

Making Visible Asians and Asian Americans in Introductory Women's Studies Courses: The Personal Voice in Pedagogy, Making Feminist Connections across Diversity

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The introductory course in women's and gender studies (IWGS) first introduces, centers, and problematizes the concept of gender and sexuality to undergraduate students, and at a depth not offered in other disciplines. It requires a political and critical approach to rethinking our place in society across the gender spectrum as this intersects with diversity by race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, ability, class (and more), and the power relations implicated within and between these dimensions of identity. Such a course needs to be flexible and continuously redefined in theory, content, and pedagogy to continue to be relevant to the academic endeavor as well as to the (broadly defined) feminist one. Flexibility is important not only in principle, but also as a pragmatic strategy, where this course draws majors and minors to WGS, and concomitant institutional and financial support.¹ In principle, as well as strategy, including and highlighting diversity variously serves to sustain WGS programs in general.

In this context, my article suggests a need for greater visibility for Asians and Asian Americans in IWGS courses, in

choice of text, and in effective pedagogy. This fast-growing, vastly diverse minority in the US needs to find a greater voice—in terms of students' awareness of how its issues intersect with issues of gender in an increasingly multiracial, multiethnic American society.² Although the introductory course first addresses various forms of intersectionality to students, I have found, at least at primarily white institutions such as Virginia Tech, where I teach, that a largely black-and-white model defines students' understanding of racial and ethnic difference.

My incentives for writing this essay also stem from personal experience, as a first generation Indian immigrant and a naturalized US citizen. I have been called "black" (pejoratively) and mistaken for Hispanic. A well-intentioned white friend of long standing once told me that she finds it hard to see me as a woman of color at all, thus erasing my culture and history in a single stroke. After 9/11 it was, my family and I found, a frightening and unsafe time to be brown and Asian. We carried our new American passports with us even when we traveled within the US.

In 2006 the Asian American Student Union (AASU) at Virginia Tech invited me to speak at one of its events. I addressed the racist attacks in the US on diverse Asians in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, including South Asian Sikhs as well as Koreans and Japanese. Such incidents had also occurred locally, at both Virginia Tech and nearby Radford University. A lively discussion followed my talk, as an audience of some sixty students, variously Asian and other, spoke of their personal experiences of identity and conflict in the US. After the event, the then-president of the AASU asked if I could develop a course on Asian Americans where none such was available at the university.³ I did so, with active support at all levels of the university, and in 2011 Asian American Experience (AAE) became an official part of Virginia Tech's core curriculum. Perhaps the events of April 16, 2007, when a Korean-American student shot and killed thirty-two students and faculty at Virginia Tech, facilitated the ease with which this happened, but also, Virginia Tech's push for greater inclusivity, enshrined in its Principles of Community, helped create a climate receptive to courses like this one. I have taught the course annually each spring semester with good enrollments, which include a majority of diverse Asian students, among others. It is today a course offered in the Asia studies minor.

Although gender underlies some of AAE's content, it is not central to the course, which, as the only one of its kind in the core curriculum, also includes topics such as the histories of various groups of Asians in the US, racist laws, activism, issues of identity and conflict for current generations, and, centrally, confrontation of the model minority myth. To address this

lacuna, in fall 2011 I developed and taught an upper-level undergraduate course, Gender and Asian America (GAA). This course focused across Asian ethnicities on topics such as poverty, domestic violence, LGBTQ issues, health care, and activism. What emerged, however, as I organized the syllabus, was the paucity of research on Asian-American men and mental health, a topic of special pertinence after the 2007 massacre. The perpetrator had been mandated counseling but refused to seek help. A gifted female student I had taught in IWGS the previous fall died in that car-nage. I was deeply affected by an issue that had become personal. I researched the availability of mental health counseling for Asian Americans and found that while the West Coast fared better, elsewhere there were few culturally relevant resources available. The perpetrator's history of stalking female students also emerged after the event, but this gendered aspect of his behavior slid under the radar in the active media discourse that followed, which largely focused on issues of gun control and the university's alleged culpability in not preventing the massacre.

