

## **COVERAGE, CONTENT, CONCEPTS: TEXTBOOKS FOR INTRODUCTORY COURSES IN WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES**

by *Christie Launius and Holly Hassel*

Judy Root Aulette & Judith Wittner, *GENDERED WORLDS, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 544p. ISBN 978-0199774043. [Aulette & Wittner]

C. Lesley Biggs, Susan Gingell, & Pamela J. Downe, eds., *GENDERED INTERSECTIONS: AN INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*. Halifax, Nova Scotia: Fernwood, 2011. 512p. ISBN 978-1552664131. [Biggs, Gingell, & Downe]

Shawn Meghan Burn, *WOMEN ACROSS CULTURES: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2011. 400p. ISBN 978-0073512334. [Burn]

Estelle Disch, *RECONSTRUCTING GENDER: A MULTICULTURAL ANTHOLOGY, 5<sup>th</sup> edition*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2009. 701p. ISBN 978-0073380063. [Disch]

Abby Ferber et al., *THE MATRIX READER: EXAMINING THE DYNAMICS OF OPPRESSION AND PRIVILEGE*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2009. 672p. ISBN 978-0073404110. [Ferber et al.]

Inderpal Grewal & Caren Kaplan, *AN INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN'S STUDIES: GENDER IN A TRANSNATIONAL WORLD, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2006. 576p. ISBN 978-0072887181. [Grewal & Kaplan]

Hunter College Women's Studies Collective, *WOMEN'S REALITIES, WOMEN'S CHOICES: AN INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN'S STUDIES, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. 496p. ISBN 978-0195150353. [Hunter College WSC]

Suzanne Kelly, Gowri Parameswaran, & Nancy Schneidewind, *WOMEN: IMAGES AND REALITIES, A MULTICULTURAL ANTHOLOGY, 5<sup>th</sup> edition*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2012. 688p. ISBN 978-0073512310. [Kelly, Parameswaran, & Schneidewind]

Michael Kimmel, *THE GENDERED SOCIETY, 4<sup>th</sup> edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. 480p. ISBN 978-0195399028. [Kimmel]

Gwyn Kirk & Margo Okazawa-Rey, *WOMEN'S LIVES: MULTICULTURAL PERSPECTIVES, 5<sup>th</sup> edition*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2010 704p. ISBN 978-0073512303. [Kirk & Okazawa-Rey]

Judith Lorber & Lisa Jean Moore, *GENDERED BODIES: FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. 272p. ISBN 978-0199732456. [Lorber & Moore]

Paula S. Rothenberg, *RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER IN THE UNITED STATES: AN INTEGRATED STUDY, 8<sup>th</sup> edition*. New York: Worth Publishers, 2010. 774p. ISBN 978-1429217880. [Rothenberg]

Virginia Sapiro, *WOMEN IN AMERICAN SOCIETY: AN INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN'S STUDIES, 5<sup>th</sup> edition*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2003. 624p. ISBN 978-0767416399. [Sapiro]

Susan Shaw & Janet Lee, *WOMEN'S VOICES, FEMINIST VISIONS: CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY READINGS, 5<sup>th</sup> edition*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2012. 768p. ISBN 978-0073512327. [Shaw & Lee, *Voices/Visions*]

Susan Shaw & Janet Lee, *WOMEN WORLDWIDE: TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2011. 688p. ISBN 978-0073512297. [Shaw & Lee, *Women Worldwide*]

Verta Taylor, Nancy Whittier, & Leila Rupp, *FEMINIST FRONTIERS, 9<sup>th</sup> edition*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012. 576p. ISBN 978-0078026621. [Taylor, Whittier, & Rupp]

Martha E. Thompson & Michael Armato, *INVESTIGATING GENDER: DEVELOPING A FEMINIST SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION*. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012. 368p. ISBN 978-0745651866. [Thompson & Armato]

Jacquelyn White, *TAKING SIDES: CLASHING VIEWS IN GENDER, 5<sup>th</sup> edition*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2011. 528p. ISBN 978-0078050305. [White]

At the 2010 annual Fall retreat of the University of Wisconsin System Women's Studies Consortium, a conversation began about how we teach the introductory course or courses in our field. The conversation partly centered on which texts work best in helping students understand the core concepts in women's and gender studies. That discussion led, in turn, to an all-day workshop, in April 2011, at which thirty faculty members and academic staff from across the System worked to identify the *threshold concepts*<sup>1</sup> critical to the field. At the workshop, we honed the list of threshold concepts down to those that most represent our shared learning objectives and desired learning outcomes — essentially, ways of thinking, seeing, and doing in women's and gender studies.

