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Revisiting the “Men Problem” in Introductory Women’s Studies Classes

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Outside women’s studies classrooms, discourses of white masculinity under siege are proliferating with devastating consequences for women and people of color. Indeed, in each of the most reactionary domestic political events and trends of the past five or so years the social group most united in the support of reaction has been young white men, from the 1994 “Republican revolution,” to California’s propositions 187 and 209. Yet, against the backdrop of globalized labor markets and diffusing corporatization, the manifest destiny of being young, white, and male in the United States now seems to many like a cruel promise; in the face of this uncertainty, it makes a kind of sense that white guys could feel powerless, experiencing social policies like affirmative action and political projects like feminism (and “identity politics” generally) as antagonistic to their self-actualization. Nor is it any surprise that Hollywood films like *Falling Down*, the four *Lethal Weapon* movies, and *Die Hard* depict the angry return of the vanquished white male (usually at the hands of affirmative action, immigration/greedy foreigners, or an uppity woman). At the same time, though, a new, highly commodified, kick-ass “feminism” has emerged on the popular culture horizon. Here, seemingly more transgressive images like those in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Terminator 2* blend with the Spice Girls and Nike ads to imply that liberation requires only individualistic attitude adjustment as opposed to reconfiguring institutional power relations.¹ These are just some of the features of gender relations as they appear in a few registers of contemporary U.S. social

life, but they are enough to evoke the daunting stakes faced by students and teachers of women's studies.

As an institutionalized manifestation of a political social movement, women's studies occurs both within and against these trends. At the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), where, as a Ph.D. student, I work as an instructor and teaching assistant, Introduction to Women's Studies courses fulfill a range of undergraduate general education and special subject requirements, including writing, social science, literature, and ethnicity. Though the Women's Studies Program is small relative to other departments at UCSB (with only three full-time faculty as of fall 1998), the integration of its curricula with university requirements brings a diversity of students and student expectations into our introductory classes. Yet our introductory courses (one humanities-oriented and the other a social science) are where we attempt to make feminism compelling to students with a systematicity that they have probably never encountered before. For their part, many students register for such a course with the expectation that it is going to deal with something other than "feminism," which they understand as bra-burning, street-demonstrating radicalism despite their firm beliefs in the "equality" of women and men; and, perhaps most significantly for this chapter, usually at least 10% of our Introduction to Women's Studies students are men.

Although the challenges could be conceived in broader terms, this chapter focuses on pedagogical issues raised by the presence of male students in the Introduction to Women's Studies classroom. Feminist pedagogies often assume that women's studies or feminist analysis is best taught when female students are unencumbered by gendered power relations in the classroom itself. By extension, women's engagements with feminism are most productive not only when women are enabled to make connections between their personal experiences and the social politics of gender but also when the classroom is maintained as a space in which they can witness their shared experiences as women. When male students enter the women's studies introductory classroom, however, women's studies teachers are challenged with the task of pursuing feminist goals through objectives other than gender exclusivity—though some teachers respond to the challenge by ignoring the men as much as possible. Given the troubling cultural and political scene of gender relations in the United States, and in particular those enticing discourses of male suffering, it seems to me the *risks* of actively including men in Introduction to Women's Studies are, by and large, outweighed by the political *potential* of doing so. As my goal here is to further the political efficacy of feminism through women's studies, I treat the presence of men in Introduction to Women's Studies as an educational opportunity (as opposed to a burden) for positive feminist engagement, an opportunity that is most adequately addressed by methodologically and substantively grounding Introduction to Women's Studies pedagogy in U.S. Third World feminism.

Men who show up in women's studies classes differ from one another in so many ways that it can create problems to collapse them into the label "men":

some show up accidentally, some to meet women, and others out of a sense of social obligation to challenge oppression; by other measures some are queer, nonwhite, or from impoverished families. When I refer to men in this chapter, however, I mean to evoke the social positioning of straight, white, middle-class men because, generally speaking, that identity configuration remains the most consistent guarantor of privilege in this country. Yet, as I imply later, no identity absolutely guarantees a corresponding consciousness or practice. When I am talking about “men” in this chapter, then, I acknowledge the slippage between the white male as exemplar of privilege and the variations of privilege that individual men bring to women’s studies.