I was especially motivated to write this article, however, when, very recently, after teaching the section on violence against women in the IWGS course, four female students, across Asian ethnicities, approached me separately for advice regarding their experience of sexual assault and their inability to tell conservative parents, or of domestic conflict and financial stringency at home related to an immigrant history—all of which jeopardized their futures. I assisted them with resources they could consult, at the Women's Center at Virginia Tech and in the community, but, offered them specially, I think, an Asian—

and feminist—understanding of their problems. Over the years that I have taught IWGS there has been a rare semester when female students have not come to me with their stories of sexual assault (usually following the start of the segment on violence against women), but this was the first time that I had been approached by four Asian women, all in the same course. The women, variously, sought assistance, or, armed with the list of resources and phone numbers I provided them, successfully dealt with their situations (as they told me later).

It was after this that I realized in retrospect that the text that I was using for the introductory WGS course—Susan M. Shaw and Janet Lee's *Women's Voices, Feminist Visions*—had few selections on Asian Americans, and none that I had thought of using. Except in independent, research-based assignments where an Asian student chose to address a topic on Asian America or Asian history, or where she/he chose to share a personal experience during class discussion, the Asian-American *gendered* experience had been invisible and unvoiced, over the several years that I, a South Asian, had taught the introductory WGS course. In the spring of 2013 I organized a workshop with the Virginia Tech Women's Center and the Women's Resource Center in Radford (serving the larger community of the New River Valley), during which a reputed scholar and activist, Dr. Shamita Das Dasgupta, spoke on issues related to violence experienced by Asian women in the US, with an eye to addressing violence on campus as well as possible issues with the Asian population in the general area. I also now felt that I needed to change texts for the introductory course to one more inclusive of material on Asians/Asian Americans.

Selecting a Text Inclusive of Asian/Asian-American Material

I wanted a text that would be more accessible than the one I had been using (Shaw and Lee) to the particular demographic of students at Virginia Tech taking the IWGS (a Core Curriculum course)—one that is primarily white and drawn from a mix of STEM fields, business and finance, the agriculture and veterinary programs, as well as from disciplines in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, which include the social sciences. As I researched this essay I found it interesting and revealing that contemporary texts—both at the introductory level and those focused on feminist theory—continue to include earlier theoretical writing by Asian-American feminists on invisibility by ethnic and cultural diversity, compared to mainstream white but also black feminism. For example, Mitsuye Yamada criticizes white feminists' lack of awareness of Asian activism and political writings. She observes that it is through the women's movement that she has come to appreciate the hardship of her mother's life and that her own politics are rooted in her immigrant history (310). Sonia Shah observes that South Asian women's groups in the US have learned from white feminists about sisterhood and consciousness raising, and from black feminists about incorporating a race analysis ("Presenting" 575). However, neither black nor white feminist thinking includes violence against immigrant women, or cultural discrimination, or the complexities of a bicultural history. What is "different" about Asian American feminism, Shah concludes, is its focus on cultural discrimination, which needs to be factored into an analysis of racism ("Presenting" 577). Kandice Chuh critiques

the static and essentialist identity politics that have characterized the "unitary" Asian-American subject, and she points to the need to look transnationally and historically at diverse Asians, and in context (cited in Kirk & Okazawa-Rey 478). In other words, although cultural discrimination may impact all groups, what emerges from the authors above is the invisibility that stems from homogenizing a diverse set of peoples, with vastly different languages, religions, and cultures, and very different transnational histories and tracks to, and consequently within, the United States.

The Suzanne Kelly, Gowri Parameswaran, and Nancy Scniedewind text was recommended to me by a colleague at Radford University who told me she had used the book to effect in a largely white demographic of students. I found substantially more material in the Kelly text, quantitatively, on Asian America. Each chapter provided a brief introduction followed by a multicultural set of readings. I compared these to the selections on Asian America in Shaw and Lee, and briefly offer my rationale below for selecting the Kelly text to teach in the fall of 2013.