By the time we met again as a group in Fall 2011, the idea of collaboratively authoring our own introductory textbook began to emerge, and in the wake of that meeting, Phyllis Holman Weisbard and JoAnne Lehman suggested that a survey and review of the textbooks currently on the market would be of use to *Feminist Collections (FC)* readers. It had been seventeen years since *FC* had last published such a review — Terry Brown's "Choosing our Words Carefully: A Review of Women's Studies Textbooks,"<sup>2</sup> so an update was certainly in order. We aim to offer that update here.

Several of the texts Terry Brown reviewed in 1994 are still in print. Among those, some have been updated with new editions in the last three or four years, while others remain in print

but are perhaps in their final iteration. Still others from the list are no longer available.

The market for introductory women's and gender studies (WGS) textbooks has expanded considerably since 1994. Michele Tracy Berger and Cheryl Radeloff report that there are currently more than 700 WGS programs in the U.S.,<sup>3</sup> and a 2007 census by the National Opinion Research Center for the National Women's Studies Association reported that undergraduate WGS courses enrolled nearly 89,000 students in 2005–2006.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, WGS has become a core part of the curriculum at many institutions of higher education, and this is an unmitigated positive development in the field. The resulting expansion of the textbook market to serve these programs, courses, and students is also, in many ways, a positive development.

In this review, we take stock of the maturation and expansion of the WGS field, focusing on what can be gleaned from the existing textbooks about the current state of the field's pedagogical and political values. We also do what reviews traditionally do:



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that is, identify the strengths and weaknesses of these texts, using our particular pedagogical and scholarly priorities as a framework.

Our list of eighteen titles includes many that are explicitly billed as “Introduction to Women’s and Gender Studies” textbooks, as well as other texts that might be used in an introductory course but are designed for upper-division “Sociology of Gender” courses. We have included both types, not only because many “intro” instructors use the sociology texts, but also because the sociology texts are among the strongest in (1) introducing the idea of a (feminist) sociological imagination, and (2) explicitly incorporating and citing current research on women and gender. We have departed from Terry Brown’s approach in that we have *not* included other types of anthologies. We acknowledge that many instructors adopt such works for their intro courses, but we have chosen to focus on works that are explicitly marketed as textbooks.

**W**e talked at length about the best evaluative framework for reviewing the many textbooks that are available to instructors for introductory WGS courses, and ultimately generated a rubric. Our evaluative criteria can be roughly grouped together into three main “lenses.” First, we identified the *instructional priorities* we have arrived at as instructors with over a decade of experience teaching introductory WGS courses. Within this lens, we agreed on five principles: (1) first, what we call a “critical apparatus” is important for giving first- and second-year students a framework for understanding thematically based material. By critical apparatus, we mean a framing text or chapter that introduces students to key terms and concepts within the field and continues to contextualize each new (usually) thematic unit within the

framework of the important concepts. (2) On a related note, we’ve found it helpful to have a pedagogical apparatus that gives both instructors and students some direction and groundwork for engaging with the concepts. (3) Next, we value texts that are transparent and explicit about the research and evidence upon which arguments and assertions are based. (4) We also look for texts that provide these features while being accessible and relevant to undergraduates. (5) Finally, we look for texts that provide some historical context.

The second lens that informed our approach has to do with assessing how thoroughly current textbooks have *incorporated previous decades’ trends in women’s studies scholarship*, particularly an integrated treatment of intersectionality (overlapping social categories of identity that interact to reflect interlocking systems of oppression at the structural level), trends toward the globalization of the WGS curriculum and research base, and the valuing of a theory-practice connection.

Our third and last lens in reviewing the texts is the *national trajectory* of the field of teaching and learning in women’s studies as well as in higher education more broadly. That is, we valued more highly those books that identified key learning outcomes and that moved away from content coverage toward habits of mind. This trend is illustrated by the National Women Studies Association’s recent emphasis on integrative learning and assessment,<sup>5</sup> as well as by Berger and Radeloff’s survey of women’s and gender studies graduates,<sup>6</sup> both of which emphasize not just the content of a WGS education, but also the skills that are implicitly and explicitly taught in WGS programs. In surveying the current crop of textbooks, we were curious to see whether and to what extent the teaching of skills was incorporated.

