

Part of the Conversation: Women's Studies in Higher Education

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The United Nations, through its millennium development goals, accords the greatest importance to the role of women graduates who, because of their training, constitute part of a country's skilled human resources and are therefore in a position to make a significant contribution to the process of sustainable human development. Education is thus a principal means to empower women so that they realize their potential.

This paper begins with an examination of the goals of higher education and the question of which of the two—equality or equity of education—must be emphasized. While there are those who suggest that equality of education should be provided, meaning identical educational opportunities for all learners, there are others who are promoting equity of education, meaning the provision of varied educational opportunities in order to achieve specified goals. Four theoretical models for considering the role and place of women in education are the conceptual approaches of pluralism, assimilation, deficit, and social justice. It is suggested that increased use of complementary characteristics may lead to a merging of the concepts of pluralism and assimilation, bringing about a system that serves all.

A case is made for the inclusion and increased recognition of Women's Studies in higher education. Many women's studies programs have gained a degree of stability and familiarity on campuses, but the debate remains regarding its place in higher education—that is, whether to mainstream women's studies in the traditional curriculum or to maintain it as an independent interdisciplinary field. In this paper, the growth of women's studies programs is traced. Models from existing women's studies programs in Philippine universities and at Macquarie University, Sydney and ICU, Tokyo are presented. It is crucial to establish an institutionalized women's studies curriculum in higher education that provides a multidisciplinary organizational framework for individual scholars.

In writing about "The Idea of a University," Andrea Lunsford and John Ruszkiewicz (1994) encouraged readers to consider these questions on the purpose of education: Should education be a mechanism for advancing the welfare of the nation—augmenting its productivity, management skills, and technology and preserving the quality of its work force? Should it be an instrument of social change—teaching ideas of social justice, adjusting to new demographics in the population it serves, and providing the rationale for radical reforms of the economic order? Should it exist primarily to stimulate the intellect and the imagination of their students? Or should schooling serve other or multiple purposes?

What indeed should be the goals of higher education? What role should a college or university play in the following areas?

Shaping students' moral character?

Providing students with intellectual stimulation and satisfaction?

Preparing people for jobs?

Preparing citizens to participate in a democracy?

Preparing workers to compete in a global economy?

Preparing people to advance the frontiers of scientific research?

Answers to these questions are complicated by the fact that we live and teach in pluralistic, paternalistic and, I might add, patriarchal Asia. The first question for us should concern equity or equality of education: What shall it be?

Bennison et al. (1984) have discussed the debate between the two views. On the one hand, there are those who suggest that equality of education should be provided, meaning identical educational opportunities for all learners. On the other hand, there are others promoting equity of education, meaning the provision of varied educational opportunities in order to achieve specified goals. According to Bennison and others,

The premise of some programs is the assertion that identical and equal experiences must be provided for all learners in order to provide equitable education. Because identical experiences are provided, it is assumed that equity of education is assured. Other programs are based on the assertion that intervention programs must be provided to compensate for deficiencies the learners bring to school. The basic assumption is that equality of educational opportunity does not provide equity, but that equity is achieved only when the outcomes of schooling are the same for all groups. (p. 2)

Bennison et al. (1984) offered four theoretical models for considering the role and place of women in education by positing

the conceptual approaches of pluralism, assimilation, deficit, and social justice. Does one strive for assimilation and become a part of the governing structure by becoming the same as those who govern, or does one seek to make a pluralistic home within the established setting and gain a position of influence and power because of one's differences? Is it possible to do this?

According to Fennema and Ayer (1984), faculty competence and skills and the reward structure of academe are based upon an assimilationist model with peer review as the major instrumentation. The support of commonly shared academic values and the enforcement of academic standards often overshadow a more hidden set of criteria for admission to the academy through tenure. "These criteria," Fennema and Ayer add, "are the folkways and mores of the institutional structure" (p. xii). But, assimilation is a very slow process. Females cannot assume a natural progress from entry-level positions to academic or administrative leadership without gaining knowledge of ways to circumvent institutional barriers and without meeting criteria that include the folkways and mores of an institution. Fennema and Ayer say

The perils are well known; women who seek to enter must by definition adopt masculine values of intellectual aggressiveness, dominance, and authority, and sublimate traits identified as feminine and, therefore, come to be viewed as inappropriate. ...Yet, it is only within the institutionalized social structure that more rapid change will occur and...women will deliberately have to seek increased decision-making power. (p. xiii)

By increased use of complementary characteristics, concepts of pluralism and assimilation can be merged to bring about a system that serves all and which cannot be manipulated by the few who will not recognize that the principles of civil rights and feminist movements can no longer be termed invalid.

