

Make/shift Pedagogies: Suggestions, Provocations, and Challenges for Teaching Introductory Gender and Women's Studies Courses

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Dana M. Olwan is Assistant Professor of Gender and Women's Studies at Syracuse University. A recipient of a Future Minority Studies postdoctoral fellowship, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Art/Research Grant, and a Palestinian American Research Council grant, Dana's research is located at the nexus of feminist theorizations of gendered and sexual violence and solidarities across geopolitical and racial differences. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in the *Journal of Settler Colonial Studies*, the *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture and Social Justice*, *Feminist Formations*, *American Quarterly*, and *The Feminist Wire*. She is currently working on her first book manuscript, *Traveling Discourses: Gendered Violence and the Transnational Politics of the 'Honor Crime.'*

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AnaLouise Keating is Professor of Women's Studies at Texas Woman's University. She has taught composition, U.S. American literature, English, and Women's Studies. She is the author or editor of several books, including *Women Reading, Women Writing: Self-Invention in Paula Gunn Allen, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Audre Lorde; EntreMundos/AmongWorlds: New Perspectives on Gloria Anzaldúa; this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation* (co-edited with Anzaldúa); *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, and *Anzaldúa's Interviews/Entrevistas*. She has published articles on Chicana/Latina authors, African-American literature, queer studies, multiculturalism, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century U.S. writers, feminist theory, and pedagogy. Her most recent books are *Teaching Transformation: Transcultural Dialogues in the Classroom* and *Transformation Now! Toward a Post-Operational Politics of Change*.

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Catherine M. Orr is Professor and Chair of Critical Identity Studies at Beloit College. She is co-editor of *Rethinking Women's and Gender Studies* (Routledge 2012) and co-author of *Concepts for Everyday Use: An*

Introduction to Gender and Women's Studies (Routledge forthcoming). Her work has appeared in *Feminist Studies*, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *Hypatia*, and *NWSA Journal*. She has been involved in the leadership of NWSA for many years and recently authored "Women's Studies as Civic Engagement: Research and Recommendations" (2011), a white paper for the Teagle Foundation grant administered by NWSA. She lives in Madison, Wisconsin.

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Beverly Guy Sheftall is the founding director of the Women's Research and Resource Center and the Anna Julia Cooper Professor of Women's Studies. She is also adjunct professor at Emory University's Institute for Women's Studies where she teaches graduate courses. She has published a number of texts in African-American and Women's Studies, which have been noted as seminal works by other scholars, including the first anthology on Black women's literature, *Sturdy Black Bridges: Visions of Black Women in Literature* (Doubleday 1980), which she co-edited with Roseann P. Bell and Bettye Parker Smith; her dissertation, *Daughters of Sorrow: Attitudes Toward Black Women, 1880-1920* (Carlson 1991); *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought* (New Press 1995); and an anthology she co-edited with Rudolph Byrd titled *Traps: African American Men on Gender and Sexuality* (Indiana University Press 2001). Her recent publications include two books co-authored with Johnnetta Betsch Cole: *Gender Talk: The Struggle for Women's Equality in African American Communities* (Random House 2003) and *Who Should Be First?: Feminists Speak Out on the 2008 Presidential Campaign* (SUNY Press 2010).

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Abstract

Drawing on over four decades of diverse teaching experiences as well as our recent work facilitating the NWSA Curriculum Institute, this article discusses some of the politics and praxis of teaching the introductory Gender and Women's Studies course in the U.S. academic class-

room. While mapping different pedagogical strategies, it offers some suggestions, recommendations, and provocations that inform our commitment to design syllabi, plan courses, and teach materials that introduce students to formative works and concepts in Gender and Women's Studies, chart current trends, and signal new developments in the field.

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Résumé

En s'appuyant sur plus de quatre décennies d'expériences d'enseignement diverses ainsi que sur nos travaux récents pour organiser l'institut des programmes d'études de la NWSA, cet article discute certains aspects de la politique et de la pratique de l'enseignement du cours d'introduction Études sur le genre et les femmes dans les classes d'université aux É.-U. Tout en exposant différentes stratégies pédagogiques, il propose des suggestions, des recommandations, et des idées provocantes qui contribuent à notre engagement à concevoir un programme d'études, à planifier des cours et à enseigner un contenu qui initie les étudiants aux travaux et aux concepts formateurs des études sur le genre et les femmes, rend compte des tendances actuelles et signalent les nouveaux développements dans le domaine.

In June 2014, the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) hosted a Curriculum Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio. Focusing on the undergraduate curriculum in Gender and Women's Studies (GWS), the two-day institute was designed to explore a variety of curriculum-related issues, focusing especially on the four key concepts viewed as central to the field: the politics of knowledge production, social justice, intersectionality, and transnational analysis. Our goal was to explore ways in which we could more effectively apply and connect these concepts in the undergraduate curricula. As noted in the NWSA call for participants:

Frequently, the Gender and Women's Studies curriculum relies on a 'deferral' model wherein transnational, intersectional and decolonial lenses are taught later on, to complicate earlier frames and lenses which can tend to remain more gender universal or US-centered, presenting concepts—such as feminist 'waves' or whiteness—that upper division courses go on to 'correct.' This institute will examine what it means to introduce women's studies from the start in transnational and intersectional ways. What's more, this institute will ask participants to explore how the field's curriculum can be better aligned with its social justice mandate.

