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An Experimental Study of the Influence of Woman's Studies Courses in College on the Values of Female College Students

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Abstract

Women's studies/gender studies courses, aiming to foster proper gender values and healthy personalities among college students with theoretical achievements of interdisciplinary gender researches, to advocate their harmonious and comprehensive development both physically and mentally, play a unique role in college curriculum teaching along with many other subjects. Selecting from women's studies courses taught in college, this article discusses whether and how women's studies course influence the values of female college students, major influential factors in course teaching, etc, based on the influence of women's studies courses on value building of female college students. Research statistics indicate as following: (a) Female college students who have taken courses on women's studies gain an advantage over those who have not in terms of value levels and subentries (vocational/ aesthetic /marital values) in the fixed-group comparison experiment; (b) Courses on women's studies exert a favorably continuity in influence on the values of female college students, and long term effect is better than the short term; (c) "Students' attitude towards the courses" and "degree of class participation" are the two major influential factors in women's studies course in light of the influence on the values of female college students. Course teaching

of women's studies effectively improves the values of female college students.

Key words: Women's studies; Values; Experimental study

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INTRODUCTION

Women's studies courses are, fundamentally speaking, class focusing on feminist researches and education. In other words, researches and education are proceeding centered in women's experience and knowledge, which are ignored by male-centered researches and education. An instrumental definition is "feminist education gives attention to what is being taught—feminist academic researches and the process of imparting knowledge—feminist pedagogy" (Schniedewind, 1987; Husen & Postlethwaite, 2011). Women's studies courses are defined by some Chinese scholars as courses on female issues (Cai, 2005). Female education, especially education concerning people's mind, morals, values, spirit, beliefs etc, imposes a significant influence on establishing proper values for the young (Huang, et al., 1994). College courses on women's studies are designed to foster the idea of gender equality and self-independent personalities, so as to advocate harmonious development for both sexes. This article, studied from an empirical point of view, analyzes the effects of women's studies courses on the values of female college students, in an attempt to verify the hypothesis that course teaching of women's studies courses could effectively improve the values of female college students.

1. RESEARCH MEHTODS

Experimental research: The fixed-group comparison design (also called as static-group or whole-group comparison design) is applied, and response effects of after tests are compared between two groups (the experimental group and the control group) to further understand the influence of women's studies courses on the values of modern female college students.

Respondents: 820 questionnaires are handed out among female students in two colleges in Chongqing, 779 of which are retrieved; 372 questionnaires of students who have taken courses on women's studies in Southwest University and Chongqing Medical University are sorted in the experimental group and 407 of those who have not in the control group. Subjects range from 17 to 30 years old, and the average age (M/SD) is 20.34/1.503.

Procedures: (a) Group tests are conducted on the female students of experimental group and control group with self-designed *Questionnaires on Values of Female College Students* and *Questionnaires on Women's Studies Courses*. (b) Test schedule: in consideration of different curriculum setting of women's studies courses in two universities, the test in Southwest University is conducted in October 2012 and the test in Chongqing Medical University in March 2013, to reduce experimental errors, and both tests rely on individual respondents in order to collect first-hand data. Students take the tests in extracurricular time so as not to disturb their daily learning. All groups are tested simultaneously in a total time of 10 to 15 minutes.

Statistical processing tools: statistical package SPSS13.0 for windows is applied in data analysis and processing.

2. RESULT ANALYSIS

2.1 Multi-Dimensional Comparison Between Values of Female College Students Take Courses on Women's Studies and Those Does Not

Table 1
A Contrast of Vocational Values Between Female College Students Taking Courses on Women's Studies and Those Not Taking Courses (N=779)

Basic information	Testing results				t	
	The experimental group		The control group			
	M	SD	M	SD		
An only child	Yes	34.06	2.84	33.26	3.05	2.462*
	No	33.52	3.00	32.58	2.86	3.393**
Major	Arts	34.24	2.90	32.31	3.03	4.251***
	Medicine	33.68	2.92	32.65	2.59	3.260**
Degree	Bachelor	33.78	2.93	32.84	2.91	4.399***
Grade	The second year	33.83	3.17	32.98	3.07	2.600*
	The fourth year	34.28	2.57	32.22	2.68	4.258***
Student source	Town	34.18	3.28	32.33	2.99	4.376***
Professional values		33.77	2.94	32.84	2.95	4.412***