### ***First Lens: Instructional Priorities***

In the broadest sense, these eighteen textbooks can be divided into two main types: those that are primarily authored by one or two people (Aulette & Wittner; Burn; Hunter College WSC; Kimmel; Sapiro; and Thompson & Armato), and those that have one or more editors and contain a combination of original and previously published material. Within this second category, there is a lot of variation. Some texts, as their titles suggest, are primarily readers, with minimal framing material: Disch’s *Reconstructing Gender: A Multicultural Anthology*, Ferber et al.’s *The Matrix Reader*, and Kelly, Parameswaran, & Schneidewind’s *Women: Images and Realities, A Multicultural Anthology* all fall into this subcategory.

**A**s instructors who regularly teach the first-year, introductory women’s and gender studies course, we acknowledge a strong preference for edited collections with robust framing essays. For teachers like us, two of the most effective books in this regard are Shaw & Lee’s *Women’s Voices, Feminist Visions* and Kirk & Okazawa-Rey’s *Women’s Lives: Multicultural Perspectives*, both of which provide a rich context for each set of readings. It is our experience that students being introduced to the field of women’s and gender studies need (and like!) some guidance that can help them shape their reading and understanding. The introductory sections in these two books serve a critical function in helping students (particularly first- and second-year students) absorb a “landscape” of important ideas upon which they can deepen their thinking about the topics discussed in more detail through selected readings. The critical introduction before each selection of readings introduces students to the important ideas and concepts within that



topic (for example, “Women’s Work Inside and Outside the Home” and “Systems of Privilege and Inequality”), and highlights key terms using italics. Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, for example, provide an analytical framework they consistently use throughout the book, in which each of the topics discussed is framed in “micro-,” “meso-,” “macro-,” and “global” levels; this is particularly effective in helping students develop an understanding of structural forms of oppression and privilege.

Instructors looking for texts with a *robust embedded pedagogy* feature will find this in Burn’s *Women across Cultures: A Global Perspective*; in Thompson & Armato’s *Investigating Gender*; in both texts edited by Shaw & Lee; and in Kirk & Okazawa-Rey. Both Shaw & Lee’s *Voices/Visions* and Thompson & Armato’s *Investigating Gender* are exemplary in this regard, with the kind of “textbook-like” features that can provide structure to an introductory course: epigraphs to start chapters, “pull-out quote” boxes, boldface sections and italicized key terms, and discussion questions at the end of each chapter. Each chapter also includes suggested further readings, and class periods can be structured by chapter, each of which includes discussion and writing questions at the end as well as “learning activities” (which involve making connections between the course material and gender “out in the world”) that can also produce interesting and engaged discussion. Shaw & Lee’s *Women Worldwide* offers these same features in a global-focused text. *Women Worldwide* differs from Shaw & Lee’s U.S.-focused *Voices/Visions* in that individual chapters are authored or co-authored by various experts in the thematic areas — reproductive freedoms, global politics of the body, families in global context, and sexuali-

ties worldwide, for example — and are supported by excerpted readings within the field from a variety of global settings.

Experienced WGS instructors will know that, for many students, documenting the issues discussed in the course is essential to establishing disciplinary credibility. We agreed that successful textbooks refer directly and explicitly to specific *research studies and theory*, as opposed to using vague phrases such as “research shows” or “studies have proven.” Doing so models for students the importance of supporting claims with evidence, and it further reinforces the fact that WGS is an established academic field. Because introductory WGS courses often ask students to think in ways that contradict their commonsense understandings about gender, it is critical to demonstrate the evidence-based foundation on which the field is built. Several textbooks stand out to us in this regard, including Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, Aulette & Winter, Kimmel, and Thompson & Armato. Kimmel’s *The Gendered Society* offers complete citations via footnotes and cites specific, notable research studies in the body of the text. The text has been updated with each edition, although the majority of the cited studies date to the first edition. The second edition of Aulette & Winter’s *Gendered Worlds* includes up-to-date material, uses parenthetical citations, and offers complete bibliographic citations at the end of each chapter. Kirk & Okazawa-Rey’s *Women’s Lives*, which is a strong textbook regardless of evaluative criteria, is also notable for its use of documentation to support claims — providing both parenthetical citations (using the “see also” model) and a complete list of references. Thompson & Armato provide the same, but go one step further by including an inset “Research Example” in each chapter that summarizes a relevant research study,

describing its methods, findings, and contribution to the field and briefly assessing the study in terms of what they call the five major components of a feminist sociological imagination.