The response to this call for participation in the Curriculum Institute was enormous. NWSA received almost three times more applications than it could accommodate. While we were surprised by the interest in the institute, we believe that this attention signifies a shared commitment to developing just, effective, and transformational Gender and Women's Studies pedagogies and curricula. This commitment, as we witnessed over the course of the two-day workshop, also indexes growing anxieties and deepening concerns over the changing meanings of the field of Gender and Women's Studies and its multiple and varied curricular mandates across a variety of institutional sites and states.

As teachers employed variously in freestanding GWS programs and departments at both public and private universities and colleges in the United States, each of us navigates Gender and Women's Studies curriculum in our own way. Our interventions at the NWSA Curriculum Institute reflected our varied raced, sexed, and classed positionalities as well as our disciplinary backgrounds and our own specific institutional

locations. Three of us are senior professors in Gender and Women's Studies and one of us is an emergent colleague. While we are currently located in the U.S., some of us negotiate multiple homes and belongings and often cross literal and metaphorical national borders in our lives and in our work in the classroom. We come from several disciplinary trainings that have shaped our entries into the field of Gender and Women's Studies and our multiple and varying approaches to its histories, meanings, and mandates. We have taught a wide range of students—from first-generation and/or non-traditional to elite and highly privileged students. All of us have taught or are currently teaching the introductory course to Gender and Women's Studies, and we have collectively and individually invested considerable time, energy, and labour in designing syllabi, planning courses, and teaching materials that both introduce students to formative works in Gender and Women's Studies and chart current trends and signal new developments in our fields. We have also, over time, revised our courses in ways that demonstrate our own shifting investments in feminism and that map the disciplinary changes in Gender and Women's Studies. As facilitators of the institute, we shared our experiences in GWS classrooms and we reflected on our different approaches to where, who, what, and how we teach. Our experiences, which span four decades in the U.S. academy, demonstrate the opportunities and challenges of academic feminism and feminist/womanist pedagogies. In the following exploration, we focus on the intro course, a course that has become ubiquitous in the Gender and Women's Studies curriculum.

Considered a building block for a degree in Women's Studies, the introductory course typically serves as a requirement or a core elective, often satisfying a writing intensive, humanities, social sciences, and/or liberal arts curricular emphasis and, in some cases, a "diversity" requirement for general education. It is also often viewed as an entry into interdisciplinary academic areas of study that explicitly emphasize social justice as a curricular mandate and an area of engagement and inquiry. In the introductory course, students are often taught to distinguish between concepts like sex and gender and think about the intersection of gender with categories like race, class, and ability. This conceptual and intersectional work makes apparent to our students the anti-oppressive mandates and histories of feminism

we endeavor to teach. It is also in the Introduction to Gender and Women's Studies that we draw connections between local and global feminisms to articulate their histories as collective struggles for civil rights and liberties, women's, trans, and queer resistances, and anti-war movements. Because making these links often demands personal reflection and serious commitment from our students, teachers often must address considerable resistance against concepts considered imperative to the Gender and Women's Studies classroom. From our experiences, we know that the introductory course in Gender and Women's Studies provides an important space where difficult questions are often asked and where contentious, but crucial, debates can and do take place. Although most Gender and Women's Studies departments and programs offer the introductory course on a regular basis, we acknowledge that there are great variations in both philosophical and practical approaches to reading materials and teaching strategies used in the course.

Our essay maps some of these tensions and variations. None of us teaches the introductory course in the same way, and our approaches to the field of Gender and Women's Studies itself are multiple, various, and sometimes even conflicting. This multiplicity is an important part of the field. While we share some similar goals for the introductory course, such as conveying the importance of intersectional thinking about identities and the ways they are constituted through structures of inequality, we also have different concerns about the institutional, curricular, and pedagogical functions the introductory course currently serves. Together, we are committed to thinking about the politics and praxis of this course, and we use the space of this essay to reflect on the labour involved in teaching the introductory GWS course. In the following sections, we offer some suggestions, recommendations, and/or provocations based on our experiences facilitating the NWSA Curriculum Institute and our experiences teaching intro courses. Catherine Orr explores the stories we tell about GWS in introductory courses; Dana M. Olwan questions conventional understandings of transnationalism in the introductory course; Beverly Guy Sheftall explores the value in adopting a comparative approach in the introductory course; and AnaLouise Keating offers suggestions for pedagogies of invitation and transformation. While Orr and Olwan

focus on content (*what* we teach—or don't teach—in our introductory courses), Guy Sheftall and Keating focus on tactics (*how* we teach). Together, we seek to illuminate the curricular projects that we are invested in, continuing a longer trajectory of feminist critique and womanist investigations of institutional, curricular, and pedagogical entanglements, participations, and imbrications in the project of academic feminism and its core building block: the Introduction to Gender and Women's Studies.