Shaw and Lee note in their Introduction that the text focuses on the US. Lengthy, theoretically informed chapters precede each section and are followed by selections of "classic and contemporary readings." I briefly discuss below the essays in this text on Asian America.

In the chapter on women's work, Shaw and Lee note that despite the stereotype of Asian academic achievement, a majority of Asian women immigrating to the US after 1980 drop out from grade school (at more than twice the rate of white girls), suffer from race and sex discrimination in the labor market, and are underemployed or unemployed. They also note that recent

immigrant women from the Philippines, Vietnam, Korea, and South Asia are the majority of workers in sweatshops and the microelectronics industry (428). In the essay following this introductory chapter, Momo Chang informs us that of 350,000 manicurists in the US, 96 percent are women and 42 percent are Asian or Pacific Islander. In a Boston-area study Vietnamese salon workers' health is described as impacted by carcinogenic toxins, yet they cannot find other work because of poor English-speaking skills.

Both the chapter and selection raise questions. Which Asians drop out of school, and which are high achievers, and what allows the latter to pursue the "American dream" when so many Asians cannot? Why do a high percentage of Vietnamese work in low-paying, toxic nail salons? Which Asians speak English fluently, and why? Our questions about history, culture, and internal diversity go unanswered.

On women's health, John E. Lewis et al. provide an overview of studies investigating alcohol and drug use in context of sex risk and find that white college women report much higher substance use correlated with risky sex behavior when compared to Hispanics and African Americans. Where, however, high percentages of the latter groups report being drunk or high during sex, less than one-quarter of Asian-American college students do so (321). Can immigrant history, family values, and cultural norms explain low rates of drug or alcohol use in Asian Americans? Even as this study might be of value to policy-makers, the larger question is what the statistics *mean* for WGS students at the introductory level.

Following Shaw and Lee's chapter entitled "Feminist Futures," the selection by

Phyllis Rosser looks at falling numbers of men enrolling in college. Between 1995 and 1996, comparing by sex, age, race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, Rosser finds a larger gender gap among low-income students, ages 18–24, in all racial and ethnic groups *except* Asian Americans (660). More recent data (2003–2004) continues the trend, with the largest gender gap among African Americans and Native Americans (661). Rosser's essay does not tell us why there is a low gender gap at college level for Asians. Can an immigrant history and economic need impel a change in gender norms, and if so, at what cost to especially women? The selections in Shaw and Lee raise good questions but do not provide, in my view, adequate answers that will facilitate an understanding across Asian/Asian-American difference for students at the introductory level.

Kelly, Parameswaran, and Schniedewind observe in their introduction that feminism is “continually developing” a more multicultural perspective, that Asian and Latina feminists have pointed out the tensions between Anglo and immigrant cultures and the need to affirm a cultural heritage while simultaneously rejecting its sexism (13). At first glance, I liked this book's multicultural, multi-genre, and transnational approach to material on Asian America, including, at the start, Asian feminist Stacey G. H. Yap's critique of hegemonic white feminism. The selections include poetry, personal testimonials, short fiction, ethnographic studies, and short theoretically informed essays (such as Yap's), offering, in my view, depth and dimension to understanding the Asian/Asian-American experience, but in a diversity of contexts that includes other voices across race, ethnicity, gender, and more. The text highlights the significance

of visibility and voice in IWGS (e.g., that of a tribal Southeast Asian woman compared to a black woman), inspires (as I would find) a reflexive critique of white (male and female) privilege, offers cultural and racial comparison and contrast (e.g., cultural dimensions of violence against women), questions stereotypes (e.g., the “passive” Asian woman who demands more equitable working conditions), and examines stereotypes of white women by women of color (e.g., white American women seen as hypersexualized by Filipina immigrants).