Although we are clearly expressing a preference for textbooks that incorporate evidence-based research, we also appreciate those that include first-person narratives and/or literary selections. Kirk & Okazawa-Rey’s *Women’s Lives: Multicultural Perspectives* is a good example of a text that incorporates research but also includes first-person narratives. Instructors looking overall for a more humanities-based approach will want to explore Kelly, Parameswaran, & Schneidewind’s *Women: Images and Realities* and Biggs, Gingell, & Downe’s *Gendered Intersections*.

Related to the use of citation and up-to-date research to ground the material, we also looked at a textbook’s *tone regarding controversial or unresolved issues within feminist scholarship*. That is, we agreed that the best textbooks contextualize feminist perspectives on whatever topic, issue, or theory by explaining what that perspective stands in contrast to. What are the debates, for example, about theories of gender role socialization? What arguments are made about reproductive control and public policy? Who says what, and why? Furthermore, multiple perspectives are presented, not just a singular or monolithic feminist (or anti-feminist) perspective, and room is left for students to evaluate, consider, and weigh these multiple perspectives. For example, Aulette & Wittner’s *Gendered Worlds* demonstrates this approach in its discussion of sexual violence: For example, in their discussion of recent decline in rape statistics, they ask, “Why has this decline occurred?” and go on to say, “Some argue that...”

and “Other experts, however, believe that...” (p. 270). White’s *Taking Sides: Clashing Views in Gender* falls into this category as well. Although readers might initially approach White’s book with skepticism, given the way each chapter title is formulated as a yes-or-no question (for example: “Can Social Policies Improve Gender Inequalities in the Workplace?”), *Taking Sides* can ultimately be useful in helping students understand a variety of contemporary debates over sex/gender issues.

Another quality we evaluated in these textbooks is what we call *accessibility and approachability*: an admittedly amorphous criterion for evaluation. Like most veteran instructors, we are all too aware of some students’ tendency to dismiss the course material if they feel it violates their standards of recency, relevance, and readability, and we had these student concerns in mind as we reviewed each of these textbooks. Of course, we also have our own standards of recency, relevancy, and readability, which we also brought to bear on our reviews. For our purposes, being up to date has a couple of different dimensions. First, the best textbooks provide up-to-date statistics (data from the 2010 Census, for example) and cite recent research studies; for the most part, all of the textbooks that have been updated in the last two to three years have done a good job of this. A few that have not include Ferber et al.’s *Matrix Reader*, which seems to use sources from the early 2000s and some from the 1990s, with most statistics about five years old. *Feminist Frontiers*, by Taylor, Whittier, & Rupp, also feels a bit dated, with most readings at least a decade old. Finally, Grewal & Kaplan’s *Introduction to Women’s Studies* differs in that most of its readings do not provide statistical data on the issues discussed, but some readings are problematically dated — for example,

an essay on AIDS prevention dating from 1991.

A second aspect of being *up to date* is a little trickier, though, even for some texts that have been released in a new edition recently. This second form of being up to date has to do with referring to recent cultural phenomena and popular culture (e.g., social networking, “hook-up” culture, etc.). Thompson & Armato’s *Investigating Gender* refers to the “Bechdel Test” in its chapter on media; Taylor, Whittier, & Rupp’s *Feminist Frontiers* has recently added an article about gestational surrogacy; Shaw & Lee’s *Women’s Voices, Feminist Visions* has articles about “sexting” and the cult of virginity; and White’s *Taking Sides* has a chapter on cyberbullying. Other texts were less current in this regard, such as Hunter College WSC’s *Women’s Realities, Women’s Choices*, which contains references nearly a decade old, including pop-cultural references to Madonna instead of more contemporary figures like Lady Gaga. Another instance of this is the “email” feature in Biggs, Gingell, & Downe’s *Gendered Intersections*, which presents email messages on the page as though they’ve been forwarded multiple times and then printed out. The editors write, “In this book, we include a sample of the kind of gendered commentary that circulates electronically to be read with levity and poignancy by diverse Internet users” (p. 26). Given the significant growth in alternative methods of electronic communication, such as various social media, that students choose over email, retaining this format in the second edition seems quite dated (particularly in light of the editors’ note in the first edition that “[a]s computers become increasingly central to more people’s lives, we are developing new ways of communicating, disseminating ideas and sharing humour” (p. 26).