Curriculum as Narrative: What Story Are We Telling? *Catherine Orr*

My intention for the NWSA Curriculum Institute—what I thought I could offer given my research interests and current writing project—was to outline a meta-perspective on Gender and Women's Studies as a disciplinary-based knowledge project. The introductory course is, after all, a primary site for disciplinary training, not just for the students who take the course, but also for the faculty who teach it. I wanted to provoke some fresh thinking about the course we might assume (rightly or, I suspect, wrongly) to be our easiest prep: intro courses are just about passing along “the basics,” right? The fact that the overwhelming majority of the participants at the NWSA Institute showed up with their intro course syllabus in hand, ready to rethink it, seems to indicate otherwise.

This is where the “story” metaphor comes in. For this, my thanks goes, in large part, to Clare Hemmings' (2011) work on GWS narratives. Her book, *Why Stories Matter*, has helped me think about disciplines as narrative constructions that, like all narratives, are highly selective and deeply invested in particular outcomes. To do the work of enticing institute participants to reframe their thinking about the role of the introductory course, I started my talk with a series of questions about the investments we have in our own GWS curriculum, the role the intro course plays in its developmental arc, and the outcomes we seek to produce in our students and our programs/departments.

What is the story we are asking our various GWS stakeholders—faculty, students, administrators—to be a part of? What narrative of the discipline, in other words, are we asking them to see themselves within? An even more difficult question might be: Does the story our curriculum tells about the discipline serve those we

seek to reach with it? Who, in other words, is not in the room when we seek to tell the story of why GWS matters? Given that introductory Gender and Women's Studies courses are typically the curricular places where we have the most people we'll ever have in the room, what compels us to say what we say? Perhaps another way to ask this is: Where did we get this story?

One response to that last question is that we've been disciplined, although not in the same way, of course. We've had our own unique training, most of us in another discipline (even as our Ph.D. programs produce more and more graduates each year). Another response is that our stories are likely influenced by the disciplinary artifacts we've worked with and, for some of us, helped produce. Textbooks, for example, are designed to pass on particular stories about disciplines. And often those textbooks play an outsized role—because we're busy, because we were handed this class at the last minute, because we never had the opportunity to really think about what we really want our intro course to introduce—in the stories we tell.

The problem, however, is that in telling one story, it usually means that we're not telling another—or we are only able to tell that other story in an additive kind of way. So I'm always interested in hearing from other GWS practitioners: What stories do we think *must* be told and to what extent is this couched in our disciplinary training? What stories cannot be told? What is the sacred: that which cannot be questioned? What is the profane—that which threatens to undo everything? Can we begin to “loosen up” the various assumptions we hold about what must be “passed on” in the introductory course? After all, is the dominant narrative the “right” narrative? Put differently, is there just one story to tell? And can one story ever be enough? In other words, is “coverage” a goal we should even contemplate? Clearly, curricula tell stories about what and who is important, and what and who is not. So if we think about the introductory GWS course as Part One of the undergraduate curriculum's narrative arc, what and who exactly is the introductory course introducing as important? What stories do we think are enticing or provocative for our particular students at our particular institution and why? On the other hand, what stories are we duty-bound to pass on to do the work of the discipline regardless of who our students might be? If these are not the same stories, what do we risk by “letting go”

of the dutiful passing on? What other stories could be told?

For example, do we have to tell a story of something called “The Women's Movement” in our intro course? I ask since Becky Thompson (2002), Sherna Berger Gluck (1997), and Rosalyn Baxendall (2001)—to name just some authors I have assigned in more advanced GWS courses—have pointed out some serious problems of race and class exclusions in this story. So, if we don't find their claims about this particular “origin myth” of the discipline compelling, why pass it on? Likewise, do we need “waves?” Astrid Henry's (2012) work has done a good job of calling this metaphor into question for constructing generational divides that sometimes do, but mostly don't, exist. And do we have to make feminism the foundational—and singular—paradigm of the field when a significant number of practitioners in Gender and Women's Studies might prefer a different intellectual tradition (think: womanist or xicanista or queer or trans) or have pointed out the obvious: there are multiple versions of feminism that can fundamentally contradict each other. Obviously, I'm messing with the sacred artifacts of GWS, and evoking some rather profane lines of thinking. And maybe for the students at your institution, these disciplinary artifacts are strategically necessary to pass on. In evoking the profane, I am attempting to draw attention to the fact that we don't always allow ourselves to question whether our intro classes are actually introducing what we think is most worthy of passing on.

Ultimately, I'm asking that we reflect on relationship between what the discipline of Gender and Women's Studies has introduced to us and what we feel compelled to introduce to our students. I wonder what it would take—and what we must let go of—to tell different stories, to imagine different genealogies of the discipline that draw on different social movements grounded in different perspectives to emphasize different outcomes? What stories could we tell our students if anti-lynching campaigns or Idle No More or the Arab Revolutions shifted “The Women's Movement” and feminism to the periphery? Who might show up in our classrooms to hear those stories? (And who might find themselves “decentered” from the expected narrative?) Instead of passing on requisite content—stories that don't allow other stories to be told—my approach seeks to create the space to ask: Which audiences am I trying

to reach? Which stories is that desired audience more likely to see themselves within? Which histories, movements, and identities do my students need to hear, and what is the relationship between those stories and the ones I feel obligated to tell? Obviously, I am suggesting that our versions of the introductory GWS course can, and perhaps should, be driven in more contentious ways by “the local”—our institutional locations and student constituencies (both current and aspirational).

