationship of leader-follower generally remained. Nevitt Sanford agrees, "She had a mind of her own. She was certainly a psychologist in her own right. I think, though, she saw her primary task in helping Harold both make a success of the Institute and find out important things about adolescents" (Sanford, Note 4). This dedication to the success of Harold and the Institute probably led her to assume somewhat different tasks from those of an independent career scientist.

In 1928, while Mary was involved primarily in setting up the nursery school (now the Harold E. Jones Child Study Center), two other women, Nancy Bayley and Jean Macfarlane, were hired as administrators of the first two longitudinal studies, the Berkeley Growth Study and the Berkeley Guidance Study.

The third longitudinal study, the one that Mary has been associated with most closely over the years, began in 1932. The Adolescent Growth Study (later called the Oakland Growth Study) was
initiated to follow the transition through puberty of 200 fifth and sixth graders from five elementary schools in Oakland (Jones, 1967).

The Institute, now the Institute of Human Development, has recently celebrated its 50th anniversary. Luminaries such as Margaret Mead, Robert Butler, and Alice Rossi have personally appeared in Berkeley to honor this group of researchers and their study participants whose work is now proudly claimed by psychology. Throughout its history the Institute, now headed by Paul Mussen, has been the home of distinguished psychologists, including Diana Baumrind, Jack and Jeanne Block, Wanda Bronson, Dorothy Eichorn, Erik Erikson, Else Frenkel-Brunswick, Norma Hann, Marjorie Honzik, Nevitt Sanford, Brewster Smith, Read Tuddenham, and John S. Watson. The three longitudinal studies, begun in the time of the Joneses, have been combined into one investigation, now called the Intergenerational Studies. The study members are still being followed; 60% of the original groups remain. Results based on the data collected from 1972–1975 are being prepared for publication (Eichorn, Mussen, Clausen & Haan, in press). Over the years Mary Cover Jones never lagged in her dedication to the Institute of Human Development (IHD) and its objectives. An IHD Citation, awarded in 1969, described her as “a player of many parts in the Institute’s history—charming hostess and helpmate to her husband, who for 25 years was the Institute’s Director—a distinguished scientist in her own right...” Applauded were her “sensitivity and perceptiveness,” which led her to make “multiple distinguished contributions to the field of human development.”

THE PROBLEMS OF EARLY AND LATE MATURING

One major series of studies by Mary Cover Jones emanates from data collected in the Oakland Growth Study: her research on the effects of early and late maturation in adolescence on personality development. She has published five papers in this area (Jones, 1957, 1965; Jones & Bayley, 1950; Jones & Mussen, 1958; Mussen & Jones, 1957), one as her Presidential Address to Division 7 (Developmental) of the American Psychological Association (Jones, 1965).

The idea for this research arose from Mary’s responsibilities for organizing direct observations of the Oakland Growth Study members. Participants were observed in their classrooms, on the playground, and in a “clubhouse” established near the school by the researchers. She remembers being impressed in her observations by
differences in status accorded to teenagers based on their physical development (Jones, Note 4).

Although this work on early-late maturing is linked primarily with Mary Cover Jones’ intuitive conclusions, she magnanimously has described it, and related documents resulting from the longitudinal studies, as truly collaborative efforts. Undoubtedly, her solicitude and understanding contributed heavily to the success of the kind of cooperation demanded by the intricacies of longitudinal investigations.

Through careful study over many years she has shown that clear, measurable group differences in personality functioning exist among adolescents maturing earlier or later than their peers (Jones & Bayley, 1950; Jones & Mussen, 1958; Mussen & Jones, 1957). Further, she has documented that the coping strategies developed by the less popular late-maturing males and early-maturing females served them well even after maturation (Jones, 1965; Jones & Mussen, 1958). Finally, for reasons not quite clear, deviant timing has been shown to have long-term effects for males but not for females (Jones, 1957, 1965), perhaps due to a generalized tendency for women to be less affected by their history than men (McCandless, 1970).

Qualifications—primarily references to the narrowness of the sample—have been placed on the generalizability of this work on early-late maturing by Mary Cover Jones and her associates (Boulterline Young, 1971; Grinder, 1973; McCandless, 1970). Admittedly the group is small, white, urban, middle-class volunteers from the western part of the United States. Nevertheless, the research has become a standard topic in the analysis of puberty and adolescence as found in textbooks on both adolescent psychology (e.g., Conger, 1977) and general developmental psychology (e.g., Hurlock, 1975).

