

Unlearning Introductions: Problematizing Pedagogies of Inclusion, Diversity, and Experience in the Gender and Women's Studies Introductory Course

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Abstract

This article interrogates the ways in which the ideas of diversity, experience, and inclusion became central to the introductory Gender and Women's Studies (GWS) course at one institution and the way that various stakeholders define and interpret these terms. After providing a short local history and analyzing current and former instructors' understandings of these concepts as they function in the GWS introductory classroom, the authors further explore these themes with two case studies: transgender inclusion and Native American feminisms.

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Résumé

Cet article s'interroge sur la manière dont les idées sur la diversité, l'expérience, et l'inclusion sont devenues centrales au cours d'introduction Études sur le genre et les femmes (EGF) dans un établissement d'enseignement et sur la manière dont les divers intervenants définissent et interprètent ces termes. Après avoir fourni un bref historique local et analysé la compréhension de ces concepts par les professeurs actuels et anciens lorsqu'ils exercent dans le cours d'introduction EGF, les auteurs

explorent ces thèmes plus avant dans le cadre de deux études de cas : l'inclusion transgenre et les féminismes autochtones.

In Spring 2013, a small group of senior Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) majors began talking with faculty about the introductory course at the State University of New York at New Paltz (SUNY New Paltz), a public comprehensive college in the U.S. Northeast.¹ While this course has long been popular on campus with students often talking about its eye-opening and life-changing power, these students experienced a disconnect between what they learned in our introductory course, "Women: Images and Realities," and subsequent upper-division courses. Some worried that important theoretical frameworks were left untouched with students who continued in the major experiencing a certain degree of "unlearning" of material or concepts from that early semester. Our program, which has a long history of working closely with students, took these concerns seriously and so we invited anyone who wished to further this conversation to do so in formal meetings as well as in other WGSS classes.

The timing was fortuitous. That same semester, WGSS faculty met to discuss a journal article authored by Toby Beauchamp and Benjamin D'Harlingue (2012) that critiqued our course text, a home-grown anthology edited by three colleagues. Not surprisingly, faculty expressed a range of reactions to, and counter-critiques of, this article. The three of us (one newly tenured, one up for tenure, and one recently hired) experienced these conversations as an opening; in sharing our own reflections and dissatisfactions with each other, we found that we held similar perspectives. As we began to talk more openly about the course, which all of us had taught, we realized we had more questions than answers.

At first, our inquiry centered on why it seemed so difficult to change the intro course. We were familiar with the challenges shared by many institutions, especially the fact that the class served two primary student populations. It functioned as our majors' gateway course at the same time that it reached a wider range of non-majors, mainly because it fulfilled our institution's general education requirement in "Diversity" (hereafter, GE-DIVR). We were also familiar with the course's unique characteristics: as a team-taught class that includes one shared lecture and multiple discussion sections with a roster of full-time and part-time instructors, any change was a team effort. The course's storied history as a collaborative endeavor stretched back to its inception, in 1974, with distinct advantages (with a

teaching team numbering between five and six instructors, we had the ability to draw on interdisciplinary expertise to keep the course going, despite changes in personnel) as well as disadvantages (despite everyone's best efforts to work together, each instructor was differently situated in the institution and, at the end of the day, the course "belonged" to no one person). From a logistical standpoint, it was far easier to make tweaks from semester to semester rather than substantial overhauls. This, plus the assumed collective commitment to our text, posed unique constraints that we didn't face in other classes.

Our initial thoughts about the whys of the course hinged mainly on our sense of the larger field and its growing pains; but as we embarked on more systematic research into the course's history, we discovered a more complicated story. This was not primarily about the move from women to gender, though it was partly that. This was also a story about structures, resources, and externally imposed constraints; about the effects of growing inequities in contemporary university settings; about the challenges and opportunities of team teaching; and most salient for this essay, about the centrality of "diversity," "inclusion," and "experience" in the field of GWS. As we conducted oral histories with former and current instructors, researched the history of GE-DIVR at our institution, reflected on comments written by students, and scoured syllabi and teaching materials since the course's inception, we realized that the different stakeholders in our course all held varying ideas about what these terms meant and why and how they should be taught.

Perhaps this should come as no surprise. The text and the course were founded on the concept of "diversity" as a project of inclusion and, ultimately, both personal and institutional transformation. In this, the course mirrored the founding moment of Women's Studies more broadly, which sought to open up new sources of knowledge and challenge the heteropatriarchal foundations of existing disciplines and academic institutions by centering the lived experiences and intellectual ideas of those who had been marginalized and excluded. The Women's Studies Program at SUNY New Paltz, established in 1972, was one of the earlier curricula created in the U.S. and carried the distinction of being the "flagship" Women's Studies major in the SUNY system. At our institution, as at many others,

the effort to center women emerged alongside the understanding that the category “woman” included many different kinds of women. The focus on race, class, and sexuality (particularly lesbian identities) was modeled in our text, first published in 1994, which from its inception was a “multicultural” anthology. Likewise, the introductory course’s team-taught structure was often explained as a model of diversity with differences between instructors (especially concerning disciplinary training) enabling the class to model a range of approaches and perspectives.

