Denying Difference: The Continuing Basis for Exclusion of Race and Gender in the Curriculum

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DENYING DIFFERENCE: THE CONTINUING BASIS FOR EXCLUSION IN THE CLASSROOM

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FOR EXCLUSION IN THE CURRICULUM
by Margaret L. Andersen*

Introduction

Reflecting on her undergraduate education at Barnard, the Black feminist poet and essayist, June Jordan, has written: ...but nothing at Barnard, and no one at Barnard, ever, once, formulated, and expressed, the necessity, the political necessity, if you will, for the knowledge they required you to absorb. Precedent and tradition, after all, are not of themselves sufficient justification for anything whatever. And nobody, and not a single course of study at Barnard ever spoke to issues judged critical, or to possible commitments evaluated as urgent. More specifically, no one ever presented me with a single Black author, poet, historian, personage, or idea, for that matter. Nor was I ever assigned a single woman to study as a thinker, or writer, or poet, or life force. Nothing that I learned, here, lessened my feeling of pain, and confusion and bitterness as related to my origins: my street, my family, my friends. Nothing showed me how I might try to alter the political and economic realities underlying our Black condition in white America.(1)

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Jordan's words ask us to consider what the curriculum would look like were women, and especially women of color, central to our teaching and thought. What happens to our concepts, theories, descriptions, and methods when we center the curriculum in what I would like to call inclusive thinking? What happens to our teaching when we try to make it inclusive?

These questions are simply stated, but they are not simply answered. You will not have them answered by the time you leave this conference. But I hope that they will always be present in your mind. Answering these questions asks us to reflect on the current content of the curriculum and to think critically about the ways that knowledge is constructed, as well as how and what we and our students learn in this process.

This kind of thinking stems, of course, from the enormous growth of women's studies and Black and ethnic studies in recent years. Centers such as this one, the MSU Center for Research on Women, and the over one hundred curriculum integration projects across the country represent a new community of scholars who are working to develop an inclusive curriculum. As I travel to different campuses across the country, some of them in remote places, I am struck by the vast number of people who are working to transform to the curriculum through inclusive thinking about race, class, and gender.

One of the more stunning examples was a visit to the University of Maine in Presque Isle. Presque Isle, Maine is in the northernmost point of the state. On the day I arrived, it was
the 23rd of December and zero degrees. In this place, not only did I find faculty who were well informed by feminist scholarship across the disciplines, but I also met a woman who had driven 100 miles in this freezing weather to hear more about women. As it turns out, she was also a needleworker and one of the contributors to Judy Chicago's "Birth Project." It is reassuring to know that on campuses and places across the country, there is a vast network of scholars doing the work of integrating women and people of color to the educational curriculum. Though at times it may feel that you are alone in your home institution, be assured that you are now entering this network of colleagues.

The growth of this area of work is impressive. Women's studies alone has grown from only 200 courses nationwide in the early 1970's to over 20,000 courses and 500 programs in 1986.(2) In sociology, as I suspect is true in other disciplines, the sociology of sex and gender is now the second largest section in the American Sociological Association. Now, more colleges and universities are also requiring students to have courses on multicultural topics. These facts reflect the belief that understanding gender and race is essential to the development of educated minds.

Despite these developments, the curriculum remains centered almost exclusively in the experiences and thoughts of a few. Many educators have labelled education as an institution in crisis, and various proposals for addressing this crisis have been made--ranging from evaluating teacher competency, to increasing the number of teachers, and to developing more standardized testing of
students. These proposals are now being promoted in the context of calls for "greater competition" with foreign nations. But thinking of the problems of education in this way fundamentally misunderstands the crisis that we face—one that is based in the very deep alienation of our students from that which we ask them to study. We could add to that our own alienation from that which we sometimes teach.

