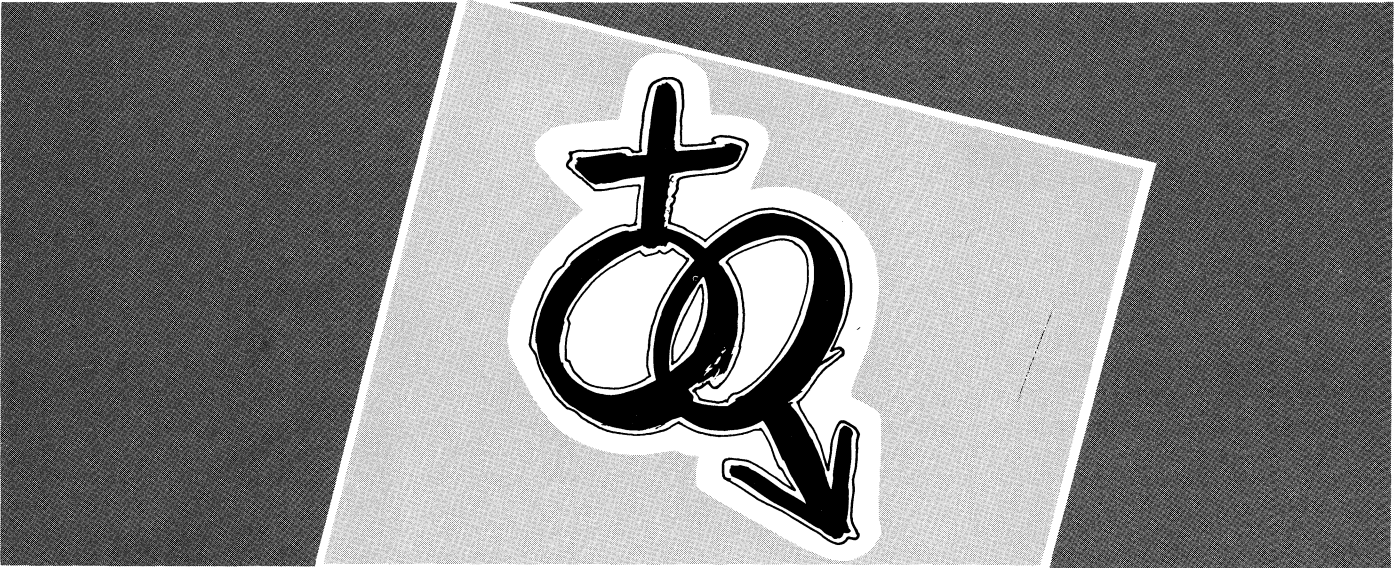# Women's Studies for Men and Women

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Les Etudes de la femme destinées aux deux sexes

Il est de première importance qu'à l'intérieur des cours de sciences sociales, on envisage une nouvelle approche aux études de la femme.

Cet article préconise un cours spécialement conçu pour les étudiants des deux sexes, et examine les répercussions qui pourraient s'ensuivre:
— une connaissance accrue ainsi qu'une plus grande expertise pratique;
— une remise en question des valeurs humaines et professionelles;
— une prise de conscience personnelle;
— une plus grande accessibilité aux individus et aux agences sociales.
En fait, l'expérience des groupes de travail avec les deux sexes s'avère enrichissante à tous les niveaux.

Introduction

For social-work practitioners, it would be difficult to identify a single area of relevance which does not revolve around woman's dependent status in society: a woman's 'problem' in therapy has much in common with her sister's status in poverty, as a battered wife, or as an exploited member of the workforce — whether a blue-collar worker in a textile mill or a white-collar practitioner in an agency.

It is clear that this presents a significant challenge to social-work educators. This article is based upon the premise that changes, of undefined magnitude, have occurred in the social and educational environment of the 1970s, and these have resulted in a pressing need for new approaches towards 'women's studies' in the social-work curriculum. Points to be considered:

* there is a distinct range of subjects in the area broadly known as 'women's studies' which may be of particular relevance to students and practitioners in social work;
* these topics provide a unique opportunity to combine theory and practice both in the classroom and in the field;
* particular opportunities arise to facilitate discussion of both personal and professional values and biases;

* the subject matter is of equal importance to both male and female students — indeed, the group process among students of both sexes can be a highly significant aid to the learning experience;
* as a direct result of the heightened recognition that 'problems' do exist, the classroom focus must evolve from a primary concern with process to one of outcome, from the identification and definition of problem areas to specific practice approaches and modalities;
* the varying backgrounds of students represent both a support and a challenge in the educational process.

Discussion in this paper will reflect the experience of a course which has now been offered at the University of Toronto, Faculty of Social Work, for three years. The course has attempted to incorporate the ideas suggested above, and was particularly designed for both *male and female* students.