This focus on diversity, experience, and inclusion resided within a feminist commitment to changing institutions through the work of building Women’s Studies and transforming larger structures and policies. Forty years later, the context has shifted. Our own questioning of the very assumptions and structures of the introductory course—with each other as well as with our students—mirrored the self-reflexive turn in GWS more broadly, as articulated by theorists such as Claire Hemmings (2011), Robyn Wiegman (2012), and the contributors to collections such as *Rethinking Women’s and Gender Studies* (2012). Had diversity, experience, and inclusion come to mean something different in the context of the neoliberal university, which had coopted discourses of “multiculturalism” and “diversity” and was increasingly becoming a place that exacerbated social inequalities, rather than remedying them? What did these terms mean when the success of GWS posed new questions: what was possible within the context of an interdiscipline still besieged, in some contexts, while it was also part of the academic establishment and colonial project (Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 2013)? Indeed, how was our introductory course an institution with its own momentum and logic?

Finally, we were led back to reflect on our own positions as scholars with privileged positions in the larger university, yet who were also relative newcomers to the introductory course. Our teaching team includes power differentials present in the subject positions of our instructors (a mix of tenured, tenure-track, and contingent faculty across a range of seniorities) as well as in individual orientations to the introductory course and the field (as a result of different kinds and levels of academic training, disciplinary identification, and generational cohort). How, then, could we “do” the intro course in ways that were feminist and collaborative,

while also acknowledging sometimes difficult to reconcile differences when it came to conceptualizing the larger field of GWS?

In this essay, we identify and interrogate the ways in which the ideas of diversity, experience, and inclusion became central to “Women: Images and Realities” and particularly the way that various stakeholders define and interpret these terms. The article understands championing diversity (of identity and perspectives) as an early and defining goal of the field that existed alongside and eventually eclipsed initial articulations of the universality of (white, heterosexual) women’s experiences. A possible pathway to “good” feminist pedagogy emerged: incorporate as many distinct perspectives as possible in any given text or course. Concurrently, however, post-structuralism asked scholars to question the validity of these categories, problematizing simple notions of “experience” and the stable humanist subject. In many ways, tensions between these approaches still haunt feminism and the field of GWS, perhaps nowhere more so than the intro course.

Precisely because we have had so many people collaboratively involved in “Women: Images and Realities” over the last forty years, our introductory course provides a particularly rich case study in thinking through varied approaches within GWS to these concepts. In the sections that follow, we provide a short local history of our course and then analyze current and former instructors’ understandings of diversity, inclusion, and experience as they function in the GWS intro classroom. We then further explore these themes with two particular case studies, trans inclusion and Native American feminisms, to shed light on the actual and the possible.

The Introductory Course: A Local History

From its inception, our introductory course has been a team-taught large lecture with smaller discussion sections that each instructor leads. It typically enrolls between 100-150 students with each discussion section capped at 25 students. Given its organization, our course is somewhat of an oddity at our institution, more closely approximating some survey introductory courses taught at larger research institutions, except that our discussion sections are taught by the same faculty who team-teach the lecture portion instead of by graduate students. The course is a requirement for both

majors and minors in WGSS, but also enrolls other students from across the university who always outnumber WGSS majors and minors, primarily because this course satisfies the university's GE-DIVR requirement.

For many students, "Women: Images and Realities" serves as a watershed experience. A significant subset who have some interest in the interdiscipline, feminism, or other activism take the course because it speaks to them. Once enrolled, their experience in the class sometimes results in a declared major or minor in WGSS. As one graduating senior reflected in an intellectual autobiography for senior seminar, the intro course was a "pivotal moment in the shaping of my academic career."

For others, university requirements—not an existing interest—pull them to the course. Another graduate indicated that the requisite GE-DIVR course encouraged her to take "Women: Images and Realities," where she gained a "first glimpse into the world that would become my life." The class thus has the ability to engage and captivate students. It provides them an analytical framework with which to read their past and present, the personal and political, and the scholastic and social.