In the current historical context of competition and increased vocationalism, the alienation of students only further breeds racism, sexism, and ethnocentrism (as we are seeing on many campuses across the country.) Because we do not teach our students to see themselves as connected to their learning, we do not teach them to see themselves as connected to others. In fact, as Elizabeth Minnich has suggested, becoming educated means learning about a world detached from the experience of most learners.(3)

The well-known account by Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger From Memory*, is a case in point. Rodriguez, who now holds a Ph.D. from Berkeley, describes his educational experience as involving a process of separation. As he became more educated, he detached himself from his family and his community.(4). Though he interprets this as a necessary part of becoming acculturated, we have to ask if education should require such a denial of one’s past and also one’s present. If we teach a curriculum that is centered in the experiences of an elite few, are we implicitly telling our students that to become successful one has to deny one’s self, one’s origins, and one’s culture? If so, then we have
centered the curriculum on a single and elite model of success and one that is distinctively masculine. This model of success is based in principles of detachment, individualism, competition, and denial.

Alienation from the curriculum is particularly acute for women, Black, Latino, and Asian students—and other groups whose experience has been that of exclusion, but whose cultural origins are centered in more collectivist ethics. Throughout the curriculum in higher education, a deep sense of "otherness" pervades. We require our students to learn American and European history, while the history of those cultures which most affect current world events remain optional or "extracurricular."

Music appreciation courses teach the music of courtly European society, but not the history of rock and roll which is rich in race and ethnic politics, social history, and gender and class relations. Rock and roll is also, of course, the music that our students, for the most part, have grown up with. I do not mean to imply that we should stop teaching Bach and Beethoven, but we might better teach music appreciation if we did not ask students to begin from an alienated standpoint.

Most educators do teach students that the United States is a multi-cultural society and they say that they want to prepare students to live in a multi-cultural world. Yet, we still teach a curriculum that takes the cultural and societal achievements of a few as the measuring instrument against which others are judged. We see this in the case of women’s studies and Black and ethnic studies which, in most places, remain as electives, not as
required parts of the educational process. There is an odd contradiction here. At the same time that educators say this is a multicultural world, they teach a deep sense of otherness and ask students to think as if we were all alike. Thus, while we acknowledge that there are different groups in society and different cultures in the world, at the same time, we deny it by maintaining a reference point on human culture and society that is centered on the experiences of a few.

In my own discipline, sociology (and I am sure there are parallels in other fields), this is reflected in the liberal strategy of developing education to be race and gender blind. Such a strategy defines us as liberal, claiming that we do not want to recognize people solely because of race and gender. Yet this strategy also denies the unique historical experiences that stem from race, class, and gender relations. As a result, the liberal orientation denies that excluded groups may have a unique social, political, and historical consciousness.

In the social sciences, this approach is particularly reflected in the primacy given to socialization as an explanation for gender relations. The socialization perspective does recognize differences between women and men—in fact, it usually overstates them. But, it conceptualizes gender only as something that is learned, not as a category of social relations with a political, economic, historical and social base. As a result, this perspective assumes that gender inequality is the result of "learning sex roles" and socialization. More often than not, gender inequality thus becomes conceptualized as some neutral
force "out there" and "in our minds" that has little material base.

This is such a limiting framework, and yet, one so easy to slip into, that I have come to think we should eliminate the term "socialization" from our language. It doesn't question or acknowledge men's power and its effect on women's experiences. It denies the unique historical experience of so-called others. Therefore, the dominant groups never have to listen to "others" articulate their own experience. Dominant groups can maintain their view, at the same time that they claim it is no view and has no perspective. This is the same reasoning that claims human as synonymous with male.

What happens as we take gender and race as fundamental dimensions of social organization and move beyond thinking only in terms of socialization? What happens when we move beyond simply acknowledging multicultural realities and say that in the construction of our courses, we are going to put women at the center? What happens when we start with women of color, not just stick them into a segregated section of a class? Interestingly, of course, from the vantage point of women and women of color, we are the center. The notion that we are on the margins is not always our own perception of our experience, which shows how pervasive is the notion of otherness. Do we accept the idea that we are on the margin or is it only assumed that we are?
Transforming the Curriculum

Transformation of the curriculum does not just mean admitting women and minorities to it. (I don’t like the term "minorities," but without a long list of adjectives every time I speak, I do not know what else to say). Transformation of the curriculum requires not only professional change, but personal change as well.

