



THIRD EDITION

# WOMEN'S LIVES

*Multicultural Perspectives*

Gwyn Kirk ■ Margo Okazawa-Rey



# Women's Lives

*Multicultural Perspectives*

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Gwyn Kirk

Margo Okazawa-Rey



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### WOMEN'S LIVES: MULTICULTURAL PERSPECTIVES, THIRD EDITION

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4 5 6 7 8 9 0 FGR/FGR 0 9 8 7 6 5

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Illustrators: *Joan Carol and ColorType*

Production supervisor: *Tandra Jorgensen*

The text was set in 9/11 Palatino by ColorType and printed on acid-free 45# New Era Matte by Quebecor World, Fairfield.

Cover image: © Jacob P. Halaska/Index Stock Imagery

The credits for this book begin on page C-1, a continuation of the copyright page.

### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kirk, Gwyn.

Women's lives : multicultural perspectives / Gwyn Kirk, Margo Okazawa-Rey.—3rd ed.  
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-07-282244-9

1. Women—United States—Social conditions. 2. Women—United States—Economic conditions. 3. Feminism—United States. I. Okazawa-Rey, Margo. II. Title.

HQ1421.K573 2003

305.42'0973—dc21

2003046364

*To those who connect us to the past,  
our mothers,  
who birthed us, raised us,  
taught us, inspired us, and took no nonsense from us  
Edwina Davies, Kazuko Okazawa, Willa Mae Wells  
and to those who connect us to the future  
Charlotte Elizabeth Andrews-Briscoe  
Gabrielle Raya Clancy-Humphrey  
Jesse Simon Cool  
Akani Kazuo Ai-Lee James  
Ayize Kimani Ming Lee James  
Hansoo Lim  
Uma Talpade Mohanty  
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Aya Sato Venet*

# Preface

An introductory course is perhaps the most challenging women's studies course to conceptualize and teach. Depending on their overall goals for the course, instructors must make difficult choices about what to include and what to leave out. Students come into the course for a variety of reasons and with a range of expectations and prior knowledge, and most will not major in women's studies. The course may fulfill a distribution requirement for them, or it may be a way of taking one women's studies course during their undergraduate education out of a personal interest to broaden their knowledge of women's lives. For women's studies majors, the course plays a very different role, offering a foundation for their area of study.

Several factors related to the wider university setting and societal context also shape women's studies. Women's studies programs continue to build their reputations in terms of academic rigor and scholarly standards. Nowadays there is increasing awareness of the difficulties of what it means for mainly White instructors to teach about the broad diversity of women's experiences in the United States. Outside the academy, a range of economic changes and government policies have made many women's lives more difficult in the United States—a loss of factory and office work as jobs continue to be moved overseas or become automated; government failure to introduce a health care system that will benefit everyone or to introduce an adequate system of child care; cuts in welfare programs; greater restriction of government support to immigrants and their families; and a dramatic increase in the number of women now incarcerated compared with fifteen years ago.

This text started out as two separate readers that we used in our classes at Antioch College (Gwyn Kirk) and San Francisco State University (Margo Okazawa-

Rey) from 1993 to 1995. Serendipitously, as it seemed at the time, we were introduced to each other by a mutual friend. We talked about our teaching and discovered many similarities in approach despite our very different institutional settings. We decided to take what we thought were the best parts of our readers and combine them into a book that would work for an introductory course.

## What We Want in an Introductory Women's Studies Book

Several key issues concern us as teachers. We want to present a broad range of women's experiences to our students in terms of class, race, culture, nation, disability, age, and sexual orientation. We assume that hierarchies based on these factors create systems of disadvantage as well as systems of privilege and that women's multiple positions along these dimensions shape our life experiences in important and unique ways. Although the national discourse on race, for example, continues to be presented in Black/White terms, we want teaching materials that do justice to the diversity and complexity of race and ethnicity in this country. We also want materials that address the location of the United States in the global economic and political system. Students need to understand the economic forces that affect the availability of jobs in this country and elsewhere. They also need to understand the significance of U.S. dominance abroad in terms of language and popular culture, the power of the dollar and U.S.-based corporations, and the prevalence of the U.S. military.