What this discipline has offered me is a place to ask difficult questions about my own investments in what has been passed on to me. I’d like my intro course to be that for my students as well.

Thoughts on “the Transnational” in the Introduction to Gender and Women’s Studies Curriculum

Dana M. Olwan

In the field of Gender and Women’s Studies, certain concepts have become so salient that they are embraced seemingly unequivocally. Echoing Catherine Orr, Ann Braithwaite, and Diane Lichtenstein’s (2012) call that GWS practitioners and teachers in the academy “think more carefully and clearly about the terms we use to do the work we do” (4), I want to use this space to engage both the possibilities and the limitations of terms assumed central to the Gender and Women’s Studies curriculum. Rather than normalize and thus obfuscate the meaning of such terms, it is crucial that we constantly challenge the assumptions and foundations undergirding their proliferation across academic spaces.

In designing our Gender and Women’s Studies courses and, in particular, the courses that introduce students to our field, then, it is important to ask: What has the wholesale embrace of certain concepts and ideas done for feminist studies in the academy? What are the assumptions being made about their critical capacities and how has their overuse blunted their radical potentials? To address these questions, it is important to note that concepts assumed crucial to GWS curriculum in the United States and Canada may not be as easily or readily applicable in other national or transnational contexts. In other words, certain concepts, assumed key to the field of Gender and Women’s Studies and its pedagogic goals in both spaces, might not be able to travel to the “elsewheres” they seek to traverse. As GWS educators, approaching these concepts critically allows us

to assess the pedagogical work they do, or are capable of doing, in short and long-term ways.

In this brief piece, I want to reflect specifically on “the transnational” and its proliferation in academic feminism. As is well known by now, studying the transnational is an aim of many GWS curricular offerings at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. In the academic field of Gender and Women’s Studies, the embrace of the transnational has generated a bevy of curricular mandates, syllabi, and content signifying the importance of knowing “the global.” From courses about gender in a global perspective, international women and human rights, to introduction to transnational women’s studies, the field is now saturated with courses charged with illuminating the realities and struggles of those who our students imagine but (may) never encounter.

As a body of knowledge that strives for global solidarity in a way that “transcends class, race, sexuality, and national boundaries” (Mendoza 2002, 296), the transnational holds much promise and sway in the Gender and Women’s Studies curriculum in general and the Introduction to Gender and Women’s Studies in particular. And yet the turn to the transnational, as many have noted, is not without dangers. Transnational feminist theory, as Jacqui M. Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2005) explain, is a “radical praxis,” a vision that is articulated through a “commitment to work systematically and overtly against racialized, heterosexist, imperial, corporatist projects that characterize North American global adventures” (25). While radical and revolutionary, the transnational does have, as both authors concede, a “normativizing” potential (24).

In pointing out the dangers of the transnational as a pedagogical goal, I do not seek to reduce the diverse ways in which it is understood or pedagogically practiced. While there are abundant models for the take up of the transnational, many fail to interrogate its location: Where and by whom does the transnational get theorized and authorized? And how does the embrace of this concept frame our students’ understanding of their place within the national space of a global super power such as the United States? What and who does the transnational stand for? Who does it make visible and at what expense? How does it sometimes further, rather than subvert, the exclusionary and gendered logics of the nation-state it seeks to transcend?

While the transnational remains indispensable

to the Introduction to Gender and Women's Studies, these questions help us think through the work that the transnational can do in our classrooms. They can also help illuminate what work the transnational cannot—or will not—do in the courses we teach. I ask these questions because the transnational has often figured centrally in introductory courses to Gender and Women's Studies curriculum. In particular, I am interested in investigating how the transnational as a category of analysis and a modality of study in the introductory course becomes synonymous with "difference" as it is articulated, practiced, and understood at a global scale. Rather than simply focus on the possibilities it creates and knowledge it enables, I am committed to thinking about how the transnational as a pedagogic end goal can become a totalizing discourse, uncritically and too readily incorporated into our curriculum. Drawing on Inderpal Grewal's (2005) critique of human rights regimes, I want to ask about the *regimes* of the transnational. What does the transnational render legible, visible, and intelligible? And what does it render *illegible, invisible, and unintelligible*? Through what processes and to what ends does the transnational become central to the introductory course?

As a person called upon to teach the transnational in a Gender and Women's Studies program, I often reflect on the reasons why I can claim this area of knowledge and expertise in the Gender and Women's Studies curriculum and classroom. While it is due, in part, to the scope of my own research on the travels of discourses about honor crimes between local and global contexts, it is also true that I teach the transnational because of my own location: I teach the transnational because I am assumed to embody it. This point is important to acknowledge as we reflect on how our own racial, social, and national experiences become mobilized in the service of a transnationalized feminist curriculum that, for some students, often provides the first encounter with the global, the international, and the other.

In what ways has this encounter provided students with opportunities to evade interrogating our own (and our students') complicities in histories of violence in our homes? Here I speak specifically of the founding violence of the U.S. as a nation-state built on colonialism and slavery. In our introductory GWS courses, how do we teach our students to be accountable to these histories—both past and ongoing? How might we move

beyond the transnational as a fetishized and othered elsewhere that remains disconnected from the places we inhabit? I am committed to thinking through these questions by engaging with what GWS educators can do for social justice movements unfolding on the very grounds we live on.