Johnella Butler has said that transformation of the curriculum also requires a willingness to be surprised, because you never know where change might lead. In starting, you may think you will stick women in here and there, but soon you may realize that the entire structure of your course and then the entire structure of your discipline is gone. The way you teach may also change. I have found that my teaching is more discursive, as well-organized around facts and conclusions as it used to be. That is surprising to me.

Resistance to the thoroughgoing transformations that come from putting race and gender at the center of our thought is deep. It is deep in ourselves and even deeper in those who are quite threatened by these changes. Transformation of the curriculum is not some quick action that will be complete by the time you leave here on Friday. Rather, it is an ongoing, lifelong process. As you begin to think about how your teaching and your thinking changes when you place women and people of color at the center of thought, you will embark on a long process of change--the outcome of which you cannot now predict.

Peggy McIntosh has suggested we can best begin by asking, "What is the core content of my discipline and how would it have
to change to reflect the fact that women are a majority of the world’s population?"(5) I would add that we must also ask how our disciplines have to change to reflect the fact that whites are a minority in the world’s population and that race, class, and gender stratification are fundamental to social organization—not just adjunct or separate topics, or "special topics," courses. These questions cut to the heart of what you probably cherish in your discipline.

In spite of feminists’ critical stance toward our disciplines, there is still much about our disciplines that we cherish. Transformation of the curriculum through the inclusion of race and gender asks that you not take that for granted. To begin with, as we have learned through women’s studies, thinking about women makes the boundaries between disciplines wither away, but even more fundamentally, it asks you to be critical about that in your discipline which you may take for granted. This is not an easy task—nor is it one which only we as women can do. It is an achieved stance—one that comes from asking how the disciplines have to change to become truly inclusive of us all.

For example, in history the narrative tale is an organizing principle for doing history. One writes history to tell the story. Stories tend to have beginnings, middles, and ends. But, it is very difficult, if you are telling the everyday experiences of ordinary women, to present "the story" as a dramatic tale. There may be no single moment in which all the characters come together and no episodes that define the story’s structure. Because women’s lives are episodic, it is very difficult to
organize a history course around their everyday life. Colleagues in history, even those who are quite sincere about building an inclusive curriculum, have said they have serious trouble telling the tale if they cannot organize it around heroes and big events. This has led them to ask, "When I am including women, how can I do history?"

Similarly, in literature, those working to transform the teaching of literature have sometimes concluded that they can no longer teach literature in chronological order because the chronologies themselves do not make sense when White women and women of color are at the center of the course. To give up chronology in the teaching of literature, even as a feminist, is very hard to do because it is a sacred assumption that literature develops over time, as if in a linear fashion.(6) And, in sociology, one of the cherished principles we must question is the fundamental method of reducing social life to variables. I will return to this point.

Phases of Curriculum Change

Several feminist scholars, including, but not limited to Peggy McIntosh, May Kay Tetrault, Marilyn Schuster, Susan Van Dyne, Gerda Lerner and others have identified different phases of curriculum change that are useful to us in thinking about curriculum transformation. I will use them to organize my ideas here. To think about curriculum change as an ongoing process of development is useful. There is, of course, a problem is labeling things in phases, because of our inclination to think of some of
them as more advanced than others. All of these phases are necessary and most of us probably work, when we are teaching, in all of them at some point and in some of them simultaneously. (7) These phases should not be interpreted as another judgmental scheme, but as useful for organizing our thinking.

The first phase is one with which we are all too familiar: the womanless, all-white curriculum. It is still the primary curriculum and doesn’t need much description because you all have identified it and are survivors of it. In its modern form in sociology, women are still completely left out of research samples, though there are footnotes appearing in articles in the major sociological journals which say, "In this analysis, women and blacks have been left out because they complicate the model."