FROM WOMEN’S SPACE TO FEMINIST SPACE

The very presence of men in the Introduction to Women’s Studies classroom makes impossible the preservation of “women’s space.” Consciousness-raising groups—methodologically grounded in women’s space—have been the generative sites for the foundations of much of what we value as feminist theory and practice. Nonetheless, in women’s studies classrooms, “women’s space” has historically come to represent *middle-class, white* women’s interests, and so there are already reasons to question the term’s exclusivity. Few women’s studies teachers *today* would dispute the importance of constantly challenging this exclusivity. Power-laden gender differences are *the* reason for a certain guardedness with respect to male incursions on women’s spaces. However, it is also the case that feminist challenges to the exclusivity of (white) women’s space have already demanded that curricula integrate dialogically the epistemologies, voices, and experiences of women whose sense of their own sexual, racial, or class positionings/politics makes their life experiences inseparable in many ways from other struggles in which, incidentally, men are often their allies. Through a consideration of the “men problem,” I argue for the fostering of a classroom space that moves beyond “women’s space” toward a *feminist* space characterized by constant (re)negotiation and an attentiveness to the voices and experiences that continue to be attacked and marginalized in society in general.

In 1988, invoking her essay of six years prior, Renate Klein asserted that the “men problem” was “even more urgent” than it was in 1982, especially in the United States (1989: 120). In the essay itself, she asks this not quite rhetorical question:

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could just treat men as a “non-problem” and either not admit them into our women’s studies classes or, if their presence is outside our control, not let them intrude an inch on our interactions and work? (Klein 1989: 114)

Klein here seems to view men as, at worst, disruptive and destructive and, at best, noncontributors who, unfortunately, have to be tolerated. In her longing, then, Klein voices a just-under-the-surface sentiment in women’s studies that

actually heightens many men's sense that "rightly or wrongly, they perceive themselves as the innocent targets of women's hostility" (George 1992: 28). Additionally, the dystopia of male presence rationalizes women as a coherently delimited group positioned unproblematically in uniform opposition to men. Indeed, the longing for a (re-)centered, pure women's space embedded in Klein's question suggests a link between the "men problem" and the *problem* of women's space as it has been articulated by nonwhite/middle-class/straight feminists. Chela Sandoval, for example, has remarked that hegemonic feminist classifications operate "as sets of imaginary spaces, socially constructed to severely delimit what is possible" (1991: 5–6). The point here is that, despite men having generally greater access to privilege than women, the projected dismissal of men from the women's studies classroom is epistemologically linked to the purging of *all* difference. In this sense, calls for "women's space," when they occur in denial of the differences among women, also obscure *connections* between men and women at the register of privilege. That is, the exclusion of men often (though by no means always) also enacts more general mechanisms for repressing the effects of privilege by scapegoating men as the unique embodiments of it.

These observations suggest at least two grounds on which women's space forecloses coalitional possibilities with men as potential "allies" in the women's studies classroom. First, calls for a pure women's space jeopardize the possibility of discussing the positive allegiances with men that for U.S. women of color have been expedient, necessary, and even rewarding in their struggles against an array of interrelated oppressive forces. Relatedly, keeping men out is a way for straight, white women to avoid confronting their own allegiances with men in terms of privilege. In light of these conflicting positionings, teacher expectations can make a lot of difference (in both senses of the term).