TRACING THE GROWTH OF WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAMS

Women's studies courses sprang up on campuses across the United States in the end of the 1960s and into the 1970s. College programs, including formal course sequences, certificate programs, minors and majors in the field also emerged but not quite as rapidly in the Philippines in the 1980s. This occurred as women and concerned men noticed the absence, misrepresentation, and trivialization of women

in the higher education curriculum as well as the ways women were systematically excluded from many positions of power and authority as college faculty and administrators (Shaw & Lee, 2004).

Karen Merritt (1984) says that early courses were, in a sense, profoundly revolutionary:

Speaker after speaker looked deeply into her own discipline and marked the ragged fabrics of her venerable field: women omitted from research but who were used to characterize the discipline's understanding of human experience; findings about women that were either nudged into the familiar stereotypes or discarded as aberrations when they could not be made to fit; value placed on human activity and achievement according to the sex of the doer; and many unanswered questions about women, great holes in the disciplinary fabric caused by an epistemological void. (p. 254)

Further, for many faculty and students involved in these early courses, dedicated research on women became inevitable choices. Mary Evans (1997) has gone as far as writing that there are few indications at present (referring to the 1990s) that universities see Women's Studies as anything other than a "peripheral or temporary phenomenon" (p. 22), extending as it were the idea of Women's Studies early on as simply a trend.

WHAT IS WOMEN'S STUDIES?

The book *Women's Voices, Feminist Visions* (2004) edited by Susan M. Shaw and Janet Lee defines women's studies as *the examination of women's experiences that recognizes women's achievements and addresses women's status in society*. "Women's studies puts women (in all our diversity) at the center of inquiry and focuses on our reality as subjects of study" (p. 1). This is different from the traditional enterprise of women as objects of study.

Shaw and Lee (2004) have pointed out that making women subjects of study involves two strategies that together resulted in changes in how colleges do business. First, it rebalanced the curriculum.

Women as subjects of study were integrated into existing curricula, and whole courses about women were offered. This shifted the focus on men and men's lives in the traditional academic curriculum and gave some attention to women's lives and concerns.

Second, it resulted in a transformation of the existing curriculum. "People began questioning the nature of knowledge, how knowledge

is produced, and the applications and consequences of knowledge in wider society." Shaw and Lee refer to the first strategy as an "add women and stir" approach, and consider the second strategy as a serious challenge to traditional knowledge and its claims to truth. Therefore, women's studies aimed not only to create programs of study where students might **focus on women's issues and concerns** but also to integrate **a perspective for looking at things that would challenge previously unquestioned knowledge**. This latter perspective questions how such knowledge reflects women's lives and concerns, how it maintains patterns of male privilege and power, and how the consequences of such knowledge affect women.

WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAMS IN PHILIPPINE UNIVERSITIES

Contemporary women's studies programs in the Philippines include: the Center for Gender Studies and Development (CGSD) at Silliman University; the Development Institute for Women in the Asia-Pacific (DIWA) at the Philippine Women's University; the Institute of Women's Studies (IWS) at St. Scholastica's College; the Center for Women's Studies at the University of the Philippines; and, the Women and Gender Institute (WAGI) at Miriam College.

A multidisciplinary group of 20 faculty members established the Center for Women's Studies and Development at Silliman University in 1981 under a five-year grant from the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia (Genove, 2006). The project was a pioneering venture in the field of women's studies in the Philippines, the Center being the first academe-based women's studies center in the country. For a time, the Center operated with four components under it—curricular, extension, research, and resource center. The faculty members represented the disciplines of nursing, psychology, business management, accounting, social work, education, communication, home economics, sociology, anthropology, and theology. In 1987, a group of Metro Manila schools organized the Women's Studies Consortium primarily to promote women's studies in the formal educational system.

The Development Institute for Women in the Asia-Pacific (DIWA) at the Philippine Women's University, Manila aims to: (1) examine critically existing assumptions about the nature of women and men and the conventional methods used in their education, (2) create a balance in the presentation of women and men in existing

academic disciplines, (3) develop courses that can give students a fuller understanding of their options as human beings and thereby correct gender-role differentiation and stereotyping, (4) develop Philippine-based materials for women's studies, (5) develop a center for the training of women's studies teachers and researchers, (6) contribute to women's studies scholarship through research and faculty and research exchange, (7) provide channels for the flow of information and insight about women from the academy to the community and vice-versa, and (8) network with domestic and overseas women's studies centers.

The Institute of Women's Studies at the St. Scholastica's College in Manila, established in 1988, has three goals, namely (1) awaken a consciousness to and provide an understanding of the woman question through a strategy of formal (institutional) and non-formal alternative education; (2) engage in research and study on gender issues, and projects that uphold the cause of women; and (3) conduct outreach programs that serve women outside the formal educational institution.