Based on what I saw, I thought that the Kelly text would resonate with my students in IWGS. Below, I describe a pedagogical tool I use for most of my courses, the discussion sheets (DS). In this context I use select student comments from the DS on assigned readings on Asian America to assess their effectiveness. My notes on pedagogy precede these comments. I conclude with my reflections on whether the selections contributed to students' learning about Asian Americans and gender and whether the selections contributed to a critical sense of feminist connection and solidarity across diversity for Virginia Tech students in the introductory women's studies course. I decided to use the text in fall 2013 for the first time.⁵

The Discussion Sheets

My teaching philosophy centrally involves giving students every opportunity to offer their own (substantiated) views and reflections, in class discussion and in assignments. For example, even when I assign a paper drawn from the text and where I frame the topic, I encourage independent and critical reflection, at least in the conclusion. Their grade, I tell students, depends not only on a well-written paper,

with appropriate supporting material, but also the quality of their insights and reflections—on *how* they have processed the material. This process of thinking about and speaking freely is what they will take with them, I believe, even as statistical information or other “facts” may be forgotten.

Students do a maximum of ten and a minimum of eight DS over the semester on a days' set of assigned readings. They need to list a minimum of five discussion points/questions per sheet on the readings for that class period, so they are prepared to participate in discussion. Even though this assignment is 10 percent of the course grade, these DS are not graded. Because of this, I have found, students feel free to offer their thoughts without fear of my disapproval or of not subscribing to the (assumed) “party line” on politically divisive issues (e.g., abortion and choice). Students also choose those readings they want to write about, and they are told at the start of classes that they are personally responsible for this assignment, that the more thought (critique, question) they put in to their list of points, the more they will learn. They keep their sheets in front of them as I ask who has done these for that day's readings. I then ask students to read selectively from their list, followed by my response as well as those of classmates. The DS are handed in after that day's class lecture and discussion. I have found that the questions become increasingly better, more complex, and more insightful as the semester progresses. I learn more about a student's learning from his/her DS than any other assignment, and often especially so because many students do not speak during class discussion. Even as this assignment means that I read a large

stack of such sheets at the end of each class, I see the learning process in action over the semester.

I assigned several readings for each class period. In the sections below I describe both my questions for the class as well as information I felt they needed in answer to their questions (e.g., Who are the Hmong? What is a dowry?). I also provided overheads with outlines of central issues in the essays, as well as pertinent statistical information, in, for example, the essay by Marielena Zuniga on women and AIDS and when beginning the section on violence against women, as I will describe later. My responses to students' written comments in the DS were very brief (given that there were an estimated two hundred such discussion and question points, in all, in forty sheets, at the end of a class period), usually pointing to cultural context or racial stereotype.

In the responses that follow I offer only those to the readings on Asian America that were assigned in selected chapters in the Kelly text. The general criteria I have used for organizing these responses are: reflexive critique, comparison and contrast across difference, personal experiences that relate to the reading, and inclusive generalizations and expressions of solidarity (e.g., “all women”). I will sum up the trends of the comments in my conclusion and offer my thoughts on whether my goals of informing about gender and Asian America and of achieving feminist solidarity were met.

The Assigned Readings, Pedagogical Notes, Student Response

For Chapter 1, “What is Women's Studies?,” I assigned two selections on Asians/

Asian Americans by Yap and Mai Kao Thao, along with ones by bell hooks, Michael Kimmel, and Adrienne Rich. Whereas Yap recommends unearthing Asian voices and experiences for inclusion in women's studies courses, Thao, in a rare Asian tribal voice, protests the cultural demand for silence in the face of abuse, as advised by her mother. She refuses, in America, to be a "good Hmong woman" (19). bell hooks notes the lack of voice for black women outside the home and her own silence in the presence of older women (and so she "speaks" through her writing). Kimmel notes his invisibility as a white, middle-class male until brought to light by feminist analysis, while Rich advises young college women to "claim" rather than "receive" their education, as a privilege but also as a right.