Without question, the course's GE-DIVR designation bolsters its numbers. Our institution first adopted a GE plan for the academic year 1983-1984 and placed the Women's Studies introductory course in the "Studies in Society and Human Organization" category. Roughly ten years later, a revision of the plan transferred the class to the newly formed category of "GE Cultural Diversity." Program documents indicate that this move was initiated by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Faculty Senate with Women's Studies Program support. A longtime faculty member and program coordinator recalled specifically that the impetus for change came from outside of the program: it was the college's faculty senate who believed the introductory course taught diversity. Senators placed the introductory course in the GE-DIVR category not because it focused on race, class, and ethnicity (which it did), but because it was about women. Thus, at the time, the subject "women" seemingly rendered the class culturally diverse. The program neither fought nor championed this decision. Revealing that perceptions of diversity within the program exceeded the university's, the Women's Studies coordinator concurred in a letter to the curriculum committee

that, although the program itself had not lobbied for the diversity designation, it could support it as "the perspectives of different groups of women are presented in this course enabling students to understand the intersection of race, class, ethnicity and gender in women's lives" (Letter from Women's Studies Program to Curriculum Committee, April 14, 1993).

Concurrent with the transition to GE-DIVR, the introductory course underwent a second significant change. After roughly twenty years of assigning course packs, fiction, and other readings, three program faculty members published a Women's Studies intro text, titled after the course, *Women: Images and Realities*. First published in 1994, some of its original editors noted that the impetus for the book was a desire to address what they perceived as a real need in the field: an accessible, comprehensive anthology that addressed multiculturalism and included as many important issues and as many different women's voices as possible. Then, as now, the text included a range of kinds of writing, from creative pieces to analytical essays, both in their entirety as well as excerpts. According to one of the text's original editors, "things have improved, but when it first came out it was definitely the most multicultural text that was out there." Estimates of book sales support that the book filled a needed gap. The first edition of the text sold roughly 40,000 copies. The second edition sold an estimated 30,000 copies with all subsequent editions (third, fourth, and fifth) selling approximately 20,000.²

In sum, our intro course is both anomalous and familiar. Some factors differentiate this class from others such as its team-taught structure with discussion sections absent TAs. Yet, many more elements substantiate the course as quite customary; for example, its longevity and diversity designation put it in conversation with other such programs in North America. Moreover, both the course and text are premised on a pedagogy of inclusion and diversity, where exposure to a broad range of experiential knowledge is key. In the next section, we look more closely at what, exactly, this means for the people who teach it.

Pedagogies of Diversity, Inclusion, and Experience

Although our introductory course satisfies the GE-DIVR requirement, no current or former instructors saw the university mandate to "teach diversity" as a fundamental influence in terms of how they ad-

dress diversity-related issues in the course. However, instructors who were at SUNY New Paltz at the time recalled that the switch to the GE-DIVR designation *did* change the course: class sizes increased with more students enrolling to satisfy general education requirements instead of being drawn to the course because of interest in the topic. Instructors at the time welcomed these changes, primarily because the message of the course would reach more students, especially students who might not otherwise self-select into a “feminist course.” Over time, however, as more and more courses were included in the GE-DIVR category, some instructors were concerned that the composition of the class had changed because students began selecting GE-DIVR courses that either matched their own identities or made them feel most comfortable. For example, one former instructor worried that white students avoided courses focusing on race and/or communities of color and another commented that the intro classroom became whiter over time.

Despite these shifts, diversity remained a very salient—even a central—category, both in the course itself and for many instructors who have taught it. The *Women: Images and Realities* text is premised largely on a logic of “inclusion,” where representing as many different social groups of women as possible is a key driver of the choice of material. Instructors who taught at the time the course received its GE-DIVR designation recalled that changes were not made because the course was already premised on this model of “inclusion.” Nothing that our course included the experiences and perspectives of many different groups of women (instead of simply “women” per the GE-DIVR requirement), one longtime adjunct laughingly noted that “diversity is what we do.” As another faculty member and *Women: Images and Realities* editor recalled, “we’ve always been inclusive,” referring to the way the course is built around the inclusion of a diverse array of women.

Our conversations with fellow instructors revealed a range of answers to the question of what it means to “teach diversity.” Some conceptualized diversity as a project of inclusion, where representing the experiences and perspectives of as many different kinds of women as possible is at the heart of the pedagogical mission of GWS. This understanding—to redress the exclusions of white heteropatriarchal knowledge formation and transmission—is in keeping with the historical

mission of GWS. As well, several instructors expressed the need to teach diverse experiences and perspectives so that they reflect students’ own experiences and social locations. This was sometimes talked about as a strategy to get students to relate to the material and course as an end goal and sometimes talked about as a tactic to encourage students to develop a feminist political consciousness (whether that be to “identify as feminists” or to “become critical thinkers”). In both of these overlapping modes (making the course “relatable” to students; sparking feminist political consciousness), inclusion and diversity dovetail with another key and often-expressed tactic: a focus on “experience.”