In 1960, after 33 years with the Institute, Mary Jones and her husband retired. Several weeks later they flew to Paris for the beginning of their dream of life at a more leisurely pace. Within three days Harold was dead of a heart attack. Abruptly, Mary found herself without two primary roles she had played for many years, wife and worker. Her successful integration of the “agency” and “communication” aspects of herself is illustrated in her response to Harold’s death. Whereas in the past she had used her feminine qualities to effect success in a masculine field, she now used her work to meet some of her affiliative needs. For the next four years she joined her old friend Nevitt Sanford, who was at Stanford University where he had established the Institute for the Study of Human Problems. Her liveliness, also evident in those years, has been recalled by Sanford, who remembers Mary and E. M. Jellinek, both previously retired, as a
vivid contrast to the grim determination of the younger investigators, worried about their tenure and reputation (Sanford, Note 4).

PERSONALITY ANTECEDENTS OF DRINKING PROBLEMS

In an innovative linkage of areas of research, she was to combine the investigation of alcohol problems undertaken by the Stanford group with the ongoing longitudinal studies at Berkeley. For her research Mary interviewed adults of the Oakland Growth Study in depth regarding their drinking behavior. The personality characteristics of the drinking pattern groups were then compared at three ages: junior high, senior high, and adulthood. Although the groups were small, she found some patterns of personality emerging before the drinking patterns were established (Jones, 1968); she could show that men and women problem drinkers had exhibited instability, unpredictability, and impulsivity in youth (Jones, 1971). Cited in recent attempts in psychiatry to establish a link between alcoholism and minimal brain dysfunction (Tartar, McBride, Buonpane & Schneider, 1977), this work has emerged as a serious step forward in understanding the interrelationship of excessive drinking and personality.

Further, she documented that male problem drinkers as adolescents seemed to over-play the masculine role and began their drinking careers in defiance of authority (Gomberg, 1968; Grinder, 1973; Sanford, 1968). Obviously this fact has implications for interventions with adolescents regarding their use of alcohol.

In a forthcoming chapter on this topic (Eichorn, et al., in press) she notes that it is easier to predict later drinking problems for males than for females based on their adolescent personality data. Reflecting on this difference, she suggests that this may be additional evidence for a sex difference in the effect of personal history (Jones, Note 5).

The value of this work is presently difficult to assess. So little agreement has as yet emerged concerning the etiology of alcoholism. Although Nevitt Sanford considers that “it stands as one of the best studies of its kind” (Sanford, 1968, Note 4), it may be that only the future will recognize the importance of this segment of Mary Jones’s research.

Mary contends that her life, like Edward Thorndike’s, has been more a response to “outer pressures or opportunities rather than to inner needs” (Jones, 1975, p. 185). An example is her involvement in this alcohol work. She has remained actively engaged in alcohol research even though she became originally involved only “because Nevitt offered the opportunity” (Jones, Note 2).
CHOICE OF LIFESTYLE

While the fields of both behavior therapy and developmental psychology have been significantly influenced by the work of Mary Cover Jones, she herself never saw her career as the most important segment of her life. At the top of her list of priorities, no doubt, was her relationship with Harold. Even now (1980), 19 years after his death, she can say, “He’s still very much a part of my life” (Jones, Note 1). She consistently mentions him first when asked to rank her greatest satisfactions, her most supportive relationships, or her deepest friendships over the years.

However, as meaningful to her personally as was this devotion to Harold, it undoubtedly inhibited her professional advancement. In addition to the influence this tie had upon the duties she assumed, there were more overt obstacles as well.

For example, the so-called “nepotism rule,” effective in university hiring procedures during those years, forbade her entree to the academic ranks. Even though she often lectured to psychology classes, she could not hold a regular appointment because of Harold’s professorship. Eventually, she was offered a tenure-track position in educational psychology, a legitimate area of study but clearly one with lesser status than psychology.

Her choice of motherhood no doubt also affected the magnitude of her professional contribution. During the time her children were young, fulltime in-home help was available for their careful supervision as well as for the normal household chores of cleaning and preparing meals. Not for her were the role conflicts of a younger generation of female professionals torn between the choice of either foregoing a career, at least temporarily, or attempting to play all roles at once, the “Superwoman” phenomenon.