Consequently, when women's studies men are figured as *necessarily* nuisances, the possibility of expecting that they will both learn and *contribute* to the learning process cannot be taken seriously—by either the instructor or the students.² Given the preponderance of discourses in U.S. culture aimed at convincing young men of their victimization by the likes of feminism, how might Introduction to Women's Studies avoid resonating in that way for the men in the class? The rigidity often accompanying insistences on "women's space" (even when men are present) is precisely what many of our male students *hear* and then dismiss when they are presented with feminism, certainly, in part, because they are predisposed to hear in certain ways; and these reactions might also predispose teachers to see male students as always already a problem. In turn, men's negative reactions to/from (hegemonic) feminism become further evidence not only that they do not belong in women's studies but that it has nothing to offer them. This seems like a circularity worth escaping. But before I discuss some of the other mechanisms that are similarly troubling, I want to complicate a certain parallel that I have implied: to the extent that hegemonic

feminism constructs both men and women of color as its Others, what are the dangers of equating the two in the interest of greater inclusivity?

Unlike Klein (1989: 106), who asserted that "there is no room for men in women's studies, none whatsoever," Madonne Miner (1994: 465) sees a benefit to having men in women's studies "if only because, in this one class, women move to center stage and men find themselves on the margins." From her admittedly "small and racially homogenous [white?]" survey of ten men, Miner (1994: 453) found that "men in Intro experience the effects of minority status: they feel highly visible, subject to stereotyping and a loss of individuality." My own experiences of women's studies corroborate the symptoms that Miner identifies, but we need to be mindful that similar symptoms can be caused by different diseases. In the classroom, conceptualizing the experiences of men as analogous to minority experiences in dominant discursive spaces casts men as victims in a hostile environment; it seems to equate male pain and minority oppression, which, incidentally, is the same sort of logic that allows "reverse discrimination" to have such currency as a reason to dismantle affirmative action. Thus, a clearer distinction between men's Intro experience and minority experiences in hegemonic spheres is crucial for developing teaching strategies that effectively address the experiences of men in Introduction to Women's Studies.

Most of the men in Miner's (1994: 456) study were disturbed that they seemed to be "capturing a larger awareness share" in women's studies; for example, many of them "commented that they knew their absences would be noticed. . . . The men felt the spotlight on them." It is an important point that the silence, cynicism, squirming, or lashing out that such attention often prompts *does* result from a sort of forced reckoning with power, but I would argue that it is because feminist spaces deprive men of the ground of cultural *privilege* that sustains the hierarchy of gender relations. The otherwise familiar presence of this ground helps to construct certain expectations in men, senses of entitlement—to speak, to be heard, to be valued, to be at the center, to be perceived as an individual. Minority experiences of dominant spaces, on the other hand, do not tend to involve the same sense of betrayal at the hands of a system that they thought was their own; they do not have to leave their hegemonic privilege at the door. Instead, minorities confront, once again, a wall of privilege invisible to those it protects.

This distinction raises the question of how and whether to center men's interests in the women's studies classroom, which has historically militated against such centerings. Whereas most women know the risks of speaking in male-dominated (or otherwise masculinized) classroom settings—because the classroom is not without the power relations that define the social generally—men's struggle to find a voice can exist because their reliance on those power relations has been undermined. Then again, none of this is to say that we should ask a man to speak for all men, but I do think we should view their silences as

suspiciously and cautiously as we do their outbursts. In fact, the most productive pedagogical strategies might try to anticipate these responses ahead of time and be prepared to name them, to resist their owners' attempts to diagnose themselves as only victims in a sort of leveling gesture that equates any sense of powerlessness with systematic oppression.

