

Eastern Illinois University
The Keep

Faculty Research and Creative Activity

Early Childhood, Elementary & Middle Level
Education

March 2007

Reconstructing Culture and Identity in Academy: Asian Female Scholar Theorizing Her Experiences

ShamAh Md-Yunus

Eastern Illinois University, smdyunus@eiu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://thekeep.eiu.edu/eemedu_fac



Part of the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Md-Yunus, ShamAh, "Reconstructing Culture and Identity in Academy: Asian Female Scholar Theorizing Her Experiences" (2007).
Faculty Research and Creative Activity. 13.
http://thekeep.eiu.edu/eemedu_fac/13

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Early Childhood, Elementary & Middle Level Education at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Research and Creative Activity by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact tabrun@eiu.edu.

2007 WOMEN'S HISTORY AND AWARENESS MONTH EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

immigrant women

The inside of this Women's Studies Newsletter is devoted to our many exciting and thought-provoking programs included in Women's History & Awareness Month 2007. Centered on the theme of **Immigrant Women**, our calendar includes our 2007 keynote speaker, **Dr. Shirley Geok-lin Lim** from University of California, Santa Barbara.



Her talk, entitled "O Pioneers: Women, Immigration and a More Perfect Union," will offer reflections and readings on immigrant and minority women in the imagined community of the United States. Framed by notions of global longings and belongings, Dr. Geok-lin Lim's address promises to provide an insightful accent to our WHAM 2007.

REPORT FROM OUR RETREAT... On Friday, January 19th, the collective met for a reflection and planning retreat. Central to the discussion were questions of where we have been, where we are, and where we envision ourselves in the future. In all, 13 members of the Women's Studies program were in attendance and we were joined by Dean, James Johnson and Associate Dean, Jeff Lynch from the College of Arts & Humanities. Thanks to the Dean's Office for providing refreshments for our gathering. In addition, Dr. Anita Shelton (Chair of History) joined us as the coordinator of a newly organized working group exploring options to better support Ethnic & Gender studies at EIU. Our afternoon together proved to generate strong dialogue and hopeful outlooks on the future of Women's Studies at EIU. See the back cover for a "snapshot" of what we discussed at our retreat.

Reconstructing Culture and Identity in Academy: Asian Female Scholar Theorizing Her Experiences

Dr. Sham'ah Md-Yunus (Early Childhood, Elementary, & Middle Level Education)

U.S. universities and colleges have become more diverse. Higher education is contested and politicized space, however, many intuitions remain uncomfortable with difference, especially with efforts to change student and faculty recruitment, curriculum, and disciplines. Asian female faculty members, in particular, have earned a place in academe, but they do not yet feel at home.

Asian female faculty experience barriers that are specific to their profession: systematic gender and racial discrimination and marginalization within the hierarchy of higher education, credibility issues as female and nonnative English-speaking professionals, difficulty in gaining tenure and promotion as minority faculty, difficulty in building collegial relationships with White and fellow ethnic colleagues and students, challenges in constructing positive cultural and professional identities, complexity of multiple roles (e.g. minority researcher, professor, mother, daughter, and wife) that Asian female faculty must play within multiple values system (e.g. collectivism vs. individualism), and challenges in developing strategies to overcome linguistic, cultural, and academic differences and thrive in academy.

These experiences of oppression are exacerbated by the same-gender politics in which some white women engage in power maneuvers to ensure centered positions. These women usually project public images such as being progressive, promoting ethics and social justice with regard to race, class and gender, endorsing postmodernism, and advocating for diversity. However, what they say they believe in does not always (or even often) match the ways they treat Asian female faculty. What is promoted here can be called (hypo) critical pedagogy - a pedagogy and educational vision that appears to be critical, but are, in fact, hypocritical because of a mismatch between the image and everyday practice.

While I am fortunate to work with colleagues who embrace a difference approach, recognizing the positive elements that nonnative English-speaking teachers bring to the profession, I continue to be constructed within the context of the native and non-native dichotomy.

I remain constructed as Other, often assigned to teach courses that my colleagues feel less inclined to teach. In spite of the good intentions underlying the 'differences' discourse, I am aware that the legitimacy and authority that I have negotiated within the existing discourse at my workplace prescribes only limited roles for me to play.

Diversity is of compelling interest to excellence in higher education. A diverse academy is critical for creating a culturally pluralistic learning and working environment. Asian female faculty contribute new and different theoretical perspectives, knowledge, research interests, curriculum, and ways of being, thinking, and doing in higher education. We must always remember that notions of competency and authority are culturally based and socially constructed. If higher education intuitions are to be agents of social change, they must engage in a cultural transformation of their climates, structures, and everyday practices to provide the kind of welcome, support, and integration at all levels.

While I am fortunate to work with colleagues who embrace a difference approach, recognizing the positive elements that nonnative English-speaking teachers bring to the profession, I continue to be constructed within the context of the native and non-native dichotomy.

Snapshot of the Women's Studies Retreat

Strengths & Assets

- ◆ Dedicated faculty
- ◆ Diverse – across and beyond EIU
- ◆ Allows for involvement of (& attracts involvement of) folks beyond the university (e.g., living history involves community and is a community event).
- ◆ Minor Program
- ◆ Self-motivated core of students
- ◆ Faculty & Program accessible to students
- ◆ Internships designed to engage students in the community
- ◆ Connection with SACIS and HOPE – within the parameters of the academic goals of the program
- ◆ Global perspective
- ◆ Collective philosophy – flat structure. Collective/collaborative decision making. Equality among all members
- ◆ Gender & Popcorn Film Series
- ◆ WHAM

Weaknesses & Threats

- ◆ Staffing – Need full-time faculty line to teach WST course (Gen Ed), Permanent Support Staff, Resources, Tenure-Track Coordinator
- ◆ University-wide academic support (Want more representation from other Colleges).
- ◆ Space – Need permanent space, more accessible location, and more comfortable space.
- ◆ Outreach – Need more community involvement (within the aims of the academic program).
- ◆ Need to better include and support staff at EIU.
- ◆ Need more resources/support for students in minor & beyond (e.g., conference support, student research, developing more internships).
- ◆ Questions of inclusiveness of the program – How to include wider range of people in the program and foster unity.
- ◆ Challenges of inter-departmental coordination of teaching release time to cover WST courses.

Vision & Goals

- ◆ Strengthen interdisciplinarity of the program.
- ◆ Increased connections/programming visibility with broader community.
- ◆ Increased inclusivity of the program (e.g., ongoing commitment to transparent leadership, communication, and access to information).
- ◆ Envisioning our resources to fulfill the mission.
- ◆ Increase service-learning initiatives & Increase relationship between academics and advocacy.
- ◆ Continue to strengthen curriculum of minor, explore a graduate certificate.

Urgent Needs

- ◆ Increase communication and outreach to membership – Increase membership and reach out to those who have fallen away from the Program.
- ◆ Increase support from other colleges on campus. Seek support from colleges other than the College of Arts & Humanities and recruit more minors from beyond the College of A&H.
- ◆ Dedicated lines to cover courses (especially WST 2309) and permanent support staffing of Women's Resource Center and Program.

Newsletter Editorial Staff: Suzanne Enck-Wanzer (Communication Studies) Terri Fredrick (English) Penka Skachkova (Women's Studies)



Women's Studies Program
Eastern Illinois University
600 Lincoln Avenue
Charleston, IL 61920-3099
 Account # 121C10