The University of the Philippines Center for Women's Studies in Diliman, Quezon City, also established in 1988, has five major programs, namely research, publication, curriculum development, training and outreach, and the twin services—crisis counseling and day care facility. Among its tasks as a system unit, is the coordination of the collection of data from the campuses that are related to the implementation of the Anti-Sexual Harassment policy of the University, the efforts in engendering the curricula, and research on women's/gender issues.

The Women and Gender Institute (WAGI) is Miriam College's center for research, training, and advocacy on women's rights, gender equality and non-sexist learning in support of the leadership of young women and students. It offers a cross-disciplinary perspective for empowerment that is interlinked with democracy, human rights, social justice, and value formation. WAGI forges links with other sectors, organizations and institutions at the national, regional, and international levels. Its thematic programs include gender fair education (integrates issues of women's rights, gender equality & equity into academic and non-academic programs, development programs for faculty, students and staff and, school administration system); international women's human rights (undertakes consultancy work, research and trainings on women's human rights and empowerment as well as offers an annual summer course for

mid-career public servants, educators and professionals), continuing education and research consulting (generates activities on gender fair education including professional and short courses that promote values and critical perspectives on good governance, democracy, and gender justice). This includes the annual International Women's Human Rights Workshop, Feminist-Economics Forum, Feminist Dialogues, International Gender and Trade Network Regional Training, and Gender Gap Audit Training), and resource center (produces and collects women's studies feminist resources available for researchers, academe, and students).

THE STATUS OF WOMEN'S STUDIES ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES TODAY

From a scattering of courses have come whole programs and departments with minors and majors of study and graduate degrees at both the master's and doctorate levels. Although most campuses have adopted women's studies, some have gone with gender studies and others with feminist studies.

Louise Bernikow (1980), in writing about the understanding, or lack thereof, between women and men, cites the classic *The Great Gatsby*, where the narrator Nick Carraway can observe women talking with one another but can offer no report on what they say because he is not part of the conversation. Bernikow adds that so many of women's stories are told from the masculine point of view—narrated, in other words, by those who have no part in the conversation.

Women's Studies programs can make everyone part of the conversation. But the immediate response that many people (women and men) have made, in the form of a counterpart Men's Studies—misses the point altogether. After all, the traditional curriculum that women's studies sought to reform was, in essence, men's studies. Even in the call for a new "gender studies" focused on both women and men is seen **the possibility that women's priorities and standpoints will again be subsumed and ignored under generic labels**. Clearly, the meaning of terms is still in flux. But feminists have a legitimate fear of once again having women's discourse subordinated to men's concerns.

Harry Brod (2000) suggests that scholarly studies of men is an essential complement to Women's Studies. It does not follow, however, he says, that the field must be established in any particular form in academic institutions. "Such decisions should be made by

women in women's studies," he adds, and "any efforts to divert resources from women's studies to men's studies must be resisted" (p. 356). In applying such a principle, for example, the non-government Dumaguete City-based organization Gender Watch against Violence and Exploitation (G-WAVE) was established in the mid-1990s with a commitment to promoting gender responsiveness in the justice system and gender-awareness in the larger community/society towards the elimination of gender based violence. The few women who came together for this purpose eventually developed a program by men and for men. Note, however, that this latter program evolved from women's initiative.

Indeed, Brod (2000) believes that any strategy for fundamental feminist transformation requires a more informed understanding of men.

By elucidating the many and varied prices of male power—the drawbacks and limitations of traditional roles—the field helps motivate men to make common cause with feminist struggles, though not, it must be said, on the basis of any simple cost-benefit analysis, since the price men pay still purchases more than it pays for. (p. 358)

At my own institution, the Center for Women's Studies and Development has recently been renamed to Center for Gender Studies and Development. Its limited resources are invested in mainstreaming women's issues in the general curriculum, rather than developing autonomous women's studies subjects for a minimum of students. The main strategy used to meet the major objective of mainstreaming women's studies in the instructional program of the University is the development of faculty associates, representing varied disciplines. Much of the work of the Center is in advocacy and curriculum planning.

Professors of women's studies might only teach women's studies, or they might do most of their work in another department like languages or economics. This illustrates the multidisciplinary nature of women's studies: It can be taught from the point of view of many different disciplines. For the most part, however, women's studies are *interdisciplinary* (Shaw & Lee, 2004); that is, they combine knowledge from and methodologies of disciplines across the humanities and the social and biological sciences in their analysis.

The Department of Psychology at Silliman University offers a Certificate in Women's Studies with the following curriculum: *Core Required Courses* include three subjects, namely Introduction to Women's Studies, Health Psychology, and Current Issues in

Psychology and an additional three *Electives* from among the following: Feminist Theory, Feminist Research, Women and Law, Psychology of Women, Women and Literature, Women's Sexuality, Gender and Development, and Feminist Therapy. The students have also taken electives in other academic units towards the WSCertificate, including such subjects as Community Organizing, Community Theater, Sociology of Religion, Children's Literature, and so on.