Perhaps like other GWS introductory classes, our course meets the goals of inclusion and diversity primarily through first-person experiences. Almost half (47 percent) of the *Women: Images and Realities* anthology is comprised of narrative-based pieces (predominantly first-person stories, plus poetry, fiction, and narrative journalism), while slightly more than half (53 percent) are argument-based (a mix of journalism, academic writing, manifestos, and white papers), though some pieces in the latter category (slightly more than 1/3) include an authorial “I” woven into the argument. The textual focus on first-person narrative is augmented by personal experiences shared by some instructors and students.

In our assessment, students really connect with the first-person narratives, which is not surprising. Indeed, the insight that the “personal is political” was a central strategy of the second-wave feminist movement in the U.S., one that informed consciousness-raising groups and, when GWS was founded, many feminist classrooms as well. In many ways, the third-wave (and beyond) continued to support personal and narrative feminist analyses, while broadening the scope of who might fit under the umbrella of feminist. These can be effective strategies. They create space for the articulation of counter-narratives and counter-knowledges and provide one of the major theoretical underpinnings of our course text (“Images and Realities”): “realities” are aligned with experience and “images” with hegemonic myths and narratives.

Despite the ways in which this framework can be critiqued as potentially simplistic (reducing “realities” to “experiences”; foreclosing discussions about the ways in which “reality” is constructed), our conversations

with instructors highlighted the positive dimensions of this focus: it helps students relate to the course; it allows students to see their own experiences in newly politicized ways; it invites students to understand the experiences of groups that are different from them; it asks students to draw links between themselves and others, including the students in the classroom; and, finally, it pushes students to situate their own and others' experiences within the context of broader systems of inequality, allowing them to interpret experiences in terms of structural-level forms of privilege and oppression. It is thus the inclusion of diverse experiential knowledges that allows students to recognize themselves in course materials, to learn about groups they may not have been exposed to, and, ideally, to interpret individual experiences in structural terms that help them understand, and ultimately challenge, forms of inequality.

An experiential focus also fits for some with a general skepticism about making the course too "theoretical." This was expressed as especially particular to the introductory course, where it's important not to "scare students off." Opinions were divided on this topic with some instructors wary of incorporating difficult theory in an introductory course (and, in some cases, more broadly). One former instructor noted the centrality of the "consciousness-raising model" to the course and another noted the singularity of the intro course: unlike other college classes, it "draws in [students] without having them say this is just like my other classes in terms of being overly theoretical."

By contrast, other instructors were critical of the course's reliance on first-person experience and viewed the "lack of theory" as a "problem." While additional theoretical frameworks are introduced in lectures and discussion sections (which allow instructors to engage students in conversations about how first-person texts theorize), these complaints reveal some differences of opinion about the role of "experience" and "theory" in the classroom.

Rethinking Diversity, Experience, and Inclusion

Several instructors noted additional limitations of basing the course so heavily on diversity, inclusion, and experience. The notion of diversity adopted in the class is premised on identifying existing categories of difference (for example, "different kinds of women" based on race, class, sexuality, etc.) and ensuring that

there is broad representation through categorical inclusion. Yet, the impossibility of actually accomplishing such a task was signaled by several members of the teaching team. Others acknowledged this impossibility, while arguing that inclusivity must remain a primary goal of the course. For example, a longtime faculty member noted that the introductory course has a "very special place" in GWS and is thus different from other courses: we have to strive for inclusivity because it is the key to individual and collective empowerment in the intro course. As she noted, "It's impossible and we have to try. The introductory course has a special mission."

We suggest that the phrase "special mission" illuminates a particular understanding of the course and its *sui generis* nature, present at the moment of its founding, but also powerful today. It points to the uneasy relationship between the founders of Women's Studies—at our institution and more broadly—and the narrow confines of individual academic disciplines and academia. Women's Studies was supposed to change the academy and provide students with an opportunity to do what they did not do in other courses: reflect on their own experience, participate as equals in the process of creating knowledge, and learn how to work for social change. The core elements of the intro course (consciousness-raising, team-teaching, interdisciplinarity) were all ways in which the course modeled and signaled its difference, its "special mission" that set it apart from college as usual. Perhaps institutional designations, such as GE-DIVR, never registered for some instructors because there were so many ways in which the course did not "fit" into existing university structures. This narrative about the course's "special" identity made possible a liberatory vision of what education could be. Forty years later, we wonder, has this story contributed to the bifurcation of such categories as "experience" versus "theory"? Has it led to the privileging of certain forms of experience over theory as a way of resisting the professionalized university and maintaining ties to feminist activism? Has it partly obscured the realities of our course's institutional setting and of the field more broadly?

