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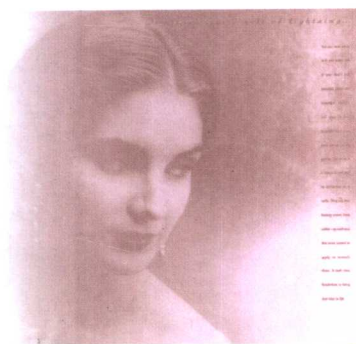


# Women's Studies in the Academy

## Origins and Impact

# 女性与学术研究

## ——起源及影响



[美] 罗宾·罗森 著  
Robyn L. Rosen



北京大学出版社  
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北京市版权局著作权合同登记图字:01-2004-2651 号

**图书在版编目(CIP)数据**

女性与学术研究:起源及影响/(美)罗森(Rosen,R. L.)著. —影印本. —北京:北京大学出版社,2004.10  
(培文书系·人文科学系列)

ISBN 7-301-07364-X

I. 女… II. 罗… III. 女性—权利—研究—教材—英文 IV. C913.68

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2004)第 033899 号

English reprint edition copyright © 2004 by **PEARSON EDUCATION ASIA LIMITED and PEKING UNIVERSITY PRESS.**

Original English language title from Proprietor's edition of the Work.

Original English language title: Women's Studies in the Academy: Origins and Impact, Robyn L. Rosen  
Copyright © 2004

ISBN: 0-13-092928-X

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Published by arrangement with the original publisher, Pearson Education, Inc., publishing as Prentice Hall, Inc.

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仅限于中华人民共和国境内(不包括中国香港、澳门特别行政区和中国台湾地区)销售发行。

书 名: 女性与学术研究:起源及影响

著作责任者: [美] Robyn L. Rosen 著

责任编辑: 戈含锋 孙明卉

标准书号: ISBN 7-301-07364-X/C·0265

出版者: 北京大学出版社

地 址: 北京市海淀区中关村北京大学校内 100871

网 址: <http://cbs.pku.edu.cn> 电子信箱: [pw@pup.pku.edu.cn](mailto:pw@pup.pku.edu.cn)

电 话: 邮购部 62752015 发行部 62750672 编辑部 58874097 58874098

印刷者: 山东新华印刷厂临沂厂

发 行 者: 北京大学出版社

经 销 者: 新华书店

850毫米×1168毫米 16开 35印张 550千字

2004年10月第1版 2004年10月第1次印刷

定 价: 52.00 元

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# Preface



This book was born out of a simple, yet ambitious goal: to create text that would introduce undergraduates to Women's Studies. It has been a labor of love. Twenty years ago I took my first undergraduate Women's Studies class at Brandeis University. This class quite literally changed the course of my life. It introduced me to the politics of knowledge, the problem of bias, and the promise of feminism to make things at least better, if not right. Declaring a minor in Women's Studies, I pursued my education with a renewed intellectual vigor that emanated from the dynamism I now saw all around me in the academy. In the academy that I was now operating debates raged, ideas were challenged, theories revised, and new questions asked. This was an intellectual ferment into which that I could sink my teeth, and it was made manifest to me through Women's Studies. The attraction of being part of this ferment led me to graduate school where I studied women's history and began to lend my own voice to the great conversations I had been introduced to as an undergraduate.

Twelve years ago I taught my first undergraduate class. It was an Introduction to Women's Studies class, and I was free to shape it in any way I saw fit. As I developed the course, I gave a lot of thought to the question: How can I introduce something as big and complex as Women's Studies in a sixteen-week semester and make it coherent, accessible, and exciting? There seemed so much to cover. I decided that the class had to accomplish two purposes: to place the development of Women's Studies in a historical perspective and to show its impact on the academy. First, I wanted my students to know where Women's Studies had come from—a long struggle for access to and then reform of higher education. This struggle for women's education emanated from the larger struggle for political and legal rights for women. Simply put, there would be no Women's Studies without social movements dedicated to women's equality. In fact, Women's Studies has been described the "academic arm" of feminism. Furthermore, as the first section of this text will show, there would be no movements dedicated to women's equality without other movements for racial and social justice. It is vital to show today's undergraduates how their present experience of the academy has been influenced by the struggles of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Specifically, cultural notions of womanhood, ethnicity, class, and race shaped both access to and the curricular contents of higher education. In other words, the historical factors that help to explain why women and minorities either weren't educated or were educated differently than white males also help to explain what the curriculum looked like in past eras and why its content has been challenged by "outsiders."