A final point that we believe is of importance to many instructors is the degree to which particular texts provide *historical context*. None of these textbooks is primarily historical in nature, but some include more historical content than others, and from a range of perspectives. For example, Kirk & Okazawa-Rey’s *Women’s Lives* addresses the historical aspects of U.S. feminist movements in a section in Chapter 1 entitled “Feminist Legacies and Perspectives.” Shaw & Lee’s *Women’s Voices, Feminist Visions* has a similar brief section in its opening chapter, and also intersperses some “classic readings” throughout the book, including pieces by Margaret Sanger, Pat Mainardi, and Emma Goldman. Kelly, Parameswaran, & Schneidewind’s *Women: Images and Realities* takes a slightly different approach, including both an overview of U.S. feminist movements and examples of documents from the movement in its final chapter. Grewal & Kaplan’s *Introduction to Women’s Studies* also distinguishes itself as a text that is not only globally focused but also grounded in historical content; for example, it includes an excerpt from *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, a history of sexual surgery in America, and more “recent” historical texts from global women’s movements. The text that seems the most “overall historical” is Sapiro’s *Women in American Society*, which not only provides a historical overview of the achievements of the feminist movement overall, but also opens many chapters that focus on social issues with a historical overview of that particular issue (education, law and policy, etc).

Two other texts use historical data and excerpts in interesting and purposeful ways. For example, Ferber et al.’s *The Matrix Reader* includes 200 years’ worth of Census data to trace the evolution of American thinking about and the social construction of racial

categories. In keeping with this institutional approach, it also offers an article outlining twelve major court cases contributing to the historical evaluation of cultural attitudes about race, class, and gender. Rothenberg's *Race, Class, and Gender* makes similar use of historical government documents in a section entitled "How it Happened: Race and Gender Issues in U.S. Law," a compelling historical overview that could be of powerful pedagogical value in helping students gain a context for the discussion of racism and sexism, for example.

### Second Lens: Trends in the Field

Critical to a successful introduction to gender and women's studies course is the concept of *intersectionality*, or *confluence of identities*: the notion that overlapping categories of identity shape individual experience in ways that reflect macro-level systems of oppression and privilege. Several textbooks stood out to us in offering teachers and students an integrated approach to intersectionality. We distinguished these from textbooks that, for example, represented diverse perspectives but weren't as effective at showing relationships across those diverse perspectives.

Three texts stood out to us as exemplifying an integrated approach: Kirk & Okazawa-Rey's *Women's Lives: Multicultural Perspectives*; Estelle Disch's *Reconstructing Gender: A Multicultural Anthology*, and Paula Rothenberg's *Race, Class, and Gender* are notable as introductory texts that very intentionally approach the material through an intersectional lens. Rothenberg opens with the assertion that *Race, Class, and Gender* is an "examination of the ways in which race, class, gender, and sexuality have been socially constructed in the United States as difference," and her promised focus is borne out by the wide selection of readings



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that take as a given intersections of race, class, and gender, and by a table of contents organized around how and where they intersect — in economics, discrimination in everyday life, social and cultural consequences, and history. Similarly, the general introduction of Disch's *Reconstructing Gender* opens with the assertion, "No one is simply a man or a woman. Each of us embodies intersecting statuses and identities, empowered and disempowered, including physical and demographic traits, chosen and unchosen" (p.1). Part I of the reader is titled, "It's Not Just About Gender"; in addition, subsequent parts (e.g., "Communication," "Education," and "Health and Illness") each contain multiple readings that focus on gender in relation to other categories of identity. Kirk & Okazawa-Rey similarly make good on the promise in their

introduction to "do justice to the diversity of women's lives in this country" (*Women's Lives: Multicultural Perspectives*, p. xviii). Hunter College WSC's *Women's Realities, Women's Choices* is the least effective in this regard, only superficially correcting an approach in the first two editions that "the term 'we' was often used to describe all women" (p. 12). The most recent edition of *Women's Realities* tries to correct this somewhat essentialist approach, but instructors who emphasize difference and intersectionality will find this text a poor match for their pedagogical values.