I introduced the class to the Hmong, for no one had heard of them. A Southeast Asian tribal people, they had been recruited to fight for the US in the Vietnam War, and were later resettled here as refugees. When brought here, they were a nonliterate people, who did not speak English and had had no experience of an industrialized society. I mentioned that they were the poorest and least literate of Asian Americans and that they suffered high rates of domestic violence. I had to elicit, by specific questions, student responses in class discussion on the differences in contexts of silence, voice, and visibility in this set of readings. Some students, in response to hooks's essay, related the issue of speaking up to respect for parents, even as they had the right to speak. Students asked if "women sell themselves short in thinking that silence is a woman's strength" (as Thao's mother tells her) when I asked that they see this in cultural context. I also gave students a

diagram ("Intersecting Axes of Privilege, Domination, and Oppression," Figure 2.1 in Morgan 44) and asked if each of us, including myself, combine aspects of both privilege and oppression (by gender, sexual orientation, educational level, race, class, ability, language, etc.). Notably, white students commented that they had never stopped to question either their own privilege, or that they could fall below the line—simply as "female" or "Jewish"—and that we could, evidently, all be oppressors, as well as oppressed.

STUDENTS RESPOND IN DS

The responses below suggest an early sense of feminist solidarity:

WF (WHITE FEMALE): "I never really thought about feminism among Asian Americans. Maybe this is because I picture Asian-American families as more equal between the races than other races . . . I know this is a racist and skewed view, but it's what immediately came to mind." [She notes in ink, "I'm glad I wasn't alone in this thought during class."]

WF: "I enjoyed this text because I also am learning about women's and gender studies from a woman who is not a white American woman like I am [I assume she means me!]. I like getting a different perspective on women's rights from a culture that is different from my own."

WF: "... the unique experiences of Asian women need to be spoken about so their challenges and struggles concerning feminism can be recognized. Although women's studies can include all women of all different races and ethnicities, Yap explains that the difference of each woman's background needs to be taken into account as well."

VIETNAMESE-AMERICAN FEMALE (VAF): "Asian-American feminists share many of the

same thoughts as white-American feminists. However, they should be able to speak for themselves because their experiences differ in terms of politics, history, etc."

WF: "bell hooks and . . . Thao both speak of how their culture (black and Hmong, respectively) has held them back. . . . Both have had the courage to write, and thus speak, back at their oppressors. Reading [this] reminds me that a woman's voice, whether it be spoken or written, is not just a part of being [in] society and being heard as many people automatically assume. Rather, it is a means of finding ourselves. . . . If we let our oppressors control us and suppress our voices . . . we are not treating ourselves as humans."

Under "Gender and Women's Bodies" (Chapter 3), beauty and sexuality come up for comparison in Nellie Wong's poem and essays by Jessica Valenti and Yen Le Espiritu. In the first, a Chinese-American girl aspires to be blonde and white, is ashamed of her ethnicity, and wants to leave Chinatown behind. Valenti sharply critiques (white) virginity as the sole marker of female worth, while Espiritu notes the value of the virginal Filipina in the US as central to an immigrant community's values and identity. This is in comparison with its perception of the "other," here, white women, as promiscuous—a consequence, the author argues, of American colonial presence and military bases in the Philippines (even as Filipinas are sexualized by whites). However, Espiritu notes the consequences of such intergenerational silencing in the high numbers of attempted suicides by young Filipina Americans.

In class discussion a Filipino-American female (FAF) student commented that she

could relate to Espiritu's essay, having experienced such restrictions herself, and that her grandmother's generation talked in ways that supported Espiritu's argument—that white women's sexuality was not to be emulated by the "good" Filipina. Wong's poem did not come up in discussion, interestingly, although Miss America 2013 did. Nina Divaluri, born in New York City, had been the target of racist diatribes in the media, such as "Miss 7-Eleven," "terrorist," and "Arab" (about which I informed them). Students responded in some outrage, and asked what was America thinking? When I asked if it said good things about the nation that a brown-skinned woman could be Miss America, some agreed.

STUDENTS RESPOND IN DS

Some students noted with surprise the value of whiteness, while some valued their own darker skin tone (and culture):

WF (ON WONG): "This essay [sic] is eye-opening because I never realized how much the beauty ideal is focused on the American woman . . . Why is it that society values the white woman rather than women of other colors and races? Has beauty become more diverse since 1981 [Wong's poem is referenced here]?"