A few instructors shared our concerns and questions, seeing the task of inclusion as not only impossible, but also potentially counter-productive. For example, one faculty member asked, what does the will to "be diverse" and include different voices satisfy? While the

course (along with some iterations of the field) may be premised on including experiences that have been “covered up,” this diversifying move can also be exoticizing (akin to “anthropological voyeurism”), encouraging a liberal pluralistic approach that remains individualist in its analysis, actively working against the broadly shared goal of illuminating systems of inequality. Thus, diversity and inclusion have the potential for both illuminating *and* obscuring a system-level focus on inequality.

Along with several instructors, we worry that placing such emphasis on the inclusion of “diverse experiences” unwittingly precludes the difficult work of intellectual critique and engagement. Learning to listen *is* difficult, of course, as is the act of sharing with others. Yet, when we share personal stories in the classroom today, we do so in a changed culture, one that offers to many students (though certainly not all) copious opportunities to share. Neoliberal hyper-individualism and the rise of “empowerment” feminism, without any accompanying structural critique, threaten to co-opt and depoliticize private narratives (Allen 1998; Kaber 1999; Batliwala 2007; Valenti 2014; Faludi 2014). In a globalized, virtual, and media-saturated world, the classroom provides a space where students can work on moving beyond a superficial social media “like.” We want students to move beyond themselves and to evaluate, contextualize, and think in nuanced ways about “experience.” Might more sustained attention to the structures, uses, and effects of “personal narrative” and “experience” help students ask more questions and develop more critical tools to interpret and construct meaning?

Inclusion and diversity seen through the prism of social categories and experiential knowledge can create additional tensions or shortcomings in the classroom. Different approaches to the role and prominence of categorical inclusion may mean that instructors evaluate teaching successes differently. One longtime instructor talked about her dissatisfaction with how race is taught and discussed among students in part because of the lack of a racially diverse student body in the classroom. She addressed the limits of having students “represent” their race, but also the ways in which the class was “better” when there were more African American students enrolled (here again noting the whitening of our intro course’s student composition as one unforeseen consequence of the proliferation of GE-DIVR course offerings). The focus on sharing of experiential knowledge

linked to categorical inclusion can mean that this version of “lack of inclusion” or “lack of diversity” is seen as a failure.³ Another instructor noted that the course is particularly strong concerning race because of the inclusion of reading material that provides a theoretical framework beyond simply sharing experiences, pointing students toward an analysis of structural racial inequality instead of simply different individual racialized experiences. These two approaches are not necessarily incommensurate with one another, yet these different ways of assessing the course provide insight into how a focus on particular versions of diversity and inclusion shape understandings of both what we are doing and how well we do it.

Problematic Uses of Categorical Inclusion

Ongoing discussions concerning trans inclusion in our introductory course provide a window into some of the thorny issues associated with a “pedagogy of inclusion” approach. The general focus on categorical inclusion means that the course and its contents (topics, readings, lectures, etc.) are often evaluated based on how they succeed at incorporating excluded groups. Text editors and course instructors have indicated in either formal interviews or other settings that the text and course would benefit from more trans inclusion. But what, exactly, does “more trans inclusion” mean and how might it be accomplished?

At the time of this writing, the teaching team had not yet held focused, in-depth discussions on these questions, yet the seemingly self-evident call for more trans inclusion itself may shed light on taken-for-granted assumptions underlying an “inclusion through diverse experiences” approach. Some instructors have explicitly recommended including more trans voices as a key remedy for these shortcomings, noting that “transgender omission [in the text] has been a real problem” and thus calling for “more transgender experiences.” But *how* trans voices (or the voices and analyses of *any* individual or group) are included can shape the messages that those voices convey in productive and/or counter-productive ways. Further, the degree to which “voices,” or experiential forms of knowledge, are the best teaching tools is up for analysis and debate.

Beauchamp and D’Harlingue (2012) address these kinds of questions in their analysis of some of the broad ramifications of particular approaches to trans

and related issues adopted in the GWS classroom. They base their analysis in part on a reading of the general conceptual framework of *Women: Images and Realities* alongside its inclusion of transgender-related material. The edition of the text that they review includes just one reading directly addressing trans issues (the current edition includes that same piece with no additional trans-related material).⁴ Given that the *Women: Images and Realities* text centers around the inclusion of diverse forms of experiential knowledge, it's not surprising that the chapter in question, "Courage from Necessity" (by Mr. Barb Greve), is a first-person "coming out" story of sorts, where Greve's authentically expressed gender as a trans guy who does not identify within existing sex/gender binaries serves as the narrative pay-off. This chapter is potentially instructive vis-à-vis social constructionist understandings that form a baseline for much contemporary feminist analysis; moreover, it could work to challenge simple and outmoded "sex is biology" and "gender is socially constructed" framings of social constructionist theory.⁵ Yet, when analyzed in the context of the overall text, Beauchamp and D'Harlingue conclude that the piece actually works *against* accomplishing such goals.