However, having made the distinction clear and having deconstructed women's space, I am not at all saying that "we" should abandon concerns about gendered power relations in the classroom or the possibility of making the classroom a coalitional, feminist space. To illustrate how both of these important objectives remain possible, I will have to say more about what I mean by feminist space as something different from women's space. This is an analytical distinction, of course, because one of feminism's main lessons concerns the interconnection of bodily identity and social experience, even as one way of understanding feminism is as an attempt to delink the two. Thinking in terms of feminist space is useful here because it helps "us" to imagine men as potential participants in feminist delinking activities while at the same time reminding "us" that feminist practice/pedagogy exceeds socially inscribed identity; as such the practice/pedagogy cannot be guaranteed to emerge from a secure women's physical space. It will be important, therefore, to imagine spaces that can be created independently of the biological identities that inhabit them.³ For men, I think, feminist spaces can simultaneously conjure the theoretical possibility of the separation of the penis (the body) and the phallus (socially structured power), and they can provide a challenging context for exploring the relationship between the two as they manifest in practices.⁴

BEYOND ESSENTIALISM AND PLURALISM . . . FROM OPPRESSION TO PRIVILEGE

For a variety of legitimate reasons, including overwork, job insecurity, institutional constraints on time, and pedagogical staging (i.e., women need to learn to identify as women and with women's oppression before creating coalitions with, say, men), many feminists find themselves teaching versions of feminism that they themselves do not quite buy. As a result, rigid identity politics still occasionally work their way into our classrooms—particularly in Introduction to Women's Studies, the *only* sustained exposure to feminism some students will ever get. But—and this should not be underestimated—for many people, (white) feminist separatism remains *the* stereotype of feminism in general, and the persistence of this stereotype constricts the possibilities for coalition, much the same way that the identity politics stereotype of men as always only nuisances too often works as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

It seems, therefore, that much of the political solution to the "men problem" is already embedded in the work of U.S. Third World feminists. I leave it as an open hypothesis, then, that whenever men as a category appear troublesome to the project of Introduction to Women's Studies, it may be a sign that there

is more work to do in exploring the ways that privilege works *within* gender categories. When well-meaning, privileged folks are accused of essentializing outward from their own social positions, they commonly respond with additive or assimilationist gestures—“Sure, it says ‘all *men* are created equal,’ but women and people of color should certainly feel included!” Similarly, the vast majority of white feminist theorists now “recognize the problem of difference,” according to María Lugones (1991: 38), but “whether they *recognize* difference is another matter.” What still happens all too often, especially in introductory classes, where there is a certain urgency to create an initial unity of oppression, is that a disclaimer is made about the actual lack of inclusion only to be followed by no further engagement with the facts of difference (Lugones 1991: 38).

Perhaps an even more common pedagogical approach in the late 1990s is to essentialize the category woman initially, only to problematize and de-essentialize it later through an exploration of other axes of difference. But even this more evolved strategy may not be adequate. By way of illustration, consider Gayatri Spivak’s response to Ellen Rooney’s statement that she views the “essentialism/antiessentialism” approach as a necessity:

Rather than make it a central issue, work it into the method of your teaching so that the class becomes an example of the minimalizing of essences, the impossibility of essences; rather than talk about it constantly, make the class a proof of this new position. . . . it seems to me that one can make a strategy of taking away from them the authority of their marginality, the centrality of their marginality, through the strategy of careful teaching, so that they come to prove that that authority will not take them very far because the world is a large place. (Spivak and Rooney 1993: 18)

Spivak’s remarks reframe the challenge as one of determining what teaching methods might produce a solidarity of *doing* antiessentialism in opposition to systems of oppression. Similarly, Chela Sandoval (1991: 23) posits the “differential consciousness” of U.S. Third World women as the basis for “a kind of anarchic activity (but with method), a form of ideological guerrilla warfare . . . in a highly technologized and disciplined society.” For Sandoval, the transformative potential of U.S. Third World feminism is in its two-part methodology of reading “the current situation of power and of self-consciously choosing and adopting the ideological form best suited to push against its configurations, a survival skill well known to oppressed peoples” (15). Sandoval’s work moves us closer to the “method” referred to by Spivak earlier. It evokes the feminist space of the classroom as a *process* of inquiry, not a pluralist celebration of difference or a search for some surefooted position at which everyone in the class might, finally, arrive. That is, it involves a vigilant inquiry into “the modes the subordinated . . . (of any gender, race, or class) claim as politicized and oppositional stances in resistance to domination” (Sandoval 1991: 11).