There is now a proposal to include Introduction to Women's Studies among the general education subjects so that more students are introduced into the field. Naturally, an ongoing concern in universities is that teachers of women's studies' courses are themselves gender fair to begin with. Otherwise, it would be a self-defeating enterprise.

A list of the goals or objectives of women's studies might look like this:

- To understand the social construction of gender and the intersection of gender with other systems of inequality in women's lives.
- To learn the status of women in society and way to improve that status through individual and collective action for social change.
- To experience how institutions in society affect individual lives and to be able to think critically about the role of patterns of privilege and discrimination in women's lives.
- To improve writing and speaking skills, gain new insights, and empower self and others.

The Institute for Women's Studies at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia provides us with a good model that both mainstreams women's studies in the traditional curriculum and maintains it as an independent interdisciplinary field. They offer a BA or BSocSc degree with a major in Women's Studies as well as a BA degree with a major in Gender and Sexuality. At the same time, students from other disciplines may take courses in the IWS even if they are not WS majors. The courses offered, however, are taught in a variety of academic units. For example, Women and Gender in the Ancient World is taught at the Department of History; Family Law at the Law Division; Media Identities at the Department of Media and Communications; Gender, Colonialism and Development at the Department of Anthropology; and, Philosophy of Psychoanalysis at

the Department of Psychology. In addition, the IWS offers Graduate Diplomas in Women's Studies and Gender Studies, both of which investigate what it means to be a woman or a man in society and culture. The courses look closely at the impact of gender, sex, and sexuality on our lives in a variety of arenas: at home, at work, on the streets, in the classroom. WS and GS offer new approaches for untangling such questions as Who are we? Why are we the ways we are? What directions is society taking?

Meantime, at the International Christian University in Tokyo, Japan, the Center for Gender Studies (CGS), established in April, 2004, has developed in so short a time the undergraduate course called the Program in Gender and Sexuality Studies (PGSS). It was established with the aim of providing a model curriculum for students who wish to create an interdisciplinary major that focuses on issues of gender and sexuality. The CGS provides advice on curriculum coordination for all PGSS majors. Students are encouraged to create their own study programs by taking a set of general education courses and choosing from a wide array of courses offered at ICU. According to the CGS Director, Prof. Kazuko Tanaka, the most significant characteristic of PGSS is that in all the courses, students can acquire the gender studies perspective and the skills to approach or think about various phenomena and representations, enabling them to develop their own viewpoints, theories, and feelings (Tanaka, 2008).

The manner in which the degree courses are taught at Macquarie and ICU is similar to the Certificate program at Silliman University in that the teaching staff are drawn from several Departments. One must understand that the objectives of WS programs are achievable within a context of *gender fair education*. The WS or CGS director has to be on top of things because, not infrequently, many students have reported back that some teachers of WS courses turn out to be sexist.

Although many universities in Asia, and the Philippines in particular, offer courses in women's studies and gender studies, only a limited number have an institutionalized women's studies curriculum. This means that individual scholars may teach wonderful classes but there is no continuity for their teaching and research after their departure or retirement. Therefore, it is crucial to establish a curriculum supported by an organizational framework that can accumulate the efforts of individual scholars.

A CAREER IN WOMEN'S STUDIES?

But what does one do with a certificate or degree in Women's Studies? What kinds of jobs might a student hope to get into? Like other knowledge programs within a generic BA or BS degree program, such as Philosophy or Sociology, Women's Studies is not designed to offer vocational training as such. What it does foster is the development of critical thinking, and writing and communication skills, all of which are generic skills keenly sought by today's employers. In addition, it offers expertise on a specific range of questions to do with gender (its intersections with class and race; how identity and body image is formed, how to deal with discrimination and the possibility of social change, etc.), that concern many fields of employment. These include education (classroom teaching and curriculum development on a primary, secondary and tertiary level, policy and management issues); health and welfare; political or public policy making; media writing and advertising; management of private and public enterprises (sexual harassment and equal opportunity policy, issues of power, personnel management and office culture), and more. (See Macquarie University website for more on their WS program at www.mq.edu.au and <http://subsite.icu.ac.jp/cgs/> for more on the PGSS program at ICU).

THE CASE FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

UNESCO accords the greatest importance to the role of women graduates who, because of their training, constitute part of a country's skilled human resources and are therefore in a position to make a significant contribution to the process of sustainable human development. They contribute in various ways—as professionals within their chosen domains of expertise, as decision-makers through their influence on policy issues related to social, economic and cultural development and through their participation in family and community life (Inayatullah, 1996). Education is thus a principal means to empower women so that they realize their potential.

Women's studies does not only aim for the satisfaction of intellectual curiosity. Knowledge has power, and access to it is not equally distributed among us (Tanaka, 2008). Therefore, we need to bridge the gaps between theory and practice, and academia and activism.

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