How, according to Beauchamp and D'Harlingue, does the inclusion of a transgender voice produce effects that undermine the productive challenge and promise contained in some of Transgender Studies' contributions to GWS thinking and teaching? In the most recent version of the *Women: Images and Realities* text (5th Edition), "Courage from Necessity" appears in the "Learning Gender" section; in the previous edition, that same piece appeared in "The Perils of Heterosexism" section. Beauchamp and D'Harlingue (2012) argue that the combination of a quasi-biological essentialist approach framing the entire text, along with the placement of this particular piece among analyses of the effects of heterosexism on lesbians and women, ultimately work together to construct transgender men "as anomalous" and transgender women as "an impossibility" (30). Ultimately, they argue that transgender inclusion here works via what they call an "exceptionalizing framework," where trans people are positioned as exceptions that ultimately render them "more constructed" than non-trans people, leaving non-trans embodiment and identity as natural and unproblematized. Instead of illustrating the ways that the sex/gender system is coer-

cive and constructed for all of us, the use of this piece in this particular way conveys that sex is constructed for some of us (trans "exceptions," for example), whereas for the rest of us (cisgender people, for example), sex simply *is*. Based on Beauchamp and D'Harlingue's interpretation of this textual framing, "inclusions" of this sort end up doing more harm than good.

While some members of our teaching team have called for more inclusion of transgender experiences, others have linked these issues more broadly to questions of how we teach sex and gender in ways that may fit more closely with the intervention Beauchamp and D'Harlingue make. Questions remain, of course, about the scope and form of materials best suited to teach such topics. One instructor noted that dissatisfaction on the part of some students and instructors with the way that sex and gender are taught (in that sex has sometimes been presented or understood as a *given* upon which gender is *built*) have been present since she's taught the course. She went on to say that the "sex/gender thing" only comes up around trans issues. While the constructedness of sex/gender may initially be most apparent to our students in terms of trans issues for a number of reasons (for example, based on the political education concerning sex and gender that students attuned to these issues may have already undergone), the challenge for us in designing pedagogical strategies is to resist reducing this issue to one of categorical inclusion; capitulating to that way of framing these issues recreates the kind of *normative center* versus *exceptional* (yet supposedly pedagogically illustrative) *outsider* that Beauchamp and D'Harlingue (along with many others) caution against reproducing. Here, the way in which we include heretofore marginalized groups may work to increase, not decrease, forms of marginalization.

Discussions of trans-related issues also illuminate tensions within the broader GWS field that may not be fully thematized for students via an "inclusion of diverse experiences" approach. For instance, in the context of discussing the contributions that a trans analysis can bring to GWS, one instructor voiced concerns over the continued political necessity of talking and teaching about "the female body" and felt constrained in her ability to do so when trying to incorporate a trans analysis in the course. Another longtime instructor bemoaned the lack of an "eliminating gender" analysis that she asserted was more apparent as a feminist political goal in the

1960s and 70s and linked this contemporary omission to trans activists' political goals. These forms of analysis—whether we agree with them or not—sit (mostly uncomfortably) in the background of simpler conversations about transgender inclusion. Yet, our students would likely benefit from being introduced to and invited to consider debates such as these that have informed the broader GWS field.

Finally, current and former intro students, too, have voiced concerns over the lack of trans inclusion or concerns over the way in which trans issues and materials have been incorporated. In terms of the text itself, some students have voiced concerns that (a) only one piece focusing on trans experience is included in the course text, and (b) that in a course purportedly centering on the experiences of “women” (which some students also flag as problematic), this lone example of trans experience concerns a trans guy. Some students thus reflect back the deep investment in experiential knowledge that has been communicated to them via the course and evaluate its “success” primarily based on the inclusiveness of the materials that make up the course. This is not surprising, given that the deep focus on diversity, inclusion, and experience means that we aren't just teaching our students about included groups, but also about the value of the very categories of diversity, inclusion, and experience themselves. Students subsequently evaluate their own learning based largely on the degree to which courses are “inclusive” or not, sometimes at the expense of other ways of evaluating “successes” and “failures.” In addition, however, some students also signal their dissatisfaction with missed opportunities for more nuanced learning about basic conceptual categories—for example, sex and gender—in the intro course's treatment of trans material, noting that they must “unlearn” or “relearn” the relationship between these conceptual categories later in their education. Thus, student interpretations of the course are not merely a recapitulation of the focus on diversity, inclusion, and experience (although they are that as well). In addition, student responses can be interpreted as a sophisticated critique of the course, where they *both* demand inclusion of a range of diverse, marginalized experiences *combined with* a robust theoretical framework that does *more than* rely on those experiences to provide students with compelling analytic tools.