Take, for example, two recent and ongoing movements for justice taking place across the borders of the two settler colonial states of U.S. and Canada: the Indigenous Idle No More movement which originated in Canada against targeted legislative attacks on Indigenous bodies, governance, lands, and sovereignty, and immigrant youth in the Undocumented and Unafraid movement and ongoing struggles against deportation and for educational equality in the U.S. These examples, which originate from different but interrelated local contexts, have much to teach us about decolonization in a time of war and empire. As movements encompassing a series of acts, they are designed to contest conditions of colonialism, occupation, racism, and injustice. They both bring our attention to the situated contexts in which oppression becomes articulated and resisted by racialized men, women, and children living in settler colonial states. When incorporated into the Gender and Women's Studies curriculum in serious and sustained ways that help our students understand the inextricable relationships between feminism and social justice activism, both movements also provide students with tools to better recognize and disrupt injustices and oppressions here and elsewhere. They teach students about the importance of understanding the nation-state as a site of routinized threat, violence, and terror in the lives of racialized men, women, and children. They also teach students about the significance of intersectional and cross-border analyses of colonial state power in separate but interconnected sites of control, domination, and resistance.

In short, these movements teach students about the intersectional and systemic nature of oppression. As interconnected movements, they help demonstrate that oppression is not isolated or historic and that equality is not always a radical end goal. More importantly still, these movements teach us to ground ourselves in the "over here" to understand both our collusions with and contestations of hegemonic power where we live and on the lands we occupy. As place-based movements located in Canada and the U.S., activists from Idle No More

and the Undocumented and Unafraid movement help us situate ourselves in the “here and now” of settler colonialism and settler nation-state formations and thus provide concrete visions and strategies for decolonized and violence-free futures. They are movements that challenge assumptions about the transnational as an externalized territory, an othered body, or an essentialized praxis.

These two examples are not offered as an alternative to the study of the transnational, but as a way in which we can understand the transnational in localized terms and contexts. In other words, I invoke them because they challenge our constitution of the transnational as always taking place in *other* geographic contexts. Through anchoring our introductory courses in such contemporary and ongoing examples that are situated in local contexts, GWS instructors can also place themselves in relation to movements for justice and liberation unfolding on the very grounds they live on. In this way, these movements offer GWS educators opportunities to practice pedagogies of accountability and reciprocity; that is, they provide us with ways of teaching inside and outside of the classroom that ask of our students what we ask of ourselves when we focus our attentions on actively challenging transnational contexts of injustice.

In seeking such curricular inclusions, I am aware of the dangers of employing social justice activism in the service of advancing academic feminism. I also realize the problematic ways in which academic feminism renders activism as object of—rather than subject of—study and inquiry. Here it is important to heed Robyn Wiegman’s (2002) caution against a form of activism that is “instrumentalized to the domain of academic professional culture” (24). I bring up those examples, however, as a way through which we can render the transnational local in our Gender and Women’s Studies curriculum. Such an approach provides students with more complex understandings of geographies of power and justice, ones that do not presume the transnational as an always already violent elsewhere.

As someone who has regularly taught the Introduction to the Gender and Women’s Studies course in a number of academic institutions, I engage the transnational in critical ways that help illuminate the links between the local and the global and which, in turn, can complicate my understanding of feminist commitment

to justice. For me, the Gender and Women’s Studies curriculum is a crucial site in which limited notions of the transnational that privilege our students and provide them with a false notion of superiority and comfort can be explicitly encountered and willfully challenged.

In spite of the dangers of curricular and pedagogical strategies that do not reproduce or consolidate relationships of power and dominance over those whom we study, the Gender and Women’s Studies classroom remains a space in which difficult conversations can and do take place. Our roles as feminist academics, who are implicated in the Gender and Women’s Studies academic project, are not simply the replacement of knowledge or its suturing in the service of a curriculum comfortably aligned with the corporate academy and its global ambitions. To this end, it is crucial that we develop critical pedagogical approaches to the transnational that can reshape the Introduction to the Gender and Women’s Studies course in the U.S. American and Canadian academy today and reorient its commitment to justice in “the here” and in the here’s “elsewheres.”

Teaching Introduction to Comparative Women’s Studies

Beverly Guy Sheftall

I have been teaching “Introduction to Comparative Women’s Studies” (what we call our program at Spelman College) since 1981, the year we established the Women’s Research and Resource Center, exactly a century after the founding of the oldest and one of only two historically Black colleges for women in the U.S. The course satisfies one of the college’s core requirements, is a requirement for Women’s Studies majors and minors, and is open to sophomores, juniors, and seniors. We remain the only historically Black college and university (HBCU) with an undergraduate Women’s Studies major. Further, our program emerged within a particular national context and at a particular moment in the evolution of the field. As Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith (1982) underscored in the first anthology on Black Women’s Studies:

Women’s studies courses focused almost exclusively upon the lives of white women. Black studies, which was much too often male-dominated, also ignored Black women... Because of white women’s racism and Black men’s sexism, there was no room in either area for a serious consider-

ation of the lives of Black women. And even when they have considered Black women, white women usually have not had the capacity to analyze racial politics and Black culture, and Black men have remained blind or resistant to the implications of sexual politics in Black women's lives. (xx-xxi)