The objects of multi-dimensional comparison between values of female college students refer to the secondary-dimension total points cumulated from the third-dimension points in value testing of female college students; each of the three secondary-dimensions, namely vocational values, aesthetic values, and marital values, contains 2 or 3 sub-dimensions. For instance, vocational values include vocational purpose, vocational attitude, vocational approach and vocational means; aesthetic values include aesthetic purpose, aesthetic attitude and aesthetic means; marital values include the purpose, attitude, approach and means of marital. Three secondary-dimensions of values female college students will be examined hereinafter:

From inspection result summary Table 1 of independent sample *T*, it is observed that vocational values in the experimental group of female college students differ markedly from those in the control group ($P<.001$). Among the rest, the vocational values of female undergraduates from towns majoring in arts in senior classes are strikingly different between the experimental group and the control group ($P<.001$). In the meantime, significant differences in vocational values are found between the two groups of sophomore girls who are the single child in family and studying in medical classes ($P<.01$, $P<.05$). These facts suggest that learning women's studies courses has the greatest impact on the female undergraduates from towns majoring in arts in senior classes, and it is not difficult to comprehend that dramatic differences in vocational values are found between these female students, on account of the particularity in vocational values shaped by their social background, growing experiences and knowledge bases, and imminent occupation choosing and employment issues they are facing with. The vocational values of female college students who have attended courses on women's studies are graded higher than those who have not.

Remarkable difference is presented in the aesthetic values of female college students in the experimental group and the control group ($P<.001$), which shows in Table 2.

Table 2
A Contrast of Aesthetical Values Between Female College Students Taking Courses on Women’s Studies and Those Not Taking Courses (N=779)

Basic information		Testing results				<i>t</i>
		The experimental group		The control group		
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
An only child	Yes	30.35	2.73	29.60	2.56	2.563*
	No	31.10	2.29	29.99	2.93	4.395***
Major	Science	31.02	2.34	29.65	2.82	2.849**
	Arts	30.86	2.56	29.46	3.27	3.034**
	Sports	28.25	2.36	31.35	2.18	- 2.529*
	Medicine	30.76	2.56	29.97	2.43	2.825**
Degree	Bachelor	30.77	2.52	29.78	2.65	5.229***
	The second year	30.91	2.39	29.80	3.15	3.816***
Degrade	The third year	30.69	2.62	30.02	2.36	2.225*
	The fourth year	30.42	2.74	29.40	2.75	2.018*
Student source	City	30.38	2.76	29.70	2.90	2.037*
	Town	31.08	2.43	29.64	2.67	4.668***
Professional values		30.76	2.52	29.84	2.80	4.764***

Thereinto, remarkable differences are revealed in terms of the aesthetic values of sophomore undergraduates from rural areas with siblings in the family between the experimental group and the control group. Judged by average points in the aesthetic values, female college students in the experimental group score over 30.7 in average; students in the control group score around 29, all below those in the experimental group. Moreover, major differences have also been found in the aesthetic values among single-child students from urban cities in various majors and grades ($P<.01$, $P<.05$). However, the average scores of female college students majoring in PE are higher in the control group than that of those in the experimental group, displaying a notable discrepancy. These facts indicate the phenomenon that, in specific domain, students who have not taken any courses on women’s studies surpass those who have relevant courses

in aesthetic values, which may result from the influence of multiple factors including the content of women’s studies courses and the individual factors such as physiological status, psychological status and pre-existing aesthetic ideas.

Statistics in Table 3 shows that, female college students in the experimental group present average scores over 48 points in terms of marital values, while students in the control group under 47.5 points, all below those in the experimental group. Except for the marked discrepancy between two groups of senior students ($P<.05$), disparities in marital values have reached a stunning level comparing the experimental group and control group ($P<.001$). This shows a consistency in the statistical significance of differences in marital values between the two groups with students’ origins, sibling relations and majors.