Misappropriations of Diverse Indigeneity

Similar to the complications that arise when a course or text simply adds trans experience, the mere addition of Native American women's voices in the service of inclusion can do more harm than good. Many Indigenous scholars—largely writing out of Native American Studies—remain cautious about how best to include the perspectives of Native American women under the umbrella of GWS (Grande 2003; Goeman and Nez Denetale 2009; Mihesuah 2003; Smith and Kehaulani Kauanui 2008; and Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 2013). A central concern argues that GWS may consciously or not accept dominant narratives about economic, political, and physical control over land, while ignoring the realities of many Indigenous people's lives and politics (Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 2013).

Our own text, for example, offers essays and poems authored by Native American women, but it presents these works as examples of multicultural perspectives or—at best—a type of intersectionality oddly silent on citizenship. That is, the text never distinguishes these contributors as citizens of sovereign Indigenous nations within the greater boundaries of the United States. This misidentification exemplifies perfectly the misguided project of inclusion for diversity in the neoliberal university. In this instance, inclusion ultimately upholds a settler-colonial framework as it renders invisible tribal sovereignty, native citizenship in these nations, and Indigenous rights to land.

Indigenous scholars Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill (2013) argue that challenging heteropatriarchy (an established GWS objective) and decolonizing the field (a newer goal) are interrelated. In sum, they argue that the interdiscipline must “problematize settler colonialism” and move beyond a paradigm of inclusion, while its teachers and scholars must investigate their own participation in erasure and dispossession. Ideally, to include Indigenous feminisms means radically transforming messages the introductory course imparts rather than simply adding more “diverse” perspectives. The latter frequently results in tokenism and feel-good box checking. The former can yield significant reconceptualization as well as productive intellectual and emotional discomfort. The point, then, of incorporating Indigenous feminisms is not the objective of “inclusivity” in and of itself, but to learn from these epistemologies and use them as tools to deconstruct,

challenge, and better understand many things—including white heteropatriarchy.

Of course, to take on such a project requires the “unsettling” of many tacit assumptions on which our course and many others are based such as the unquestioned authority of the United States. While the text and the course itself engage in critiques of the United States—its historic decisions and present actions—neither question U.S. *legitimacy*. Thus, students learn content about Indigenous epistemologies and experiences through the framework of an untroubled U.S. validity. In this paradigm, the United States may have acted poorly or treated Native Americans badly, but its *right* to act upon sovereign nations and its citizens remains unexamined, as does the interpretation of the United States as a settler-colonial society.

Rather than engage with this conceptually unfamiliar and challenging content, our course has included the experience of Native women as exemplars of other things: environmental and reproductive justice activists, lesbians, and poets. It has focused on the experience of the individual rather than on the socio-political and structural realities of the nation and/or the many. While the text fails to put these readings in conversation with tribal sovereignty and settler colonialism, some of the Native American contributors speak directly to these issues. Yet, this presentation permits students to read these contributors and their experiences as part of a diverse United States instead of as people with more complicated and competing political allegiances and identities confronting systemic challenges. Such a reading continues to obscure the realities of settler societies and makes the possibilities and promises of such texts as tools of decolonization unlikely.

When this issue arose in some interviews, former and present instructors readily acknowledged the difference between adding more Native women to the syllabus and employing Indigenous feminisms to inform the course. Yet, in each instance, nothing immediately materialized regarding how to do so. Perhaps this is because many in the field of GWS do not know much about Indigenous peoples and nations generally, let alone Indigenous feminisms specifically. Certainly in the United States, primary, secondary, and even collegiate education remains woefully inadequate in Native American Studies. It is not surprising that intelligent, invested, and otherwise well-trained instructors would

find themselves struggling to give their students what was missing from their own schooling. Beyond the challenge of not being able to give away what one does not have, this difficult undertaking—of how better to incorporate Indigenous analytical frameworks—may rest with the *experiential* focus of the introductory course. Instructors and students alike perhaps read these materials as individual narratives with which they are profoundly unfamiliar. With clear respect for the problems inherent in “speaking for” another group, students frequently resist engagement with such authors and texts because they feel inadequately prepared to participate at the level of experience. A move away from the experience of the individual (a flawed conceptual framework from most Indigenous perspectives anyway) permits students to go beyond themselves, connect with ideas, and perhaps effect change. In such a model, the goal is less about comprehending an individual author’s experience and more about making sense of that author’s ideas and arguments. Such an approach would trouble and complicate the way the course presents (and fails to present) some materials, readings, and writers. But it would also provide a way to better understand the interdisciplinary, its objectives, and weak spots—including its participation in a colonial paradigm.