With WGS scholarship increasingly taking on *global topics*, many instructors may want to incorporate global content into their introductory course or courses. They will find



text choices across the spectrum, with some books that are entirely focused on global women's issues and others that isolate global content in a specific chapter. Kirk & Okazawa-Rey's *Women's Lives: Multicultural Perspectives* is primarily U.S.-focused, but includes a wide-ranging and dense chapter on "Living in a Globalized World." Kelly, Parameswaran, & Schneidewind's *Women: Images and Realities* has in its newest edition added a section of readings under the heading "Nations, Boundaries, and Belonging: Citizenship in Women's Lives"; the editors note that they did this "[b]ecause of the importance of developing a transnational consciousness and awareness of the effects of citizenship on women's lives" (p. v). A slightly different approach is taken by Thompson & Armato in *Investigating Gender*; rather than devoting a chapter to global issues, they incorporate what they term a "relational global perspective" throughout the book.

Instructors looking for a textbook with a substantive global focus will find only a small handful of choices. Burn's *Women Across Cultures: A Global Perspective* is a solid option in this regard. Burn shapes the text around four key themes: gender inequality as a historical and sociocultural phenomenon; activism and empowerment; multicultural and intersectional approaches; and women's rights as human rights. Within these four themes, she provides a balanced, academic approach, introducing students to some basic theoretical perspectives as she frames some of the key issues — reproductive rights, women's low status and power, sexuality, work, etc. The global perspective means that Burn also includes chapters on "Women, Development, and Environmental Sustainability" and

"Women and Globalization," which are welcome additions to an introductory WGS textbook market that has focused almost exclusively on U.S. issues.

A similarly effective global-focused text is Shaw & Lee's *Women Worldwide: Transnational Perspectives on Women*. Unlike Burn's text, which is single-authored and largely a synthesis of existing research, *Women Worldwide* includes separately authored chapters focused on concepts and institutions, such as "Transnational Feminism," "World Media," "Global Politics of the Body," and "Families in Global Context." Each chapter includes representative texts from a variety of disciplinary perspectives and in a range of genres — journal articles, newspaper articles, poems, reports — and nearly all are highly up to date. A wide range of diverse ethnic, national, and racial perspectives make up the book's content, and the chapters vary in their presentation of intersectional perspectives, with some integrating such perspectives fully into the chapter material and others including a separate section on how race, class, and gender are at work within that issue (for example, reproductive technologies). Grewal & Kaplan's *Introduction to Women's Studies: Gender in a Transnational World* was perhaps the first of its kind, but it has not been updated since 2006, and a scan of its bibliography shows that the vast majority of the readings date from the 1990s.

Another feature of effective textbooks, we would argue, is *integration of feminist praxis*, or blending of academic knowledge with activism and advocacy. As most instructors know, students can become overwhelmed and frustrated by critical analysis of the status of women and the social construction of gender (or "here's the problem"), without an accompanying

sense of what has been done and what could be done to solve those problems. Therefore, we want to highlight those texts that incorporate a focus on activism, within each chapter as well as, often, in a separate chapter focused specifically on activism and advocacy. Again, as with their other strengths as texts, Kirk & Okazawa-Rey's *Women's Lives: Multicultural Perspectives* and Shaw & Lee's *Women's Voices, Feminist Visions* do this particularly well. Kirk & Okazawa-Rey directly address the text's focus on activism in their introduction: "We see collective action for progressive social change as a major goal of scholarly work, and thus, in the face of these economic and political trends, we take a deliberately activist approach in this book" (*Women's Lives: Multicultural Perspectives*, p. 17). Each of their twelve chapters ends with "Finding Out More on the Web" and "Taking Action." The final part of the book is entitled "Activism and Change," and Chapter 12 (the only chapter in Part V) is entitled "Creating Change: Theory, Vision, and Action." In addition, each individual chapter concludes with an overview of feminist perspectives and activism.