The Background

If significant attitudinal and behavioural changes are to occur in the field, it is evident that they must be reflected, or perhaps even begin, in the classroom. Much has happened through the past few years, and educational approaches and philosophies which may have been appropriate previously are now in need of an update. Consider for example the proliferation of courses being offered in Women's Studies across the campuses of Canada and America. It is scarcely an overstatement to suggest that virtually any college department that holds even a tenuous claim to relevance must now have at least one Women's Studies offering in its calendar.
Many of the early courses were primarily directed towards female students, and functioned essentially as consciousness-raising groups (though often without the precise label). Stress was generally on the group process, as a sharing of experiences led to identification and possibly to a clearer definition of problem areas.

Over time, the focus of many of these courses began to alter, perhaps in response to changes in the women's movement itself. As various kinds of self-help groups evolved, the concern with process was overtaken by an increasing preoccupation with outcome. It is obvious that educational approaches towards practice with women should now advance to encompass issues of policy — rather than merely raising levels of awareness.

The Teaching Process

A major difficulty in teaching almost any interdisciplinary course, particularly at the graduate level, is that students arrive with widely differing backgrounds and experiences. This diversity can be a significant strength, but it does necessitate a preliminary stage in which everyone will be brought up to some common base or take-off point. For example, the views of Freud and the Horner studies (and responses to them) may, by now, be boring or perhaps even trivial to the psychology major or to the woman who has been in a group. But students also bring other 'baggage' with them. At the University of Toronto, one man had majored in political economy at the undergraduate level and had never taken a course in psychology or sociology. Another man had worked in a practice with a large caseload of women before returning to school, and stated that 'I needed to know more about their problems and how to deal with them'. One woman was enrolled in the Business Administration program and was motivated to take the social work course by her own earlier experiences in the business world — yet she had not previously dealt with concepts such as role socialization and had not encountered the phrase 'fear of success'. On the other hand, one woman student indicated that she was not only familiar with the literature, but was by now, utterly bored with discussions about 'fear of success'.

Keeping this diversity of backgrounds in mind the course must begin by considering general concepts such as role socialization, sexism, and discrimination. These will, in some sense, serve as an underlying unity for all that follows. The format here can be relatively unstructured, as the group will identify and define at least the broad parameters of important areas. Specific topics of interest may also be isolated. Small discussion groups and the sharing of personal experiences — including individual statements as to why one initially enrolled in the course and what are the individual and group expectations — may be appropriate, particularly if the class is large; the more heterogeneous these small groups, the more interesting and useful the outcome is likely to be. At the same time, the goals and focus at this stage of the course must be more than merely sensitizing.

This preliminary phase of the course directs attention towards a more structured approach to problem-solving. The meaning and implications of concepts such as 'sexism' are discussed and perhaps clarified. Matters of definitions should be resolved at an early stage. For example, 'discrimination' as used by an economist has a rather particular meaning which must be clarified if work-related issues are to be examined. Articles dealing with the sexism of the social work profession itself are also appropriate at this stage, leading students to isolate various questions of values — their own personal values as individuals, as well as those of the profession as a collectivity.[1]

Once a common base of knowledge and shared experiences has been established, the course then proceeds to consider a range of specific policy areas. These will undoubtedly vary from year to year, depending on the interests and priorities articulated by students and instructor. At Toronto, for example, the question of women's hostels became one of great importance in 1976, in large part because of serious funding crises facing the community's hostels at that time. Yet in the previous session the issue never arose. One semester work-related issues and problems may be the primary concern, while another class may be more interested in dealing with therapy, casework, and non-sexist counselling.

Once topics have been identified each one might be considered in a module of two or three sessions with three identifiable stages:

(a) the literature or theory may be examined in a relatively formal context. Studies may be read, cited, and analysed in class. Premises and assumptions which underlie the academic work may lead to useful discussions of values;

(b) this involves attempts to relate the readings to social-work practice, possibly based on the students' experiences in the past, or their current field placements. Alternative approaches to problem-solving may be considered at this stage;

(c) finally, practitioners from the community may be invited to meet with members of the class to share their own experiences and relate their frustrations and successes in dealing with the 'real world'. The preferred guest will use a creative approach in her practical work. She will be informed of, and familiar with, the knowledge base and values which have been previously considered by the class.