Table 3
A Contrast of Marital Values Between Female College Students Taking Courses on Women's Studies and Those Not Taking Courses (N=779)

Basic information		Testing results				t
		The experimental group		The control group		
		M	SD	M	SD	
An only child	Yes	48.92	5.06	45.50	4.23	6.565***
	No	50.05	4.11	46.99	4.66	7.313***
Major	Science	49.66	4.28	47.42	4.44	2.839***
	Arts	50.59	4.39	45.86	4.83	6.650***
	Medicine	49.27	4.73	46.11	4.27	6.182***
Degree	Bachelor	49.55	4.59	46.65	4.41	8.776***
Degrade	The second year	49.77	4.70	45.80	5.14	7.762***
	The third year	49.46	4.58	47.03	3.92	4.728***
	The fourth year	48.92	4.33	47.40	3.67	2.055*
Student source	City	48.80	4.80	45.36	4.37	6.324***
	Town	50.42	4.35	46.76	4.59	6.069***
	Rural area	49.60	4.49	47.25	4.53	4.304***
Marital values		49.53	4.60	46.43	4.56	9.448***

2.2 Stepwise Analysis on the Influence of Women's Studies on the Values Female College Students

To further discuss the influence of women's studies courses, their effects, students' attitude towards the courses, methods of class teaching and degree

of class participation on values of female college students, stepwise analysis is conducted on the basis of experimental research, taking women's studies courses and their multi-dimensions as independent variables. (Results are shown in Table 4)

Table 4
Abstract of the Stepwise Regression Analysis of Women's Studies on Female College Students

Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²
A	(Constant)	100.005	6.851		44.346	.000			
	Courses on women's studies	.659	2.255	.383	2.393	.000	.292	.086	.079
B	(Constant)	103.269	1.794		57.562	.000			
	Attitude towards the courses	.830	.161	.233	5.142	.000	.272	.074	.072
C	(Constant)	99.931	2.244		44.530	.000			
	Degree of class participation	.627	.255	.111	2.455	.014	.291	.085	.078

Stepwise analysis shows as follows: women's studies courses (Beta=0.246) come into the stepwise formula and produce a prominent stepwise effect on influencing the values of female college students, R²=.061; furthermore, two dimension of women's studies courses, "students' attitude towards the courses" (Beta=0.233) and "degree of class participation" (Beta=0.111), come into the stepwise formula and produce a prominent stepwise effect on improving the values of female college students, R²=.085. The result, on one hand, suggests that women's studies courses do have an influence on the values of female college students; on the other hand, it indicates the two

factors, "students' attitude towards the courses" and "degree of class participation", have the greatest impact on the values of female college students.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 Courses on Women's Studies Exert Positive and Lasting Impact on the Values of Female College Students

Concerning the scope of impact, long term effect is better than the short term.

Results of pre-post testing of a single group: Women's studies courses have distinct impact on improving the values of female college students. On the one hand, the courses on women's studies motivates their "thirst for knowledge", the most realistic and most active part of learning motivation. More importantly, content of the course can impress learners to some extent. If students have no interest in a course, no matter how good the course is and how important it is, it is hard for them to attain teaching objectives let alone the durability of teaching efficiency. As some respondents pointed out in the interview, certain chapter, class, or even teacher's words could leave profound impression on them and generate epiphany. On the other hand, it takes time for students to digest knowledge and concepts embodied in women's studies. During adolescence spanning from immaturity to maturity, values are developing and showing temporary, phased and autonomous characteristics in various aspects (Huang Xiting, Zhang Jinfu). In the meantime, concerning impact of women's studies on female college students, its durability and effectiveness involving internal and external environmental factors, are comprehensively affected by physiological and psychological issues during the development of adolescents' values, courses, society, etc..

3.2 Analysis of Merits and Demerits of This Experiment (the Fixed-Group Comparison Design)

This experiment adopted the fixed-group comparison in non-experimental design. According to its features (Zhu, 2000, p.51), merits and demerits of Test 2 are analyzed as follows: (a) Test 2 used the control group, playing a role in controlling internal validity. First, this design can basically control historical factors, for the post impact on two groups should be the same if they are affected by variables in the processing stage. Second, the use of control group allowed limited control on factors of maturity. Last, absence of a test before the experiment allowed the control of testing validity and instrumental disturbance. (b) When it comes to shortcomings, for one thing, the choice of subjects lacked control. Peer groups could not be randomly selected and paired. It was hard to tell whether two fixed groups were peer groups or how wide their gap was. For another, the experimental errors were made by the interaction between tested choices and maturity, between choices and ways of processing.