Similarly, Shaw & Lee embed "Ideas for Activism" throughout each chapter of *Women's Voices, Feminist Visions*, linking the course material with specific strategies for addressing gender injustice in small and large ways. Instructors could use these embedded activist strategies as ideas for weekly learning activities or for larger final projects. Additionally, many chapters include "Activist Profiles," inset boxes that highlight past achievements in feminist movement related to the chapter content. For instructors who want students to make connections between what happens inside the classroom and what happens outside, Shaw & Lee's approach would be attractive. While the focus of Thompson & Armato's

*Investigating Gender* is primarily on research rather than activism, this text does include two kinds of inset activist profiles in each chapter: these are called “The Power of One” and “The Power of Many,” and focus on individuals and organizations respectively.

### ***Third Lens: Concepts, Outcomes, and Coverage***

One gap in the current array of available textbooks can be seen through our third lens. A growing trend in many disciplines is to shift from a “coverage” model (in which a survey or introductory course introduces students to as many of the themes and subtopics of note within a discipline as can be covered in fifteen weeks), to an approach that privileges “ways of thinking” and learning outcomes that could more accurately be understood as skills — ways of seeing and doing in women’s studies that reflect the core competencies students develop after completing a course, a minor, or a major in women’s and gender studies. We see this trend toward skills and ways of thinking manifested in both the scholarly literature and in the national disciplinary trends as represented by NWSA.

Berger and Radeloff’s *Transforming Scholarship: Why Women’s and Gender Studies Students Are Changing Themselves and the World* illustrates this trend. Intended partly as a guide for WGS students and majors, it includes a chapter titled “Discovering and Claiming Your Internal Strengths and Internal Skills,” which outlines an array of “ways of thinking” that characterize the learning students do in our courses. Some are as general as “thinking critically,” while others are more field-specific, including “developing critical reading and analytic skills on the variety of theoretical perspectives on sex/gender, race/ethnicity, social class, and sexuality” and “connecting

knowledge and experience, theory and activism in women’s studies and other courses.”<sup>7</sup> Berger and Radeloff outline in significant detail how these skills translate into occupational and intellectual activities after graduation.<sup>8</sup>

In our estimation, few, if any, of the textbooks we examined *explicitly* reflect this trend in the field. As noted earlier, quite a few include a robust embedded pedagogical apparatus — learning activities, discussion and writing questions, tools for reflection — and others are accompanied by online resources for instructors and students to assess learning. However, quite a bit of this material is geared toward measuring student command of content rather than the ability to “think like” a feminist scholar. For example, Sapiro’s *Women in American Society* includes discussion questions that focus primarily on helping students self-assess their understanding of the chapter content (e.g., “What is the history of homemaking, and how is it related to sex/gender systems?” and “Explain what the right-of-way in communication is. How does it relate to gender?”). Shaw & Lee’s *Women’s Voices, Feminist Visions* offers a test bank in its instructor’s manual, with both multiple-choice and true-false questions focusing on content.

Many of the textbooks provide pedagogical material that seems intended to move students beyond understanding content to applying theoretical or epistemological lenses. To give just a few examples, Kirk & Okazawa-Rey include questions for reflection at the end of each chapter; both texts by Shaw & Lee include “Learning Activities” that ask students to conduct field research by connecting the chapter content to the world around them; Ferber et al. includes similar activities inviting students to, for example, assess their workplaces in the context of

readings about institutionalizing social change; and Lorber & Moore include classroom exercises. What we were looking for, however, were pedagogical features that made these learning outcomes *explicit* to students.

Of the eighteen textbooks, two stand out as explicitly adopting a skills-focused approach. White’s *Taking Sides* focuses on argument analysis, and its preface states that book’s goal is to “help you develop an ideological tool chest that will enable you to intelligently and responsibly navigate the challenging gender landscape” (p. vi). *Taking Sides* opens by introducing the idea that knowledge is socially constructed, provides tools for argument analysis, and invites students to “remain open to considering and reconsidering beliefs and knowledge in ways that you never imagined” (p. xxxiii).