As is frequently the case, my particular institutional location is different from most of my Women's Studies colleagues, at the NWSA Curriculum Institute, and in other scholarly gatherings. Nearly all of the students who enroll in our introductory courses at Spelman, for which we share a common syllabus, are women of African descent, most of whom are from the U.S., though we occasionally have a few students from Morehouse College, the only HBCU for men. On the first day of the introductory course, I introduce myself to the class and have the students introduce themselves so that they will know that who they are as particular human beings is significant in terms of what transpires in the classroom. On the first day of the class, I invite my students to recognize that the majority in the room are Black women, that what they have experienced already is more representative of the lived experience of the world's population (people of colour and women) than what students throughout the U.S. academy read about in most of their classes—that is, the experiences of a small group of Western white men. A significant component of my “oppositional” pedagogy is to decenter Eurocentric male models and experience, and to critique the processes by which we come to believe that whiteness and maleness are the most valuable commodities that humans can possess. Where one begins is very important, so I begin not with the experiences of middle-class, Euro-American women, but with the experiences of Indigenous women, especially Native American women, and women of colour in the U.S. and around the world, especially women of the African Diaspora. During this process, our students are sometimes shocked to learn that the cultural and intellectual heritage of the West is traceable to ancient African civilizations and that “feminism” is not an invention of nineteenth-century Western privileged white women.

Our mostly Black students are also surprised about our approach to the introductory class since they sometimes assume that “all the women are white” and so is feminism. A major focus of the course is an ex-

ploration of the ways in which gender is linked to other asymmetric systems of power and privilege such that systems of oppression are simultaneous and interlocking. In other words, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, and so on impact how one experiences gender, including gender oppression. Although gender asymmetry is widespread, there is no undifferentiated experience of womanhood. Middle-class, Western, white Christian, heterosexual, able-bodied women are not the norm for an understanding of sex/gender systems globally.

Another challenge involves exploring the ways in which world religions, including Christianity, impact notions of gender. Since the majority of our students at Spelman are practicing Christians, feminist critiques of organized religion are often experienced as unsettling. A provocative question for my students is: What were concepts of the divine during the long course of human history? Scholars have argued that early on humans worshipped many forms of the Great Mother and that agricultural, goddess-oriented worldviews were replaced by patriarchal notions and a concept of divinity as male. These questions help unsettle students' assumptions and thus encourage them to engage with organized religion in ways that may be previously unimaginable or not possible.

I am convinced that what happens in our introductory courses is suitable, even critical, for students everywhere, irrespective of their race, ethnicity, or gender. Students leave this “mandatory” class knowing more about themselves and the world in which they live or don't live, but also feeling connected to the people whom they study and among whom they work. In a compelling essay describing her own revolutionary pedagogy, feminist theorist bell hooks (1989) invokes Miss Annie Mae Moore, her favorite high school teacher, who embodies the idea of the teacher as subversive and who hooks reverentially calls her “pedagogical guardian.” As hooks recounts, Miss Moore was:

Passionate in her teaching, confident that her work in life was a pedagogy of liberation, one that would address and confront our realities as black children growing up within a white supremacist culture. Miss Moore knew that if we were to be fully self-realized, then her work, and the work of all progressive teachers, was not to teach us solely the knowledge in books, but to teach us an oppositional world

view—different from that of our exploiters and oppressors, a world view that would enable us to see ourselves not through the lens of racism or racist stereotypes, but one that would enable us to focus clearly and succinctly, to look at ourselves, at the world around us, critically, analytically. (49)

As we strategize about ways to improve our introductory course among the four faculty members who regularly teach it at Spelman and debate about “best practices” in the field, we continue to heed the words of bell hooks. As her reflection on Ms. Moore makes clear, hooks compellingly argues for the need to continuously transform ourselves into better professors, armed with “radical and subversive” feminist strategies which are capable of forging a new world desperately in need of emerging:

We must learn from one another, sharing ideas and pedagogical strategies...We must be willing to...challenge, change, and create new approaches. We must be willing to restore the spirit of risk—to be fast, wild, to be able to take hold, turn around, transform. (54)

Pedagogies of Invitation and Transformation *AnaLouise Keating*

An invitation establishes the tentative conditions wherein something might happen; it is an anticipatory gesture, always antecedent to something else. It gives permission; it makes an opening. An invitation requests a response; it contains an implicit instruction—répondez, s’il vous plaît.