In many of our disciplines, White women and people of color are still excluded but in a self-conscious fashion. Current criticisms of social history may reflect a backlash against feminism since it is feminist historians who have really transformed the work of social history. In economics, the womanless, all-white curriculum is reflected in the assumption that rational action is the basis for economic behavior and systems and that free choice motivates human beings to work and make decisions. It assumes we all have equally free choices. I will not spend any time on the womanless, all-white curriculum, as like you, I have spent so much time in it during my life that it makes me weary.

The next phase is one with which we are also familiar. This is the phase in which we try to put women and minorities in the
curriculum--women in leadership, women in history, Chicanas in history, Blacks in the civil rights movement. This is a relatively easy phase of change and it tends to be our first impulse. Gerda Lerner called it the "add women and stir" approach. It stems from our political need to find heroines in our past--to move us up, to create mobility, to rewrite our history, to recover ourselves from our lost past. Lerner called this the "women worthies" approach and it takes different forms in different disciplines. Cheryl Gilkes gave a good example today in her topic group on women and religion. She spoke of the tendency in teaching about religion to try to find women as ordained ministers, while not looking at the everyday religious actions and beliefs of women.

In sociology, most introductory textbooks now have a separate chapter on sex and gender and also a chapter on race and ethnicity. But nowhere else in the book do race and gender have much significance. In history, we try to find the famous few--Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Susan B. Anthony. In anthropology women are tolerated as a special area of study, but somehow they are seen as something less than all of society.(8)

The "women in" or "minorities in" approach is theoretically contained. The approach takes the dominant group experience as the organizing framework for the discipline and tries to stick us in. Most of you have seen your disciplines become revised up to this second phase. For example, one of the widely used American history textbooks now includes in its chapter on the Progressive Period a discussion of how the progressives saw the immigrants.(9)
This is an addition from earlier editions because at least the text points out that progressives had attitudes about the immigrants. But, the text does not point out that the "Progressive" Period was the period that had the highest rates of Black lynching. The text does not question the significance of the label--what is progressive? Moreover, the text does not ask how the immigrants saw the progressives--to me, the really transformative question. Did the immigrants even know the progressives existed? Jessie Bernard once commented that she had lived through several periods in her life and never knew they were happening. Yet, the periods in our teaching are reified--as if they are real categories of human experiences.

The "adding in" approach has also been widely used to discuss sexuality, as when gays and lesbians become put in as "alternative lifestyles," but in which heterosexuality is still taken as the dominant reference point. Barrie Thorne has described this as it occurs in courses on the family where instructors place all the "alternative lifestyles" on a panel, including gays and lesbians, single parent households, and divorced mothers--all contained on one day in class. This approach breeds tokenism and at the same time is quite self-congratulatory. It is an easier place to move to because it does not ask more fundamental questions of the discipline's concepts.

One of the ways I see such tokenism now occurring is in the overuse of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. While I hesitate to comment because it is a wonderful book, it is being treated as if it were the only good novel ever written by a Black woman. It has
become a token way of including women of color in the curriculum because it can be said to be excellent.

In this phase of adding women and minorities in, a sense of otherness is still deeply maintained. This phase clearly results in many improvements; many faculty have reported that it is in these initially token sections of the course that students become most motivated to learn. This should tell us something, but the phase is still incomplete because it is embedded in the same models of excellence and normative judgments that stem from dominant group experiences. It is in this phase in sociology and the other social sciences where race and gender become variables. Race and gender are no longer left out of research models, but they are stuck in, while the models are unchanged.

The third phase is one in which we begin to see women, Blacks, Latinos, gays, lesbians, and other traditionally excluded groups as victims. This is the victimization phase. This approach often happens tangentially or in conjunction with the second phase, because they are interrelated. In the third phase we begin to document the exclusion and discrimination against these "other" groups.

This strategy clearly yields important findings. All of you can probably think of a classic in your discipline that was revealing in this way. Women's income is not equal to that of men. Anthropologists did not observe women when they went into the field. There are numerous examples in the disciplines of pathbreaking work that by documenting bias has opened our eyes to new ideas. This phase fits nicely with the positivist-empiricist
basis of the social sciences because one can use quite fancy manipulations of data to show how pervasive discrimination is and in how many different arenas it occurs.