Placed in this context, the emergence of Women's Studies in the late 1960s is properly recognized as an accomplishment of great historical significance. Historicizing the development of Women's Studies encourages recognition of the rich and varied contributions made by women's movements. Furthermore, this context makes clear the integral connections between Women's Studies and other struggles for inclusion and social justice. It highlights the political nature of education—who has access to it, what it looks like, and what its purposes are—and reminds today's students that these issues still require their attention. The omission of this history does a disservice to our students. It is my hope that beginning this class and this text with this history will provide students with the perspective necessary to both appreciate and think critically about their education. I encourage all students to use their experience with Women's Studies to evaluate what and how they are taught, what purpose their education serves, and how critical perspectives enhance the dynamism and relevance of the academy.

Once the historical dimensions have been established, the next objective of this text is to show students exactly what Women's Studies has accomplished. All scholars ask and answer questions in a manner particular to their disciplinary training. For example, historians might ask about the causes and origins of events and then collect and analyze certain kinds of evidence to ascertain answers, while literary critics might ask about the themes or symbolism in a text and apply theoretical and analytical strategies to explore these questions. Feminist scholars have altered the questions scholars ask and the strategies and methods used for answering those questions. In 1995, feminist scholar Peggy McIntosh of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women encapsulated the power of Women's Studies in the following manner: "Once you've been given permission to connect the dots in a different way, you see new constellations in the sky." This astute and poetic observation captures the essence of my dedication to Women's Studies as a crucial aspect of education. Feminist scholars have literally changed the face of the curriculum: they have connected the dots in different ways and uncovered new constellations. These new constellations are represented by the wide array of readings in this text. It presents a sample of the most innovative and exciting work by feminist scholars over the past thirty years to show students exactly how Women's Studies has transformed the academy. Students will be introduced to research that has been shaped by a feminist consciousness and commitment and can decide for themselves whether this perspective improves or detracts from accuracy or a quest for the "truth."

Feminist scholarship is wide ranging. Just as feminism is not monolithic, neither do feminist academics always (or even often) agree on research agendas, methodologies, or institutional frameworks. Despite these differences, certain important themes and tensions emerge from this collection, which helps to characterize and capture the impact of Women's Studies in the academy.

First, feminist scholars have participated in lively debates regarding the value of objectivity/neutrality traditionally associated with scholarly inquiry versus the value of engagement traditionally associated with political consciousness

and activism. Feminists find themselves trying to resolve this tension or defy its existence. This text provides examples of scholars arguing that feminist perspectives make scholarship stronger and more accurate, and others who flout objectivity as a false construct perpetuated precisely to exclude women's voices.

Second, students will be introduced to the tension in feminist research between the pull of the disciplines and the notion that studying women is an intrinsically interdisciplinary project. Some of the readings reveal the aim of ridding a discipline of masculinist bias and using feminist perspectives to enhance theory building and research methods. Others decry the artificial boundaries among disciplines and search for more holistic ways to investigate and solve problems.

Third, feminist scholars have confronted the problem of what to do about sexism in the academy. They ask, "Can we work within existing frameworks to clean things up, or do we need to 'throw out the master's tools'?" This collection contains examples of feminists who find value, despite flaws in their disciplinary tradition, and seek to correct flaws while adhering to conventional criteria and standards. Others can be labeled "rejectionists" as they attempt to create bold, new theories, methods, and standards.

Fourth, many feminist scholars seek ways to recognize and include more women in their theory, research, and teaching so as not to replicate the exclusionary practices that Women's Studies was created to combat. This text presents varying approaches to grappling with this tension of inclusion/exclusion. Some scholars particularly see feminist perspectives as a window into oppression of all kinds, sensitizing them to the ways that the academy has ignored or distorted the experience of marginalized people.