The other text that stands out here is Thompson & Armato’s *Investigating Gender*. In their introduction, the authors make explicit that their goal is to guide students through the acquisition of a feminist sociological imagination, which entails not just content knowledge, but skills and habits of mind:

Although we view knowledge acquisition as an important part of a feminist sociological imagination, we have written this textbook to go beyond knowledge acquisition alone and to provide you with the inspiration, tools, and skills necessary to become a critical feminist sociological thinker and, ultimately, to investigate gender on your own. (*Investigating Gender*, p. 8)

Thompson & Armato also introduce and define Cynthia Enloe’s concept of feminist curiosity in their introduction. Although this text is explicitly disciplinary, and therefore not a perfect



fit for introductory WGS courses, it provides an inspirational and aspirational model for instructors who want to explicitly incorporate skills-based learning outcomes into their courses.

On the whole, however, WGS textbooks have not necessarily kept pace with the trend toward focusing on discipline-specific skills, learning outcomes, and competencies instead of dense content coverage. Some are more successful than others in articulating not just what the current debates are about issues in the field of women's and gender studies, but also how conceptual frameworks that reflect a "feminist sociological imagination" or a "feminist epistemological stance" are defining features of the field as much as the content of a course or program is.

Reviewing the many options that instructors have for introducing students to the basics of women's and gender studies provides us with several insights. First, there is a textbook for nearly every instructor's pedagogical priorities. Although no one text perfectly matches all our instructional priorities, many do come close to reflecting a variety of critical aspects — a textbook-type introductory apparatus, intersectional approaches, historical content, and integrated feminist praxis — that are important to us. Second, some textbooks are weaker enough in areas of critical importance — for example, visible research, up-to-date and relevant examples — that they would not, in our estimation, have credibility with students. Finally, the current textbook array is not necessarily keeping pace with trends in higher education. As more and more academic fields reframe their disciplinary knowledge in terms of both content and skills or outcomes, the ways that we introduce students to our fields should reflect that shift in priorities.

Notes

1. A *threshold concept* is a core disciplinary concept that is both troublesome and transformative. Jan Meyer & Ray Land, "Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Linkages to Ways of Thinking and Practising within the Disciplines," in *Enhancing Teaching-Learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses* (Occasional Report 4, ETL Project, May 2003), <http://www.etl.tla.ed.ac.uk/publications.html>. A threshold concept is integrative; when students cross the threshold and grasp a concept, "the hidden interrelatedness" of other concepts within that discipline becomes apparent. Glynis Cousin, "An Introduction to Threshold Concepts," *Planet* no. 17 (December 2006), pp. 4–5, <http://neillthew.typepad.com/files/threshold-concepts-1.pdf>.

2. Terry Brown, "Choosing Our Words Carefully: A Review of Women's Studies Textbooks," *Feminist Collections* v. 16, no. 1, Fall 1994, pp. 2-5 (archived at [http://minds.wisconsin.edu/bitstream/handle/1793/22076/brown\\_rev.html?sequence=2](http://minds.wisconsin.edu/bitstream/handle/1793/22076/brown_rev.html?sequence=2)).

3. Michelle Tracy Berger & Cheryl Radeloff, *Transforming Scholarship: Why Women's and Gender Studies Students Are Changing Themselves and the World* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

4. Michael Reynolds, Shobha Shagle, & Lekha Venkataraman, National Opinion Research Center (NORC), University of Chicago, "A National Census of Women's and Gender Studies Programs in U.S. Institu-

tions of Higher Education" NORC Project 6433.01.62, December 26, 2007, presented to the National Women's Studies Association; online at [http://082511c.membershipsoftware.org/files/NWSA\\_CensusonWSProgs](http://082511c.membershipsoftware.org/files/NWSA_CensusonWSProgs).

5. See Amy Levin's "Questions for a New Century: Women's Studies and Integrative Learning: A Report to the National Women's Studies Association," at <http://www.nwsa.org/content.asp?pl=17&sl=79&contentid=79>.

6. See note 3 above.

7. Berger & Radeloff, p. 163.

8. Similarly, Amy Levin's report to the National Women's Studies Association, "Questions for a New Century: Women's Studies and Integrative Learning," cited in note 5 above, focuses on assessment practices in the field and the development of learning outcomes and assessment strategies for measuring student learning.

9. Sara Crawley, et al., "Introduction: Feminist Pedagogies in Action: Teaching Beyond Disciplines," *Feminist Teacher*, v. 19, no. 1 (2008), pp. 1–12.

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