In this phase, sexism and racism become important topics of study. In psychology, for example, we might do research on patterns of group prejudice. Or, in education, we might examine sexist images in children's textbooks. Excluded groups in this phase become defined, however, in what Patricia Bell Scott, has called a "problems framework."(10) We become the problem. In fact, not only do we become the problem, but we also begin to look pathetic. Think about this. We have all engaged in this. I have taught like this for years and still find it difficult to change because it is revealing to show, through sociological research, that, for example, women are discriminated against and their careers are blocked. But this approach still takes the dominant group viewpoint as the reference point, by comparing us to it. "It," the dominant group, is still seen as neutral and having no stance. In fact, the built-in tendency of this phase reflects the hierarchical way it is organized. People do not typically pity themselves. You are only pitied by those who are in some hierarchical relationship to you. To see a group or person as pitiful assumes a superior stance.

There is a part of this phase which I still find necessary: to point out the facts of discrimination, but I have found in my classes that this becomes overwhelmingly depressing. At this point in my courses, I could use a whole team of counselors. About halfway into a course, the students are emotional wrecks.
They can’t take any more. They don’t want to think about the course material and resistance sets in. There is an important reason why this occurs. No one wants to be seen as a victim—even those of us who are. What this approach does is to deny the creativity and the sense of self-worth that we as victims have had to achieve in order to survive our victimhood. It is a disabling phase of the curriculum—disabling because it erodes the ability we have developed to withstand victimization.

In addition, in this third phase, the classroom dynamics are terrible. The worst comes out because students begin to compete for victim status. "Men are victims, too," students will say. Within this framework, there is no way to argue against this position because there is a certain truth to it. I often think that here students could start telling their competing stories and could have "Victim for a Day"—complete with an oppressometer to measure audience reaction! (My students never get the joke because they are too young to have watched "Queen for a Day" as children!) I have survived this phase of the curriculum through humor and celebration because, not only is counseling needed, but students need to re-construct their sense of dignity. This is a time to bring in women’s culture, music, or comedy, and to make students feel good about that which so-called victims have created.

The problems in this third phase are multiple because the approach rests on seeing women and minorities as victims and as variables. How do we move beyond this in our pedagogy and thought?
Beyond Victims and Variables

I will use sociology as an extended example here since, with the exception of psychology, it is probably the most nested within variable analysis. In 1956, the sociologist Herbert Blumer argued that "variable analysis" had become the model of research procedure in sociology. (11) He described variable analysis as the method of investigation in which human life is portrayed in terms of relationships among variables. The variables are discrete, clean-cut, and clear. But, he asked how well variable analysis was suited to the study of group life. This is a question also posed by Carol Gilligan who commented that social life simply could not be reduced to hypotheses because it was simply too complicated. (12)

In the social sciences, variable analysis is the dominant method. Blumer’s criticisms of variable analysis were predicated on the assumption (one I share) that human group life is essentially characterized by a process of interpretation. For sociologists, the very definition of social action is that it is action to which human beings give meaning. Variable analysis ignores the assumption that human beings create meaning, because the process of meaning creation cannot be measured in variables.

Since 1956 when Blumer was already worried about variable analysis in sociology, it has become even more ascendant as the primary method of the social sciences. There are a host of researchers in the social sciences who believe they are being inclusive in their teaching or research because they use gender or
race as a variable. To give an example, a colleague recently argued that there was no need for a course on racial stratification because race was already treated as a variable in other courses, so why have a special topics course? This argument fundamentally misunderstands that race is a concept—one that, at times, can be well represented by a variable, but whose meaning extends far beyond this limited treatment.

In many ways, this particular model of research is deeply antithetical to research programs and teaching programs that call for the inclusion and admission of new voices—those whose interpretations of reality have been ignored, denied, appropriated and on and on. Variable analysis presumes a single voice—the voice of the dominant group. Their experiences define what variables are significant for study, what their indicators are, and what their presumed relationships are. As Blumer pointed out, variable analysis cannot account for the process of interpretation, but even more specifically for our purposes, variable analysis cannot account for the multiple interpretations of reality that we must begin to see if we are to include those who have previously been excluded. It too easily assumes that there is a single interpretation of reality.