This text is designed not to proselytize or promote a certain perspective, but to present the very idea of perspective to undergraduates who are new to both the academy and encountering Women's Studies and feminism for the first time. It is built on the premise that the academy is a rich and dynamic arena where people dedicated to a search for answers to profound questions engage in lively debates that require disciplined thinking and credible research. This is the academy that this book seeks to introduce to undergraduates. This is also the academy that may get lost in pursuit of major field requirements, professional training, or simply classes that emphasize acquiring information over the assessment of that information. Put simply, the most significant thing Women's Studies can do is help students to think critically. Even more fundamentally, it can serve to introduce the whole concept of critical thought as it offers examples of how scholars have mounted challenges to hegemonic concepts across the disciplines and altered the very nature of those disciplines. In this sense, the introduction to Women's Studies presented in this text is offered in service to all students pursuing any discipline.

I sincerely appreciate the suggestions from the following reviewers: Suzanne J. Cherrin, University of Delaware; Valerie Burks, Florida Atlantic University; Eden Torres, University of Minnesota; and Garlena Bauer, Otterbein College.

*Robyn L. Rosen*



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ISBN 7-301-08038-7

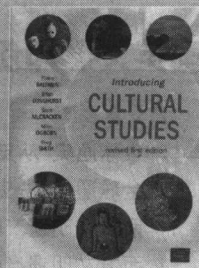
定价: 45.00 元

(16 开 468 页)

原著书号: 0-13-123283-5

(Prentice Hall 2003)

原著定价: £ 23.99



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ISBN 7-301-08050-6

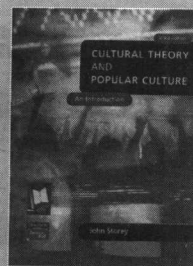
定价: 25.00 元

(16 开 240 页)

原著书号: 0-582-42363-5

(Prentice Hall 2001)

原著定价: \$38.90



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ISBN 7-301-08218-5

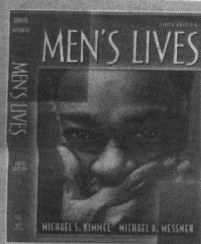
定价: 55.00 元

(16 开 590 页)

原著书号: 0-205-37902-8

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# PART I

## Historical Background

This section, divided into three parts, offers a historical perspective to help students understand the field of Women's Studies. Unlike many other disciplines that have been part of the academy for centuries, Women's Studies is a relatively recent addition. Its programmatic birth can be traced directly to the political and cultural upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s. However, the story of Women's Studies begins much earlier when the first generation of education reformers demanded access to higher education for women. The historical record shows that access to and the content of education has been shaped by cultural norms and values. Women and people of color have been stigmatized as intellectually inferior and pushed outside of the academy and toward domesticity or vocational training. Courageous individuals learned to make arguments for education that alternatively incorporated and defied these norms. In the first part, *Women and Education*, the documents show the obstacles women faced in seeking an education and how these obstacles differed among women of different races and ethnicities.

The next part, *The Politics of Education and the Birth of Women's Studies*, provides insight into the political context out of which this new field was created. Movements dedicated to racial justice, peace, free speech on college campuses, student involvement in administrative and curricular matters, and women's liberation all contributed to the development of Women's Studies. The student movement, the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement, and the women's movement shared the conviction that education was fundamental for advancing social justice. Their critiques of the educational system ranged from attacks on a biased curriculum to condemnation of institutional policies and regulations, and even incorporated a discussion of pedagogy and the power relations between teacher and student. One key accusation that ran through all these criticisms was the political nature of education. Reformers and activists insisted on evaluating the educational system on the grounds that it either contributed to or

undermined unequal power relations among whites and people of color, the poor and the rich, women and men, teachers and students. Once the politics of education was uncovered, curricular, institutional, and pedagogical changes followed. Women's Studies can be better understood as being one component of those changes.