4. MEASURES AND SUGGESTIONS

Development of a nation counts on talents, while education is the key of cultivating talents. Therefore, it is of strategic significance to develop values of young people through education. In this experiment, it has been proven effective to educate female undergraduates in righteous values by the women's studies course. This study has made following suggestions:

4.1 Enhancing Course Construction of Women's Studies and Enriching Its Content

For one thing, women's studies itself is cross-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary. Besides, universities have compiled textbooks individually, which differ a lot in terms of content and focus in various disciplines. Thus, quality of textbooks on women's studies is uneven. Therefore, colleges and universities nationwide should strengthen academic exchange, organize experts and scholars of varying fields to compile official and localized textbooks of women's studies, and seek solutions to issues like textbooks of poor quality or lecture-based textbooks. For another, concerning course orientation and content arrangement, unified textbooks should adopt socialist values as their core, take varying demands of different readers into consideration, integrate academic knowledge with popularizing content, and infuse fun into science. The principle is to provide multi-disciplinary knowledge, offer incisive insights, and integrate practice with theory (Pan & Wang, 1995). Textbooks are expected to guide female undergraduates to develop righteous and healthy values. They, for instance, may gain a correct and rational grasp of women's role, women's value and gender equality by attending the course of women's studies. The course aims to guide them to make a rational life plan, develop their self-determination capacity in the dilemma of personal development and marital issues, and cultivate a sense of self-respect, confidence, independence and self-improvement. Apart from expertise, content of textbooks should cover knowledge of romantic relationship, marriage, aesthetics, laws, rights protection, psychology, self improvement, cultural studies on gender, etc.. In the meantime, the depth and width of content should be adjusted according to different readers. In addition, textbooks may cover knowledge about training social awareness of gender, which provides consultation and assistance about daily life and employment to students in the hope of better promoting students to develop their capacity of all respects and put their subjective initiatives into full play.

4.2 Adopting Flexible and Varying Teaching Methods to Activate Students and Thus Improving Teaching Effectiveness

This study reveals that students' involvement has a large impact on the effectiveness of the women's studies course. Meanwhile, concerning the course of women's studies, this study has made a survey on forms of class organization and teaching methods. It showed that "teacher-centered cramming" accounted for 62.5%, "group discussion" 26.0%, and "simulation practice" only 1.9%. Students who found chances to speak out in class limited accounted for 3.2%. Nearly half of students were not satisfied with teaching methods used in the women's studies course. Results of this study are thought-provoking. Students should be highly activated

and involved in class so as to enable students efficiently absorb content of women's studies course and develop their values. For one thing, "one major, some minors" should be the principle for using teaching methods, namely adopting one major and dominant teaching method combined with some other methods to ensure an active but organized class. For another, current course of women's studies mainly has such forms as lecture, class discussion, group debate, feminist teaching method, participatory method, etc.. In order to have a maximum involvement of every single student, these methods are suggested: small-class teaching, encouraging students to solve problems by demonstrations, inviting students to teach some content, etc.. Teachers should come up with some innovative teaching methods according to their own characteristics of teaching. The aim is to stimulate and develop students' interest in women's studies and enhance their involvement in class. Fulfilling the aim can not only enhance teaching effectiveness but also improve individual values of undergraduates.

CONCLUSION

Course teaching of women's studies effectively improves the values of female college students. Women's studies courses in college play a unique role in curriculum teaching, fostering proper gender values and healthy personalities among college students to advocate their harmonious and comprehensive development both physically and mentally. Experimental results indicate conclusions as follows:

- a) Female college students who have taken courses on women's studies gain an advantage over

those who have not in terms of value levels and subentries (vocational/ aesthetic /marital values) in the fixed-group comparison experiment.

- b) Courses on women's studies exert a favorably continuity in influence on the values of female college students, and long term effect is better than the short term.
- c) "Students' attitude towards the courses" and "degree of class participation" is the two major influential factors in women's studies course in light of the influence on the values of female college students.

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