Yet, despite Mary’s historical advantage, her role as mother tempered her role as professional. Although she was employed throughout her career, she never worked full-time while her daughters were at home. In fact, she postponed for two years acceptance of her academic appointment when the department demanded a full-time commitment which she refused to make.

Another more subtle obstacle to her success as a scientist was posed by her motherhood as well. Despite the availability of live-in help and the concession to part-time work, her resolution to be a professional and a mother violated her own mother’s values. And, of course, even with peer support, that kind of influence is a significant burden.

Obstacles probably also arose from the priority she gave to her
friendships as well as her family. In 1940, she says, three researchers at the Institute rated each other on nine of Murray's needs which they had just used with the study members. The others rated Mary highest on "desire for social ties." "It was obvious I wanted others to like me, and I worked at it," she says (Jones, Note 2). Sanford agrees with her own perception, though he says he would personally have rated her highest on "nurturance." "She has seen friendships as enormously important, as valuable and durable," he said. "I have really appreciated her friendship and support over the years" (Sanford, Note 4).

Although her work was extremely important to the Institute, particularly in the Oakland Growth Study, she never assumed major duties as an administrator. This allowed her to avoid the competition felt among those directing the different components of the longitudinal studies, yet it probably also limited the extent of her impact.

She dismisses these obstacles to professional success that others can identify because of her decisions to be the devoted wife, the loving mother, the trusted friend. She does not even acknowledge them as compromises. The satisfaction she feels she gained from her husband, the sustenance she continues to receive from her children and her friends more than compensate for anything one might say she lost in exchange. Her conviction in this matter prompts a re-examination of the value of intellectual or professional success relative to interpersonal satisfaction.

**LIFE TODAY**

Yet Mary Cover Jones did choose to have a career, and that decision has also served her well. Her role as a professional has lasted far longer than her roles as wife and child-rearer. At 82, Mary remains involved with the Institute of Human Development as consultant to the Intergenerational Studies, her services being volunteered since her "retirement" in 1960. She remains an active contributor to the field as in her chapter on alcohol problems for the book in preparation at the Institute (Eichorn, et al., in press). She has lunch frequently with her friends Jean Macfarlane, Marjorie Honzik, Dorothy Eichorn, and others who have been part of the studies over the years.

One of her tasks at the Institute has been helping to maintain contact with the study members. We can see the strength of her warmth and caring here not only as a personal attribute but as a professional attribute as well. The special relationships she worked to develop between the research staff and the study participants is surely one of the primary reasons for the lack of major attrition, a problem of
great magnitude in longitudinal studies (Jones, 1967). It also makes the work extremely satisfying. Many of the study members have become her friends. In fact, one piece of work she would still like to do is to write up an account of what it's been like to be part of the studies over the years.

In addition to her work at the Institute of Human Development, she is currently working on a grant proposal on retirement with Nevitt Sanford, Frances Carp, and others at the Wright Institute. She is also called upon from time to time for consultation with students from the University of California and the Wright Institute regarding their research.

A couple of years ago she moved to a retirement community in Santa Barbara. “I thought,” she said, “I’m 80, and I’d better do this. The girls [her daughters] will know I’m taken care of, and they won’t have to worry about me.” However, within seven months she had returned to her home in Berkeley. “They were wonderful people, but I just wasn’t ready for it” (Jones, Note 2).

Mary remains in close contact with her daughters, Barbara and Lesley, and their children. She is delighted that a grandson-in-law’s acceptance for graduate work at the University will bring that family with two little great-granddaughters to live with her next fall.

**ROLE MODEL**

In what ways can Mary Cover Jones serve as a role model for younger women psychologists? There is no doubt that she sacrificed more than many would now be willing to in the service of her affiliative needs. Yet she illustrates that one can be a professional, even make significant contributions to the field, without foregoing interpersonal values. Also, she shows us that the traditionally feminine virtues of nurturance and affiliation need not be discarded but may, in fact, be used as assets by researchers, male and female. In addition, she reminds us that although some may achieve through very purposeful means, carefully guiding their own destiny, others find outer circumstances more influential and thus achieve partly through adaptability. Finally, aided by her earlier decision to have a career, she has remained vital and involved. She had once responded to the blows of widowhood and retirement by entering an entirely new area of study at Stanford. Now, at 82, she counters the threats of loneliness felt by many elders by remaining active in a job where her contributions are real and the personal satisfaction high. Certainly this is worthy of emulation.
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