As variable analysis has become more sophisticated in the social sciences, it has become particularly insidious because it is the way careers are made and broken. It is no accident that women and minorities are less likely to do their research in this fashion. We know that more voices need inclusion in the research projects of the disciplines, but in variable analysis we rarely
ask who defines the variables, what they mean, where they come from, and why there is such consensus over what the important variables are in the discipline. Stacey and Thorne have pointed out that those disciplines (they name history, literature, and anthropology) with the most interpretive methods are those which have been the most successful in bringing women to the center of the curriculum. (13)

This brings us to a next phase in curriculum transformation. In the fourth phase, women, Blacks, Latinos, and Asians become seen as society, not in society, but as society. In this phase of the curriculum our experience becomes the lens through which history, society and culture are viewed. This requires new forms of data, including those based on oral tradition and those which include emotion, not just rationality. Here, the meaning systems as experienced and defined by those we study become central.

In my current research, I am interviewing older Black and White women in their eighties who live on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. In their discussions of their communities they define class in an intriguing way that has been ignored by sociologists. Even though my interview questions were informed by feminism and Black studies, it is clear that the women do not have the same reference points for class that I do. Their own words indicate that class means an ethic of good care—how well one treats you. To them, it has nothing to do with money, community standing, occupation, residence—none of the traditional indicators that sociologists have used to measure class. In this case, moving beyond victims and variables has required a fundamental shift in
concepts used to understand their experience. Another such shift is that, as we move away from treating people as victims and variables and start to view the world through their experience, then as social scientists our attention turns not just to the examination of oppression, but also the examination of privilege.

Examining privilege reveals how the structure of race, class, and gender relations affects the experience of us all, not just those who are their victims. This re-centers the curriculum in different questions and turns many of our assumptions upside down. It means, among other things, that we do not just study others, but that we also study ourselves. I will use a biographical example.

In 1958, my family moved from the urban neighborhood in Oakland, California, where I had been born, to Rome, a small town in northwest Georgia. Like many young, upwardly-mobile White American men, my father had been promoted in his company, and moving was seen as a necessary step on the corporate career ladder. I was ten at the time and saw in this move neither the sociological nor historical significance that I would later come to understand.

For me, a young girl, the move across country was high adventure, although I wondered what it would be like to live so far from my grandparents and my girlfriend—all of whom lived within the few blocks in Oakland that constituted my childhood universe. For several years following, my parents would pack the car every other summer and we would drive back to California for a visit. In preparation for these trips, my younger sister and I
would fill the back seat with dolls, games, and a good supply of license plate bingo cards to pass the long hours of cross-country driving. (As I was coming in today, I remembered that on the first of these trips we made in 1959 we stayed in Memphis in the first Holiday Inn in the United States!)

Excited by the prospect of visiting our grandparents and anticipating the sights we would see along the way, my sister and I saw no pitfalls to the trip except perhaps boredom and periodic sibling squabbles. Mostly, we were eager to be on the road, wondering in what roadside restaurants we would eat, whether we would stay in a motel with a swimming pool, and how many souvenirs our allowances would buy. We checked our progress in the long hours of driving by following the maps—the beginning, for me, of a long-standing love for reading maps. As the trip wore on, we were often cranky, but on the first day of the trip, through rural Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee, we had no complaints. Two young white girls, happy to play with their Barbies, were off to see Grandma and enjoy whatever adventures came our way.