In our introductory courses, we both included some discussion of theory because a basic understanding

of various theoretical frameworks is a powerful tool not only for women's studies courses but also for other courses students take. Another shared concern we have is women's activism. As women's studies has become more established and professionalized, it has tended to grow away from its roots in the women's liberation movement, a trend that troubles us. As we talked about our own lives, it was clear that we both value our involvements in political movements. This activism teaches us a great deal and provides us with vital communities of like-minded people. Currently, there are many women's activist and advocacy projects across the country, but many students do not know about them. In our teaching, we make it a point to include examples of women's activism and urge students to think of themselves as people who can make a difference in their own lives and in the world around them. Much of the information that students learn in women's studies concerning the difficulties and oppression of women's lives can be discouraging. Knowing about women's activism can be empowering, even in the face of daunting realities. This knowledge reinforces the idea that current inequalities and problems are not fixed but have the potential to be changed.

### Linking Individual Experiences to National and International Trends and Issues

We are both trained in sociology. We have noticed that students coming into our classes are much more familiar with psychological explanations for behavior and experience than they are with structural explanations. They invariably enjoy first-person accounts of women's experiences, but a series of stories, even wonderfully insightful stories, leaves us unsatisfied. In class, we provide a context for the various issues students study. Taking a story about a woman with cancer, for example, we add details about how many women in the United States have cancer, possible explanations for this, the effects of age, race, and class on treatment and likelihood of recovery. The overview essay for each chapter provides some broader context for the personal accounts. We've included readings that reflect the complexity of women's identities, where the authors wrote, for example, about be-

ing African American and bisexual in an integrated way. We added a section on crime and criminalization in response to the great increase in women caught up in the criminal justice system in the past fifteen years, and added a chapter on women and the environment.

### Challenges for the Twenty-First Century: Security and Sustainability

We are concerned about the challenges facing women and men in the twenty-first century: challenges regarding work and livelihood, personal and family relationships, violence on many levels, and the fragile physical environment. These issues pose major questions concerning the distribution of resources, personal and social values, and the definition of security. How is our society going to provide for its people in the years to come? What are the effects of the increasing polarization between rich and poor in the United States and between rich and poor countries of the world? Genuine security—at personal, community-wide, national, and planetary levels—is a key issue for the future, and, similarly, sustainability. These themes of security and sustainability provide a wider framework for the book.

As teachers, we are concerned with students' knowledge and understanding, and beyond that, with their aspirations, hopes, and values. One of our goals for this book is to provide a series of lenses that will help students understand their own lives and the lives of others, especially women. The second goal is that, through this understanding, they will be able to participate in some way in the creation of a secure and sustainable future.

### New to the Third Edition

In the second edition we added two new chapters, one on sexuality and another on violence against women. We paid more attention to the role of women in politics, in both feminist movements and electoral politics. And we made explicit acknowledgment of the fact that women's studies students include a growing number of men.



This third edition relies on the analyses, principles, and style of the first two editions, with the following important additions and changes:

- ◆ Updated statistics throughout, and new readings on marriage, parenting, women and work, welfare, AIDS, women and political activism, militarism, and ecofeminism
- ◆ Reference to Bush administration policies and legislation, the erosion of *Roe v. Wade*, Title IX, affirmative action policies, and the worsening economy
- ◆ Explicit attention to the role of media representations and popular culture in the creation of knowledge
- ◆ A new section at the end of each overview essay, titled “Finding Out More on the Web,” which encourages students to explore various questions on the Internet
- ◆ Photos, cartoons, and diagrams throughout
- ◆ More poetry
- ◆ A more solid pedagogical structure for each chapter
- ◆ A new comprehensive Instructor’s Resource Manual, authored by Gwyn Kirk

A number of considerations—sometimes competing and contradictory—influenced these decisions. We are committed to including established writers and lesser-known writers, and writers from a range of racial and ethnic backgrounds and with differences in ability, age, class, culture, nation of birth, and sexuality. As before, we have looked for writers who, implicitly or explicitly, integrate several levels of analysis (micro, meso, macro, and global) in their work. Teachers invariably want more theory, more history, and more research-based pieces. The students we talked with, including our own, love first-person pieces as this kind of writing helps to draw them into the more theoretical discussions. In the second edition we included more articles that give historical or theoretical accounts as a complement to the first-person writings in each chapter, recognizing that if teachers do not assign the book, students will never see it. As we searched for materials, however, we found much more theoretical work by White women than by women of color. We assume this is because there are far fewer women of color in the academy, because White women

scholars and writers have greater access to publishers, and because prevailing ideas about what theory is and what form it should take tend to exclude work by women of color. This can give the misleading impression that, aside from a few notable exceptions, women of color are not theorists. This raises the whole issue of what theory is and who can theorize, questions we take up in the first chapter. We have tried hard not to reproduce this bias in our selection, but we note this problem here to make this aspect of our process visible.