Emma Cocker, “R.S.V.P.” (2010)

I teach at Texas Woman’s University (TWU), an almost-open-admissions public university located in north Texas. Our undergraduate students are primarily women, they are generally the first members of their family to attend college, they often have children, and many are single. Although the majority have spent their lives in the state of Texas, they are “diverse” in almost every other way you can imagine—racial/ethnic backgrounds, religious upbringing and practices, economic status, health, sexuality, and so on. Our introductory GWS course, currently titled “Gender & Social Change: Introduction to Multicultural Women’s Studies,” meets various general education requirements, especially the

university-wide mandate for three credit hours in “Multicultural Women’s Studies,” a mandate that represents the university’s attempt to underscore our history as a women’s college. Perhaps not surprisingly, given its compulsory status, most students who enroll in “Gender & Social Change” are wary and at least somewhat unwilling to take the course, which they view as an obstacle on their way to their desired degrees, high-paying careers, and happy lives. They don’t want to learn about social justice; they believe feminism is “old school” because, after all, women are now equal with men, racism is a thing of the past, and economic disparities are caused by an individual’s laziness and can be solved through hard work. In short, students of all colour and backgrounds come into our introductory course with “desconocimientos.” I borrow this term from Gloria Anzaldúa (2002), and use it to describe epistemological-ethical ignorance—a willful yet unacknowledged desire to look away from troubling, potentially life-altering information about ourselves and/or our worlds (560).

Unfortunately, I wasn’t aware of my students’ specific desconocimientos when I began teaching at TWU and my first semester was quite challenging. I assumed that the students self-identified as feminists or womanists, recognized the existence of social injustice, and were eager to learn about Women’s Studies. I used bell hooks’ (2002) *Feminism Is for Everybody*, excerpts from *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color* (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983), and other similar texts, naively expecting the authors’ provocative words to resonate with students. I could not have been more mistaken. Many reacted almost in knee-jerk fashion to the authors’ claims. They rejected bell hooks, replying to her title’s bold assertion with their own equally bold assertions: “Nope. Feminism is *not* for me.” Because they disagreed so strongly with her opening claim, they were suspicious of (and stubbornly close-minded about) the entire book. Their reactions to discussions of racism, imperialism, and structural inequalities were even more immersed in desconocimientos. I was startled by their limited knowledge of U.S. and global history and their extreme individualism—that is, their belief in each person’s complete autonomy, unhampered agency, and full responsibility for their lives—which led them to attribute all social inequities to individual personal failures and laziness.

These reactions compelled me to rethink my oppositional pedagogy and radically revise my introductory course, developing what I now call “pedagogies of invitation.” As I use the term, pedagogies of invitation represent a flexible approach to teaching that invites, but does not impose, progressive change on students. Employing invitational pedagogies, I do not judge, condemn, or mock students’ perspectives (regardless of how shocking/appalling these perspectives might seem). Nor do I impose my views *on* them. Instead, I remain open to students’ views, while establishing a framework for the course that requires them to analyze their views in dialogue with the required readings. By so doing, I model an attitude of respectful open-mindedness and encourage students to adopt a similar approach.

Pedagogies of invitation are based on a framework of interconnectivity. We (defined broadly to include both human and other-than-human beings) are radically interconnected and interdependent in every way we can possibly imagine as well as in ways we have not yet conceived—economically, socially, ecologically, linguistically, physically, and so on. I frame my introductory course around this concept and use it to structure the syllabus and introduce issues of identity formation, social justice, economics, language, and more (Keating 2007). I introduce students to a wide range of overlapping (and sometimes contradicting) perspectives, practices, and worldviews. While I do not advocate an anything-goes relativism—which would tacitly accept racism, sexism, and other systemic oppressions, thus making social change irrelevant, I invite students to put these multiple perspectives and worldviews into conversation. Such difficult dialogues proceed not only through oppositional critique, but also through connectionist thinking: comparing/contrasting, drawing similarities, forging commonalities (which I define not as sameness but as points of similarity which include differences), and so on. I model and invite students to explore relational forms of thinking that value ambiguity, contradiction, and interconnectivity.

Relational thinking can be used to investigate a wide array of issues. Consider, for instance, Catherine Orr’s suggestion that we revisit the stories we tell about GWS. In an introductory course, we could present students with a variety of foundational GWS stories (each with its own strengths, weaknesses, and biases) and invite them to employ connectionist thinking to analyze

the stories’ implications. We could also put these stories into dialogue with the foundational stories from other academic disciplines. Or, consider Dana M. Olwan’s invitation to challenge students’ understanding of difference at the global level by locating transnationalism not only “elsewhere,” but here – in North America. Relational thinking can facilitate this work. To name only three possibilities: we could teach *Idle No More* in dialogue with the Arab Revolutions; use Gloria Anzaldúa’s critique of the U.S./Mexico border as a lens to examine immigration issues in the U.S., France, and Turkey; or discuss the assumptions made about who can (and cannot) teach transnational issues and perspectives. Or, consider Beverly Guy Sheftall’s comparative classroom explorations of the gendered implications of world religions. We could use relational thinking to bring together a variety of perspectives on organized religion, feminist and womanist spiritualities, Christian privilege, the unspoken secularity of GWS, and academic spirit phobia (Keating 2008). The possibilities are almost endless. In order to be effective, however, it’s crucial to present these competing, intersecting, overlapping perspectives to students in ways that do not automatically prioritize, subordinate, or rank them, but instead invite genuine reflection and flexible assessments.