In Introduction to Women’s Studies, we would, of course, remain focused on the ways that social power works through gender relations. Even though the

questions asked about how to work against that power would likely result in white men (or men generally) “capturing a larger awareness share,” putting the spotlight on men would never involve the dichotomizing absolutism of the others in the class, who would be challenged (perhaps by analogy) to think about whiteness, class privilege, heterosexuality, and attractiveness. These potential, temporary centerings of identity categories other than woman are key elements of feminist space as I have been discussing it. In that sense, feminist space does not prescribe the centering of women as such. Instead, feminist space is sometimes most “feminist” when it decenters women, when, for example, it shifts the burden of social change away from women and onto men by overtly marking/centering masculinity.

As I have indicated, invocations of patriarchy as the external Other to Western feminist calls for unity generate stumbling blocks for men in women’s studies, because they propose a certain predestined connection between the penis and the phallus, something that does not resonate for men already tempted by narratives of the besieged white male. In that same conversation with Ellen Rooney, Gayatri Spivak navigates the twin traps of patriarchy studies and liberal pluralism by articulating practical guideposts for teaching self-reflexive critiques of privilege.⁵ I quote her at length as a preparation for thinking in terms of concrete tactics in the final section:

This idea of a global fun-fair is a lousy teaching idea. One of the first things to do is to think through the limits of one’s power. One must ruthlessly undermine the story of the ethical universal, the hero. But the alternative is not constantly to evoke multiplicity. . . . That leads to pluralism. I ask the U.S. student: “What do you think is the inscription that allows *you* to think the world without any preparation? What sort of coding has produced *this* subject?” I think it’s hard for students to know this, but we have a responsibility to make this lesson palliative rather than destructive. This is not a paralyzing thing to teach. In fact, when a student is told that responsibility means proceeding from an awareness of the limits of one’s power, the student understands it quite differently from being told, “Look, you can’t do all of this.” I will share with you what I have learned about knowing, that these are the limitations of what I undertake, looking to others to teach me. I think that’s what one should do rather than invoke multiplicity. (Spivak and Rooney 1993: 19)

This is an important passage to bookend this theoretical discussion because it shows that feminist teaching of privilege requires that *all* students engage in self-critique. But even as there is no sure footing for students, teachers are here also called to model the vulnerability necessary for coalition to really begin to happen. As a white male teacher of women’s studies, I take this passage as a call to *interactive* teaching, to borrow a phrase from Lugones (1991). In that spirit, perhaps this is a good place to consider some actual pedagogical tactics.

IN PRACTICE

My experience with Introduction to Women’s Studies has been as a discussion leader/facilitator. Although all the reflections in this chapter have to be taken

up differently by readers facing a variety of institutional constraints and positions as well as classroom demographics, the following tactics could be reworked for use by teachers in a variety of pedagogical roles, including lecturing.

Checking the (“White”) Box: Privilege versus Minority Experience

This sequencing of activities demonstrates to students that privilege operates as a sort of blindness to the effects of socially inscribed identity. Students are asked to write down all of the words that describe who they are—I assure them that they will not have to show this paper to anyone, so they should feel free to be honest. Without making any initial link to their lists, we talk for a bit about how being confined by labels can be disconcerting for anyone. I then solicit comments from students about whether there is any difference between the experiences of white folks and people of color in checking the race/ethnicity box on, say, a job application form.

After some discussion, many of the white students continue to insist that the violence they feel in being marked in such a way is equal to that of nonwhites; some argue that these boxes create racism by making it a relevant issue at all. At this point I urge students to revisit their lists, pointing out that privileged categories in binary systems are, more often than not, considered irrelevant to those in positions of privilege. White students tend not to mention their race on the list; men tend not to mention their gender; and straight people tend not to mention their sexuality.