This new edition represents our best effort to balance these considerations, as we sought to provide information, analysis, and inspiration concerning the myriad daily experiences, opportunities, limitations, oppressions, hopes, joys, and satisfactions that make up U.S. women’s lives.

## Acknowledgments

Many people—especially our students, teachers, and friends—made it possible for us to complete the first edition of this book, and we listed them in detail there. We are grateful to everyone at Mayfield who so thoughtfully worked to put our manuscript between covers: Franklin Graham, our editor, whose confidence in our ideas never wavered and whose light hand on the steering wheel and clear sense of direction got us to this place; Julianna Scott Fein, production editor; the production team; and Jamie Fuller, copyeditor extraordinaire.

For the second edition, we were fortunate to have the support of Hamilton College as Jane Watson Irwin Co-Chairs in Women’s Studies (1999–2000). Women’s studies colleagues and other faculty members welcomed and supported us. Again, we recognize the Mayfield team: Serina Beauparlant, our editor; Julianna Scott Fein, production editor; the production team; and Margaret Moore, a wonderful copyeditor.

This third edition has benefited from the accumulated work, help, and support of many people who continue to sustain us. Particular thanks this time go to Sarah Wunsch and Kathy Ferguson for providing leads to new material; to Christina Leño and Shirley Royster, who wrote specifically for this edition; and for research support provided by DataCenter, an Oakland-based nonprofit, providing research

and training to grassroots social justice organizations across the country. We also appreciate the support of the Women's Leadership Institute at Mills College. We thank the feminist scholars and activists whose work we have reprinted and all those whose research and writing not only have informed our work but have shaped the field of women's studies. We appreciate the independent bookstores and small presses that keep going due to dedicated staff and loyal readers, despite the difficulties of staying afloat, especially our "local"—Modern Times in San Francisco. We also rely on other feminist publishing "institutions": *The Women's Review of Books*, *Ms.* and (until 2002) *Sojourner*, as well as scholarly journals, and WMST-L, ably "mastered" by Joan Korenman.

During our preparation of this edition, the world lost the talents and commitment of four remarkable public figures: June Jordan, a poet activist scholar who bridged community and academy with insight and grace; Yayori Matsui, a Japanese feminist who worked tirelessly to hold her government accountable for the atrocities against "comfort women" in World War II; Representative Patsy Mink, perhaps best known for her key role in getting Title IX into the 1972 Education Act; and Senator Paul Wellstone, who worked consistently for feminist, labor, and environmental issues. Their passing leaves enormous holes in the progressive landscape of this country and internationally. We are among the many people who found inspiration in the way they sought to live their lives according to their principles, values, and visions.

This is our first edition with McGraw-Hill. We greatly appreciate the encouragement, enthusiasm,

and skills of our editor, Beth Kaufman, and the work of the entire book team: Amy Shaffer, Sherith Pankratz, Katherine Bates, Karyn Morrison, Jen Mills, Jean Mailander, and April Wells-Hayes. Once again we benefited from the insights and advice of outside reviewers:

Christina G. Bobel, University of Massachusetts,  
Boston  
Piya Chatterjee, University of California,  
Riverside  
Wendy A. Ho, University of California, Davis  
Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich, The Union Institute  
and University  
Molly Kerby, Western Kentucky University  
Chana Kai Lee, University of Georgia  
Stephanie Rodriguez, Texas Women's University  
Susan Sánchez-Casal, Hamilton College  
Mab Segrest, Connecticut College

Lastly, we acknowledge the importance of our friendship, deepening over these past ten years, that provides a firm foundation for our shared understandings and our work together. We continue to be inspired by the cultural work of Sweet Honey in the Rock, a national living treasure now in their thirteenth year, whose blend of music and politics touches the head, heart, and hands, and also by the "sociological imagination"—C. Wright Mills' concept—that draws on the need for complex social analysis in order to make change.

To everyone, very many thanks.



*We have chosen each other  
and the edge of each other's battles  
the war is the same  
if we lose  
someday women's blood will congeal  
upon a dead planet  
if we win  
there is no telling  
we seek beyond history  
for a new and more possible meeting.*

—AUDRE LORDE



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