

A rich body of literature raising new questions about the female experience is evolving.

# The Emergence of a Nonracist Approach to Sex Equity

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## Introduction

Those seeking to achieve educational equity for one group of learners are sometimes themselves guilty of perpetuating and/or neglecting inequities for other groups. For example, the research, curriculum development, projects and funding related to sex equity has been criticized for failing to address human diversity. There is, however, strong evidence that a nonracist approach to sex equity has now emerged. The purpose of this article is to present some of this evidence and to provide examples of how it is being used.

Two major recent contributions to the literature in sex equity have also set the stage for a nonracist approach to sex equity. They are Mary Kay Tetreault's "Stages of Thinking About Women: An Experience-Derived Evaluation Model" published in the *The Journal of Higher Education* in 1985 and the "AERA Guidelines for Eliminating Race and Sex Bias in Educational Research and Evaluation" published in the *Educational Researcher* in 1985.

## Conceptual Framework

Tetreault's work provides a framework with which to understand the evolution of sex equity literature and its direction. She suggests that the scholarship represents five phases. Characteristic of the first phase, male scholarship, is the absence of an awareness that the female view of reality is excluded. Compensatory scholarship, the second phase, is marked by attempts to include the female experience where it is the same as males. One example is the addition to the curriculum of women who have been outstanding in traditionally male activities. In the third phase, called bi-focal scholarship, the roles of men and women are seen as separate and different but equal in value. Much of this scholarship focuses upon women's oppression and their efforts to overcome it.

Two observations about these first phases are relevant to the purposes of this article. First, note the omission of any significant inclusion of issues related to racism (or other *isms* such as ageism, handicapism, classism, heterosexism, and antisemitism). Secondly, observe that it is possible for different aspects of one piece of scholarship to

represent more than one phase. The phases are loosely developmental and overlapping.

When does a nonracist approach to sex equity scholarship become evident? According to Tetreault's phase theory, it occurs in phase four, feminist scholarship. A rich body of literature raising new questions about the female experience has been and is evolving. In Tetreault's words, this scholarship "illuminates women's traditions, history, culture, values, visions, and perspectives" (p. 380). An important aspect of this scholarship is its pluralistic conception of women. The authors of this scholarship recognize that factors such as women's race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation and age interact with their gender status to influence their values, traditions, perceptions, and history. This recognition is carried further in phase five, multi-focal relational scholarship.

In multi-focal, relational scholarship differences and similarities in men's and women's experiences are studied in a way that creates a holistic view of the human experience. The intersection of race and gender, age and gender, class and gender, etc., are taken into consideration. While there is a need for further scholarship in phases two, three and four, they seem to describe the evolution of sex equity scholarship. Future research, analysis, curriculum changes, and theory will reflect the phase five perspective. As more feminist and multi-focal relational scholarship appears, the emergence of a nonracist approach to sex equity will become increasingly evident.

## Guidelines for Eliminating Bias

The AERA Guidelines for Eliminating Race and Sex Bias in Educational Research and Evaluation will facilitate further work in the feminist and multi-focal relational phases. An understanding of and adherence to these guidelines will enable all researchers to produce scholarship that is rigorous, intellectually honest, and reliable. During the planning of research, the perspective of women and minorities should be addressed and women and minorities should be included in the planning process to ensure authenticity. The research and evaluation methods should specify how the variables related to gender and race are incorporated. The review of the literature should include a critical analysis of the extent to which and how gender and race are treated and should include sources that focus on race and/or gender. Data collection instruments and staff should be selected with gender and race concerns in mind. Research findings should be reported in a context that enhances understanding of the findings with consideration to race and gender.

## Nonracist Models

Three recent publications demonstrate the emergence of the nonracist approach to sex equity described in Tetreault's phases and the AERA Guidelines. They each represent significant contributions to the literature in sex equity in education during the 1980s. As related to racism, two of the examples are consistent with Tetreault's feminist phase and the third example illustrates the multi-focal relational phase.

In the *Handbook for Achieving Sex Equity Through Education*, (Klein, 1985), racism and sexism are treated in Part Five, Sex Equity Strategies for Specific Populations. The authors of the chapter, "Achieving Sex Equity for Minority Women," stress that just as all women are not White and research and programs should include minority women's perspectives; also, all minority women are not alike and their diversity should be reflected in research and programs. The educational and life experiences of African-American, His-

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panic-American, Native-American and Asian-American women vary due to language, religion, culture, geographical location, ethnicity, and race.

Two major equity issues are described as common to minority women. First of all, there is a myth that sex inequity affects all women equally and remedies affect all women equally. According to the authors, it is difficult to determine, however, if racial, cultural, sexual, or regional biases are more fundamental to their problems. This suggests major challenges for research and program development. Secondly, these women are subjected to the negative consequences of gender stereotyping and stereotyping of their respective race, national origin, or culture. Common themes of the stereotyping of minority women are succinctly described as follows: "(a) the image or stereotype is one of powerlessness; (b) the image is pathological, that is, the victim is blamed for her victimization; and (c) the image is based on the absence of information or on distorted information." The stereotypes are different among these groups of women, but the "denigration of minorities and women holds constant" (p. 374).

The March, 1986 edition of the *Kappan* addressed "Women in Education" in a special section edited by Carol Shakeshaft. "The School Experiences of Black Girls: The Interaction of Gender, Race, and Socioeconomic Status" by Dianne Scott-Jones and Maxine L. Clark is an example of the study of minority women as distinct groups. Their review of the literature demonstrates the difficulty in determining the differential impact of gender and race and the need for adequate research addressing the educational experiences of all learners. The authors conclude, however, that the evidence on the costs of racism and classism in education is clear in the literature.

The work begun by Klein in the *Handbook for Achieving Sex Equity Through Education* is continued in the Autumn 1986 issue of *Theory Into Practice*. Many sex equity issues not addressed in the *Handbook* are treated in this edition of the journal. This work also clearly represents an effort to incorporate a multi-focal approach to sex equity related to racism. An excerpt about research on classroom interactions from the first article, "Abolishing Misperceptions About Sex Equity in Education," provides a good example:

"The observations revealed clear patterns concerning both sex and race bias. Not only did males receive more teacher interactions than females, but majority students received more interactions than minority students. The stu-

dent most likely to interact with the teacher was a White male, followed by a minority male; female students were at the end of the line. The teacher's attention, the most valuable resource in the classroom, was distributed congruent with society's value system and the U.S. Department of Labor's income statistics. The most interactive-rich student was a White male; the most interactive-poor student was a minority female" (p. 221).

Other sex equity topics discussed in that issue which address the interaction between sex and race include curriculum, parenting, disabled students, bilingual education, computer learning, and the liberal arts. A dilemma common to these topics is the inadequate body of research which incorporates race and gender. Nevertheless, the point of inclusion of racism in the discussion of sex equity is an important contribution.

## Conclusion

Is the literature on sex equity nonracist? Are the sex equity lectures in educational courses non-racist? Are the proponents of sex equity nonracist? The answer in each case is no. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that a non-racist approach to sex equity has emerged, not arrived. The publications discussed here are examples of a broad based phenomena. The emergence of this approach means that increasingly the literature, the lectures, the conference presentations, and the sex equity proponents themselves will become nonracist.

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