Pedagogies of invitation facilitate but do not impose transformation. As I define the term, “transformation” does not represent instantaneous conversion but rather a long-term, ongoing process – a type of healing that moves us towards balance and relationality by facilitating the recognition of our radical interconnectedness (Keating 2013). This definition helps me to moderate my expectations. While I hope that students will be radically transformed by my course, I understand that change takes time, often happens outside the classroom and after the semester concludes, and exceeds conscious control. Transformation is more likely to occur when I remain flexible, open-minded, and willing to be changed by what and who I teach. Transformation involves reciprocity. My experience teaching the GWS introductory course illustrates one form this reciprocity can take: the students’ resistance transformed my pedagogical approach and taught me the limitations of oppositional discourse.

Like critical pedagogy, pedagogies of invitation work in the service of social justice. However, whereas critical pedagogy generally focuses on critique and

often proceeds through various modes of oppositional thought (overt critiques of social injustice and explorations of *anti-sexism*, *anti-racism*, and so on), pedagogies of invitation employ relational, connectionist thinking. Thus, for example, in my revised course, I did not start with discussions of feminism or systemic inequalities but instead adopted a historical framework designed to subtly challenge my students' specific desconocimientos (their willed ignorance about U.S. settler colonialism, imperialism, and individualism's limitations). I invite students to consider our imbrication with the past: we are all the products of history and history itself has been reshaped and retold multiple times. Until we examine and more fully comprehend our histories as well as the limited versions of history we've previously encountered, we cannot transform the present or future. In a recent iteration of the introductory course, I began with Sally Roesch Wagner's (2001) *Sisters in Spirit: Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Influence on Early American Feminists* and Octavia Butler's (1988) *Kindred* for several reasons. These texts invite students to rethink their limited (mainstream) definitions of feminism and introduce them to settler colonialism, gendered complexities of slavery, and other historical dimensions that many had never considered. They also provide concrete examples of our inter-relatedness and demonstrate the limitations in students' belief in each individual's complete autonomy and independence. Including these texts at the outset of the course fundamentally restructured the introductory course and enabled students to develop more nuanced understandings of the course material. It also enabled me to lay the groundwork for the types of dialogic explorations of transnationalism that Dana M. Olwan describes above.

Pedagogies of invitation are *multiple* in terms of tactics, techniques, perspectives, approaches, worldviews, etc.; *context-specific*, defining context broadly, to include audience, occasion, topic, etc.; and *visionary*, but not naïve—aspiring for individual and collective transformation, while acknowledging that transformation is painful, unexpected, and cannot be fully controlled. These characteristics make invitational pedagogies extremely flexible and diverse, ready to be reshaped by your specific contexts and students.

Differing Realities, Interconnected Pedagogical Visions (or, no easy answers)

In her introduction to *Pedagogies of Crossing: Mediations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory and the Sacred*, Jacqui M. Alexander (2005) questions inherited knowledge formations and disrupts geographic and disciplinary boundaries that “distort vision” and prohibit the central pedagogical imperative of making “reciprocal investments” in both teaching and learning (6). For Alexander, this imperative can be best understood as the desire to “[make] the world in which we live intelligible to ourselves and to each other—in other words, teaching ourselves” (6). A seasoned teacher in the field of Gender and Women's Studies, Alexander reminds us about the importance of attending to the multiple and intersecting “makeshift classrooms” that we inhabit, encouraging us to consider what we teach, how we teach, and the various “challenges that arise in the task of demystifying domination” (8). Alexander's insistence on attending to questions of pedagogy in addressing sites of violence, oppression, and resistance animates the dispersed but interconnected academic and intellectual sites that each author of this article occupies and maps out individually and collectively. Like Alexander, we question inherited knowledge formations, especially as these formations have shaped the field of GWS. As GWS educators and intellectual workers, committed to the promises of resistance and social justice which GWS holds for many, how do we teach ourselves and the students who enter our classrooms about the worlds they occupy in ethical, non-hierarchical, and even revolutionary ways? How do we teach to transform and what are the possibilities and limits inherent in both the institutionalization of our field and the introductory course curriculum we develop and enact?

Our experiences at the NWSA Curriculum Institute remind us of the urgency of these pedagogical issues to many GWS practitioners. In our various ways, we have each tried to address our own questions without offering definitive answers. Indeed, there *are* no definitive answers, no easy recommendations for teaching GWS or for organizing the introductory course. There is no standard approach, no perfect canonical text, no singular history that should always be included. During the Curriculum Institute and again in this article, we have tried to underscore this lack of certainty as well as the need for intellectual humility and careful atten-

tion to the specificity of each educator's pedagogical location—and thus their limitations. Rather than offer specific guidelines for how to develop and teach the perfect introductory course, we have shifted the focus to consider broader, underlying angles of vision such as the questions expressed in the above paragraph. Each contributor explored these and related questions from a variety of embodied perspectives informed by our varied locations, investments, and imbrications in the academic field of feminism. As feminist and/or womanist scholars, we each teach in ways that explicitly and willfully refuse to replicate relationships of power and dominance and in order to actively challenge social, classed, gendered, and sexual hierarchies and oppressions. Our pedagogical commitments across the many makeshift and real classrooms in which we teach center around our ability to make the GWS curriculum a site where difficult conversations occur. These conversations, however differently we may approach them, always seek to enable students to recognize and confront systematic and interconnected oppressions that inform their lives and the lives of others. To us, this goal—above all others—remains central to the work that we each do in the feminist classrooms and to our commitments to teaching the introductory course in the GWS curriculum.

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