White discomfort in checking the box can be discussed as the trauma of having to confront privilege as opposed to the trauma of being a minority. While this may spark a sense of powerlessness in the “victim,” it is not at all the same as oppression. I ask students to consider how these different experiences shape their interactions with each other and with course material throughout the term.

Paired Readings

Students often find it useful when faced with daunting challenges to see others succeeding at the same task. One of the more effective sequencings that I have experienced in this regard is María Lugones’ (1991) “On the Logic of Pluralist Feminism” and Minnie Bruce Pratt’s (1984) “Identity: Skin, Blood, Heart.” Lugones asserts that, “in hearing the ‘What Chou Mean We, White Girl?’ question, white/anglo women theorizers did not really hear an interactive demand, a demand for an answer . . .” (1991: 39).⁶ Pratt’s essay offers an “answer” not only to this question but to Spivak’s request for an interrogation of the “sort of coding [that] has produced this subject.” Pratt is particularly deft at linking up the intimacies of her self-doubt and privilege with both personal and social histories. In so doing, she provides a crucial reference point for translating introspection into action.

Modeling Struggles with Privilege

It is also true, however, that students often find it useful, when faced with the challenge of doing antiprivilege work, to see that others have *struggled* and *continue to struggle* in their efforts to do the same. It undermines one's message to claim, on one hand, that oppositional consciousness and feminist spaces are *processes* while presenting oneself as having already arrived on the stable ground of authority. In Spivak's terms, the instructor should exhibit what it is like work from the limits of one's power, to show what it is like to learn from others.

As a white *male* in women's studies classes, I have learned that disclosure of this sort walks a fine line between generous offering, inappropriate centering of suffering men, and, relatedly, excessive self-deprecation. Yet walking the line is both difficult and necessary; and at strategic moments it is something to be specific about in the classroom, because the thickness of privilege that tends to cohere at the intersection of whiteness and maleness can sometimes be productively scrutinized in the women's studies classroom. Indeed, there is quite a difference between centering men because they are feeling left out and centering men to talk about the dialectics of gender privilege and oppression.

In a classroom discussion of connections between mass media, body image, and eating disorders, a man who had not yet spoken observed that women should resist media messages by not worrying about their bodies so much, and they should not be bothered with guys who try to hold them accountable to unrealistic beauty ideals. His comment was met with fidgety silence. Playing devil's advocate, I offered, "Well, let's talk about that. Why can't women just 'get over it'?" It didn't work very well, because the whole gesture really kept the burden of answering on the women, who had already spun out their opinions as much as they could tolerate in that mode. In retrospect, this classroom moment was an opportunity to shift the burden away from women through a focus on male privilege. In anticipation of this moment, I could have been prepared with stories of conversations with my women friends, many of whom have spent years working out sustainable resistances to the cultural impositions of body image (with varying degrees of "success"). I might have wondered aloud about why the intensity of my socialization to be a heterosexual male in this culture rarely entered the dialogue. Perhaps the class could consider how gender privilege tends to occlude discussions of (straight) men's investments in women's pre-occupations with their appearance. The discussion might then have turned to what sorts of male practices might undermine the negative effects of women's body image. For instance, we might have explored ways that hegemonic channelings of sexual desire might be rechanneled; how the gendering of fat prejudice, for example, is both different from, and related to, women's "obsession" with fat; and we certainly might have thought more creatively about tactical interventions for conversations in which fat prejudice emerges.

Cataloging Interventions for Everyday Life

One positive implication of reconceptualizing women's space as feminist space is that it shifts the focus from bodies to practices in a way that, incidentally, creates coalitional opportunities. Focusing on practices can be liberating in a sense for both men and women because it suggests the possibility for change without undermining the possibility for critique. Along these lines, I have made it a habit in the past few years to collect stories of successful, practical interventions that can be linked to thematic issues in *Introduction to Women's Studies*. For example, during a unit on gender segregation in the workplace, the assigned reading for the course offered that networking among (white) men in job settings creates exclusionary effects on promotion rates for women and people of color. To illustrate how it would look to intervene in such networkings, I tell the following "true" story:

During a smoke/coffee break at a social movement organization retreat, one male manager approached another in a secluded smoking spot. In what he perceived as neutral chit-chat, the first man complained to the other about the "bitch" who's running the meeting, and about how he was distracted by the breasts of another woman. After the break, the second man proceeded to relay the conversation to the entire group. The group, in turn, began to ask questions about how gendered power differences might be affecting the organization's functioning.