A sizeable sample of students who have studied Native American feminisms in an upper-level course were quick to ascertain the difference between exclusively learning about and absorbing content, while also learning from it. This suggests that students in the introductory course could likewise combine new content about diverse Native nations and people along with more complicated analytical frameworks that provide for the deconstruction of numerous political, social, economic, and gendered realities. They need only texts and instructors prepared to help them do so. Asking students (and instructors) to trouble white heteropatriarchy in alternative ways, and to examine previously unassailable truths, moves the course beyond a model of inclusion and provides a link to postcolonial and transnational feminist perspectives. Rather than erase or deny a United States that contains an estimated 566 federally-recognized Native nations, tribes, and villages, the introductory course could highlight this reality to better understand imperialism and colonialism. Concepts like sovereignty, citizenship, and land—which may be unfamiliar to non-Native students when think-

ing about Native Americans—might emerge more clearly in a transnational context (for example, students might readily recognize the sovereignty of Kenya, but not the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma). In these ways, linking Indigenous feminisms in the U.S. to Indigenous and postcolonial movements in the Global South can help students build a transnational feminist analysis that pays close attention to history, context, and power. Through such a lens students can interpret a transnational feminist issue, such as violence against women, with the understanding that governments should have a vested interest in protecting their citizens—a failed goal complicated by settler colonialism.

Conclusion: Problematizing Pedagogies, Unlearning Introductions

At our institution (and perhaps others), the intro course holds a “special” place for both students and faculty. Indeed, part of what makes the course so important is its reliance on identity, inclusion, diversity, and experience. Students reported feeling empowered by seeing themselves in the course and by learning about the experiences of so many unfamiliar others. Perhaps once a conscious technique to welcome students, our course has likely held too tightly to this model, trusting that our upper-level courses do the work of introducing theory, moving beyond personal experience, and troubling identity. That our interest in this topic began in part with our advanced students telling us they had to “unlearn” things from the intro course suggests as much.

Our purpose in undertaking this reflexive collaboration was not to “solve” any individual dissatisfaction with the introductory course, but rather to identify and interrogate the ideas of diversity, experience, and inclusion and to ask questions about their pedagogical value in GWS classrooms today. While we have not found easy answers, the challenge of writing about our own course has helped to highlight the tensions and differences as well as the shared goals. As we have examined the limitations of the paradigm of inclusion/diversity/experience, we have come to see the possibility of a course that simultaneously challenges categories and investigates diverse perspectives, one that reads experiential texts through theoretical frameworks that complicate them. While we initially perceived multiple barriers to change (campus-wide diversity designations;

the complexities of a team-taught course with an in-house text), we now understand these as less constraining than other factors: a collective attachment to the familiar left intact from semester to semester, buoyed up by assumptions about what our students are capable of understanding and what we can do in an introductory course. Perhaps our own stories about the course, its place in our program, and our individual roles have been in need of revisioning and we, too, can embrace “unlearning” as a tool for rethinking our introductions.⁶

Endnotes

¹ We use WGSS to refer to our program in the current moment and Women’s Studies to refer to it during earlier periods when it went by that name (we officially changed from Women’s Studies to Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies in 2013). We use Gender and Women’s Studies (GWS) to refer to the broader field not because we think this term is best, but rather to distinguish between when we are talking about our program and when we are talking about the field.

² Estimated book sales as provided by an original and present editor.

³ We note that this particular idea of the course having been “better” can be seen as coming primarily from the perspective of centering white students’ needs. It thus overlooks existing anti-racist work on all white spaces as a way of developing anti-racist consciousness and not burdening people of color with the education of whites concerning these issues.

⁴ Text editors we spoke with discussed their desires and attempts to include more transgender-related material in the most recent edition of *Women: Images and Realities*. Explanations for the continued paucity of these materials included the pressures of meeting publication deadlines; revision limits set by the publisher, both in terms of overall book length and in terms of the amount of new materials that could be included (one editor recalled that only 11 percent of the material could be “new”); the sense that available materials might be too complicated for students to understand; and the lack of any call from external reviewers for more trans-related materials.

⁵ Of course, these are not the only, or the most pressing, issues of concern for trans populations. We look at the potential of this piece to effectively teach on these issues here in order to characterize Beauchamp and D’Harlingue’s critique and to explore some of the limitations of “inclusion” and “experience”-based approaches, not to suggest that trans issues be relegated or centered on questions of the construction of sex and gender. In fact, one of the takeaways here is that teaching about the constructedness of sex and gender must implicate *all* subjects, not just normative “outliers.”

⁶ We thank our students for their contributions to this project. Particular thanks to the handful of 2013 senior seminar students who first raised this issue and to the 2014 senior seminar students who shared their intellectual autobiographies.

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