In what must have been the same period of time, another young girl also made regular summer treks to her grandmother’s house. Traveling into, not out of, the South she went with her family and sister from Washington, D.C. to Charleston, South Carolina where her grandparents lived. She describes these trips:

The drive to South Carolina allowed us a transition from our country to that one. My father always saw to it that we carried huge provisions—fried chicken, potato salad, toast, ham, buttered bread,
unbuttered bread, big Thermos jugs filled with lemonade, and anything else we could possibly want to eat or drink. We even carried bottles filled with plain water and a special container just for ice. As far as possible, the family car was to be self-sufficient. With all those provisions, our summer transition to the South began as a moving feast. We regaled ourselves all along the way, while playing games with license plates, singing songs, and reading the maps. I imagine that the vehicle of our transition had more discipline, as well as more to eat and drink, than most American cars in July. For no matter how many children went with us, disorder in the back seat was out of the question. We made our voyage with the cramped adventurousness of astronauts. Our parents made our "capsule" self-sufficient because we would make no pause for refreshment, not from the time we passed the whites-only Marriott Hotel, just across the Potomac, to the time we last turned off U.S. 1 toward Charleston. We even had sufficient water with us to refresh the car's radiator in an emergency; and my father planned ahead of time where to stop for gas. On those trips south we children could not explore gas-station restrooms, as we did on the Pennsylvania Turnpike. We could not break the 550 mile trip in some scenic place to sleep in a roadside motel. We avoided secondary roads; and, if we made a wrong turn through
some little town, we consulted our maps for the same reason that we carried so much food and drink: a determination to avoid insult, or worse. I remember the anxiety of my parents when we had to stop once in the middle of a Southern nowhere to change a flat tire. (14)

When I first read this account by Karen Fields, a Black sociologist, I was stunned by what it reveals, not just about Fields' experience, but also about my own. Two young girls recall the excitement of summer visits to their grandparents, but I never imagined that I could not stop at a roadside snack bar, could not swim in a motel pool, or could not assume that the world was on my side. My white skin protected me from fears of potential violence and harassment; her black skin did not.

Comparing my experience with Fields' reveals the potential for life histories to illuminate the social and historical structures that condition all of our experience. In my class, "Race, Power, and Social Conflict," I ask students to write an essay answering the following question, "If someone were to write your life history, what would we learn about race relations in this country?" Typically this class is composed of primarily White students and a few Black students. What I try to reveal to them through this account is what the comparison with my experience and Fields' revealed to me: that the social structure of racism in this country, along with class and gender, has affected us all—not just those who are its victims.
White students typically respond that we would learn nothing about race from their experience; I can then ask them to think about whether this is really true. Their assumption is like the parallel assumption that only women "carry" sex and men do not. That is, they assume that only Blacks are a racial group and Whites are not. It is easy for my White students to see others as victims, but it is very difficult for them to grasp the complexities of race, gender, and class and their influence on their collective and individual experience.

This assignment also gives voice to the experience of Black students in the class—an event which is typically denied in the rest of the curriculum. And, by beginning in biographical experience, the assignment initiates more empathetic discussion between Black and White students. As they share their autobiographical accounts, they engage in a more empathetic interracial dialogue because the Black students are not being singled out to say how race affects them. The assignment does not target Blacks as victims and is more likely to encourage the class to examine institutionalized privilege. Examining privilege, not just victimization, is essential in creating a curriculum that will reflect the multiracial, gendered, and class-stratified world that we inhabit.

Conclusion

As you can see, this phase of curriculum change—the examination of privilege, not victimization—turns assumptions upside down. I hope that over the next few days (of the workshop)
the questions you ask will instruct us in how the transformations might affect your own thinking and teaching. Those who have worked in curriculum change define the fifth phase as more relational, though it is difficult to define clearly since it is not yet achieved. It would likely be a curriculum in which we would study not just relations between groups, but in which we would also be situated in that which we study. It would be more reflective. We would not just be the expert knowers who exist apart from those whom we look at.

Although I cannot tell you exactly what the transformed curriculum will look like or precisely how we will achieve it, its purpose is to teach students and ourselves to think in more relational terms—to see ourselves in the context of others and in connection to the world around us. Not until that point will we have created the possibility of teaching a curriculum that is more enabling of us all.
Footnotes


6. Sara Coulter, Director of Faculty Development Project at Towson State University, Personal Communications, 1983.


10. Patricia Bell Scott, "Debunking Sapphire: Towards a Non-Racist and Non-Sexist Social Science," in Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, editors, *All the Women Are White,*