The story illustrates that privilege cannot be sustained if members of the privileged group refuse to entertain the assumptions of mutual identification upon which the maintenance of social privilege relies. The refusal itself creates the possibility for oppositional solidarity to emerge.

Students generally enjoy such stories—perhaps initially because the stories are scandalous—but their interest usually goes beyond that; they eventually develop stories of their own, especially later in the term as they begin to try out some of the tactics themselves. In addition, students are remarkably skilled in evaluating the effectiveness of various tactics. While those evaluative discussions are useful, it is perhaps more exciting to know that the entire class is involved in building repertoires of oppositional tactics for use beyond the class.

CONCLUSION

Introduction to Women's Studies courses, when taught in ways that are compelling to men, can be a point of resistance to the mass-mediated, hegemonic masculinity, which imagines (and thereby conjures) the solidarity of other men clustering around kindred discourses of their own victimization by "race extremists," "the gay agenda," and, of course, "feminazis." This particular victimization is a face of privilege, one self-righteously oblivious to its effects on Others, even viciously constructing them as the enemy. We need to take their

victimization away from them—or, as Spivak says, we need to “make a strategy of taking away from them the authority of their marginality.” We need to replace it with a set of skills: how to recognize one’s own privilege at work; how privilege affects space and then how to know when one’s presence is appropriate; how to listen intently from a position of self-doubt. We might also not *deny* their sense of victimization so much as we name the real sources of that powerlessness while also refusing to let them settle on the notion that they *alone* (or to some *greater* degree) are the victims.

I have tried to emphasize that the trick to getting men to engage feminism productively is to make them members of the class by forming coalition out of something that everyone can participate in: the critique and dismantling of privilege. Feminist space, according to this criterion, is a *process* effected by modeling vulnerability and a shift away from oppression studies as an end in itself toward pragmatic studies of privilege that take their cues from compassionate listenings to stories of oppression.

NOTES

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1. See, for example, Cole (1995).

2. By suggesting that men students could be contributors to women’s studies, I imply a space for men as *teachers* of Introduction to Women’s Studies classes, although it is a position I do not want to endorse wholesale and in advance. Certainly, no man should ever accept such a nomination by his women’s studies colleagues as anything but a tentative venture that should be undertaken with relentless self-critique (by which I mean something very different from positioning one’s need for support at the center of things).

3. Throughout the entire chapter I use the words “we” and “us” to refer to an imagined community of women’s studies teachers and students and to acknowledge the complex webs of identity and solidarity that imagining such community evokes. In fact, as I wrote this paragraph, I realized that at times it may have been unclear to some readers whether I was referring to us *people* in women’s studies (I was) or us *men* in women’s studies (I was not)—a disjuncture that testifies to the complexity of these webs.

4. Challenging though it may be for everyone, from a feminist perspective, Introduction to Women’s Studies is certainly “safer” than those masculinist spaces where most college-aged men put the finishing touches on a subjectivity destined for the top.

5. Hazel Carby’s essay in which she critiques the notion of patriarchy for lacking “cross-cultural reference points” (1986: 223) is also relevant here.

6. Lugones is referring to Lorraine Bethel’s (1979) essay by the same name.

SUGGESTED READINGS

- Lugones, M. 1990. Playfulness, “world”-travelling, and loving perception. *Making face, making soul/Haciendo caras: Creative and critical perspectives by women of color*, ed. G. Anzaldúa, 390–402. San Francisco: Aunt Lute.
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