These three stages will not be applicable to every area of concern. In some areas there is a lack of a substantive theory base and instead students deal largely with questions of values or social policy. For example, a recent article in *Social Work* on abortion subtitled 'Beyond Rhetoric to Access', indicates a clear priority for the author on issues of action and strategy.[2] Other topics of importance are only now becoming dominant concerns for social work. For example in *Social Work* battered wives were described as 'an emerging social problem'; until recently, it says, this problem was 'winked at rather than censured'.[3]

On the other hand, the area of therapy and counselling is highly developed and can be dealt with in a somewhat more comprehensive way. Here, Chessler's *Women and Madness*[4] is undoubtedly a seminal work; the Broverman[5] studies and the somewhat divergent findings of Fischer[6] *et al.* relate these general issues more specifically to social-work practice and raise critical questions of values as well. An article such as that by Underwood and Underwood, dealing with the effect on a client of a pregnant therapist, also gives rise to an important concern with individual and professional values.[7] Various treatment modalities can then be considered, ranging from traditional to feminist counselling.[8]

Time should be reserved at the end of the course for a general summary and drawing together of the various themes which have arisen. More general discussions and inferences for policy may also evolve out of the experience of the course. Particularly if students have the opportunity to share the papers that have been produced underlying unities will undoubtedly emerge. Consensus as to future strategy may or may not appear, but this should not be considered a goal of the course.

Conclusion

In developing this course, various questions of approach must be resolved. For example, decisions must be made as to whether a limited number of topics are to be covered in great depth, or whether the approach should be more extensive, in the form of a survey. Is the focus to be primarily on counselling and direct practice or on broader questions of social policy? Obviously, there are no rules other than those that reflect the interests, backgrounds, and concerns of the participants.

One particular issue that must be dealt with concerns the role of men in this type of course. It is a basic assumption in this paper that all practitioners should have some understanding of the causes, nature, and implications of woman's dependent status in society. Hence, it is of critical importance that males be suitably represented in the classroom. It may be relevant to note that one of the major difficulties with the course at the University of Toronto is that males

initially participated in the course in inadequate numbers. While men form roughly thirty-three per cent of the Master of Social Work population, they comprised only twelve per cent of the course enrolment in the fall of 1976. This may have been attributable to inadequate information, with male students unaware of their importance to the course and the importance of the course to them; the calendar description has since been rewritten.

In addition, the group process and sharing of experiences among the male and female students may be an important aid to the learning experience. For example, a male student who deals with female clients in his placement may perceive problems which his classmates will help him to resolve; these difficulties can be in matters of skill, service delivery, or individual personal values. At the same time, it is recognized that a 'mixed' classroom will undoubtedly impose some limits on the sharing of personal experiences and feelings; there may not be complete and utter openness and candour among members of the class. This is undoubtedly a problem intrinsic to the structure advocated here. All that can really be said is that this particular type of course would not preclude other groups of a single sex, should they evolve naturally. On balance, the benefits of, and need for, a women's course directed towards both men and women are such as to outweigh the acknowledged drawbacks significantly.

A recent paper by Alfred Kadushin[9] discusses the problems that men are likely to encounter in social work, described as 'a women's profession'. Although the general finding of this article was that the level of problems were 'modest', it still follows that more adequate preparation within the social-work curriculum would help to reduce any practice problems that do arise.

One student stressed that if women are socialized to be passive, men are conditioned, by definition, to be aggressive. The concept of passivity is relative, and is understandable only with respect to its converse, aggressiveness. Male practitioners will encounter female clients, and if socialization is to be examined it should be considered within a comparative framework; if consciousnesses are to be raised, they should be raised for everyone.

As to the future, one student expressed the fond hope that a course of this type might ultimately self-destruct. The actualization of this wish gives rise to pleasant fantasies of a non-sexist world — but in the interim, it is the author's very strong view, that there is a clear need for a specific women's studies course in social work — directed equally towards male and female students.

1   See, for example, D. Kravetz, 'Sexism in a Woman's Profession', Social Work, vol. 21, no 6 (November 1976), pp. 421-7 and the references cited therein.
2   E.W. Freeman, 'Abortion: Beyond Rhetoric to Access', Social Work, vol. 21, no 6 (November 1976), pp. 483-7.
3   M. Schuyler, 'Battered Wives: An Emerging Social Problem', Social Work, vol. 21, no 6 (November 1976), p. 488.
4   P. Chesler, Women and Madness, New York: Doubleday, 1972.
5   I.K. Broverman, et al., 'Sex-Role Stereotypes and Clinical Judgements of Mental Health', in J.M. Bardwick, ed., Readings on the Psychology of Women, New York: Harper and Row, 1972, pp. 320-4.
6   J. Fischer, et al., 'Are Social Workers Sexists?' Social Work, vol. 21, no 6 (November 1976), pp. 428-33.
7   M.M. Underwood and E.D. Underwood, 'Clinical Observations of a Pregnant Therapist', Social Work, vol. 21, no 6 (November 1976), pp. 512-14.
8   For example, H. Levine, 'Feminist Counselling — A Look at New Possibilities', The Social Worker: '76 and Beyond (Special Issue, 1976), pp. 12-15; 'Feminist Counselling Collective, Feminist Psychotherapy', Social Policy, Sept.-Oct. 1975, pp. 54-62.
9   A. Kadushin, 'Men in a Woman's Profession', Social Work, vol. 21, no 6 (November 1976), pp. 1440-7.

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