The last part, *Visions of Women's Studies*, offers examples of how feminists have interpreted and decided to confront the politics of education. One writer advances the notion that students should seek personal empowerment through education. This line of thought has been one of the most controversial and perhaps also most popular aspects of the Women's Studies agenda. Another scholar presents a challenging argument for the existence of conceptual barriers that hinder both educational reform and gender equality. She contends that curricular transformation is needed and explains the difference between radical and liberal feminist perspectives, which will be explored thoroughly in Part Two. Students will also be introduced to a pragmatic and broad vision for curricular reform that posits the importance of faculty development and reminds us of the full meaning of inclusiveness.

# Women and Education: A Historical Perspective



This section contains both primary documents and secondary sources that shed light on the historical development of Women's Studies in the United States. We begin with Florence Howe's "Feminism and the Education of Women" to provide an introduction to the connections between the history of women's struggle for education and the emergence of Women's Studies in the late 1960s. She shows that notions of womanhood shaped the kind of education women received throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries; education reformers had to grapple with these cultural norms in designing their schools and curriculums. A document by education reformer Catharine Beecher illustrates this dynamic. The next three documents complicate this history by drawing attention to the ways that ethnicity and race compounded gender conventions to further frame the parameters of education in the nineteenth century. Elizabeth Ihle provides an overview of black women's education after emancipation. She shows that African-American women faced some of the same obstacles to education as white women, but also many others that were particular to their race. Anna Julia Cooper's speech from 1893 offers an example of an African-American woman presenting a cogent argument for women's education in the face of rampant racism in American culture. Next, in Devon A. Mihesuah's examination of a seminary for Native American girls, we see the ways that race, class, and color add new dimensions to Howe's three stages.

## Critical Thinking Questions

1. Do you agree with Howe's characterization of the curriculum as "male-centered"? What might account for this bias, and what are the justifications for and problems associated with it?
2. Howe claims that the ideology behind the first phases of women's fight for education still exists today. To what extent do you agree with this? What evidence exists to support this claim?



3. What is Beecher trying to prove about women in this excerpt? To what extent do her ideas sound conservative and to what extent radical in the context of the time period?
4. Compare the different perspectives of white southerners, white northerners, and African-Americans on educating black women after emancipation.
5. Based on the Beecher and Cooper documents, how did cultural attitudes and norms shape the kinds of arguments women made for educational access?
6. What conclusions can be drawn about perceptions of gender, class, and race among students at the Cherokee Female Seminary from their own writings in the school newspaper?
7. In what ways did African-American and Native American women's educational opportunities and experiences differ than those of white women? In what ways were they similar?

# 1

## Feminism and the Education of Women

(1975)

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Florence Howe

*In 1974–1975, I held a Ford Fellowship for the Study of Women in Society. This essay grew out of an attempt to discover, through a search in the archives of nine colleges and universities, whether curriculum could be found that was not male-centered and male-biased. Although the search for curriculum that included women's history and achievements proved nearly fruitless, the research illuminated controlling feminist assumptions behind three phases of women's education; the seminary movement that established secondary education for women; the movement that established eastern women's colleges and coeducation; and the current women's studies movement.*

*I wrote this essay during a visit to the University of Utah in the spring of 1975, when I worked in the archives following a week's teaching to faculty and administrators of an intense introductory seminar in women's studies. The program, organized by Shauna Adix, director of the Women's Resource Center, included a comfortable residence in which I was able to write. Once written, the essay became a lecture for the 1975 series organized by Judith Stiehm of the University of Southern California, and was eventually published by that university's press as part of a volume called *The Frontiers of Knowledge*.*

*In the summer of 1976, when I was invited to guest edit an issue of Boston University's *Journal of Education*, called "Toward a History of Women's Higher Education," I revised the essay. The special issue appeared in August 1977, and that version appears here.*

WHEN I WAS A STUDENT my least favorite course was history. I had not learned to ask two or three questions which might have made a difference: *why? who made that decision? and what were women doing?* Indeed, I accepted history as given—a bland series of causes and results of wars. Even revolutions were uninteresting, the Civil War without human con-

tent, and the terms of U.S. presidents undistinguishable except for Washington, Lincoln, and the current (second) Roosevelt. I am not exaggerating. Although history repeated itself several times in the course of my education in New York City's public schools and Hunter College, I went off to graduate school without the slightest interest either in U.S.

Howe, Florence. *The Myths of Coeducation*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1984. By permission of author.