VAM (VIETNAMESE-AMERICAN MALE): "I wish I were white sometimes . . . it would have made things a lot easier . . . I wouldn't have to be so self-conscious all the time. I often wonder how my life would have been different if I were white . . . the different opportunities I would have . . . the women I would attract. I do share a lot of the feelings that Nellie Wong felt in her piece. I do feel like an outsider . . . un-American (obviously because I'm not white and because I wasn't born here)."

WF: "... When I was growing up I always wanted to be anything but white. I wanted culture, ethnic foods, to be fluent in another language, to have beautiful tanned or olive skin, and to not just be another plain old boring white girl. I guess I take for granted what I do have ... in Nellie's case I feel that most of it was brought upon by discrimination. ... It is just awful."

VAF (VIETNAMESE-AMERICAN FEMALE): "Growing up, I have never felt this way towards my Vietnamese roots. I have never felt inferior or 'dirty' that my skin color was different from most people. If anything, I am proud to be a Vietnamese American, and I embrace my culture with pride, contrary to Nellie Wong's ideas."

There were students who related to the readings, and offered personal experience:

FAF (FILIPINO-AMERICAN FEMALE) [ON ESPIRITU]: "Being raised with a Filipino heritage ... I can attest that these comments are true. Fortunately my father and mother do not stress a lot about 'being good' or a 'virgin' but my aunts were put into this situation when they were younger. My grandparents came from the Philippines, and their way of life is a lot less free for women. I especially liked how they outlined the ideal Filipina: 'She is sexually modest and dedicated to her family.'"

VAF: "As a first generation American, I could definitely relate to Espiritu's essay. ... My parents, especially my mom, have always been strict about dating. ... They always say that 'It's not the Vietnamese way' or 'It's not proper in our culture, but only in America ...' and for me, I feel the need to rebel. ... I felt like I could relate to exactly what the writer was saying."

VAM: "I enjoyed reading about the perspective of the women of color. ... They feel as if they are twice as repressed for

being a minority in addition to being a woman. ... As an Asian-American guy, I can definitely relate in some ways to their sentiment. Over the years, there have been some subtle (and sometimes even obvious) racist remarks that have been said to me."

WF: "This reading made me think of a friend of mine in high school who is Filipina-American. ... she was always keeping secrets from her parents about where she was going, who she was with, and who she was dating. Her father was strictly against her dating anyone while in high school. ... I could definitely relate [the reading] to her family."

MAF (MONGOLIAN-AMERICAN FEMALE): "In Mongolia ... women who are seen out with foreigners are looked down upon because many assume the women have sexual relations with them for the money. ... However, men who are out with foreign women are not even thought to be involved in any sexual relationship."

Students took stock of reverse stereotyping, in Espiritu:

WF: "I find it interesting that the women who were more sexually promiscuous were described by the Filipinas as 'more Americanized,' and 'more Westernized.' So our culture is actually the sexual culture although Americans judge Asians and Filipinas for being sexual."

FAF: "... The reading addresses how ... Americans are to blame for this made image of Asian women. The point I disagree with the most is that while Asian women are talking about ... stereotypes, they are pushing a stereotype upon the white women. ... I think that this weakens the case that she is using the same issue that they are fighting for, against women of another race."

WF: "When I read the title of this essay, I felt insulted and attacked. ... I was

grouped into a large group based on a single feature: white. I didn't want to continue reading (but I did anyway). ... This must be the way other races feel when white American women conceptualize blacks, Hispanics, and other races."

PRF (PUERTO RICAN FEMALE): "... Filipino culture is just as patriarchal as it is here in the US. ... While European and American culture sexually demonized women of ethnicity, it's interesting to see an ethnic culture reverse that and say that women of their ethnicity are pure and it's the white women who are promiscuous."

ACM (AFRO-CARIBBEAN MALE): "Does every culture ... ascribe to the same notion that women must have a curfew and/or be protected while men can do what they wish? ... I have heard many stories of my mother [of Caribbean descent] who said her childhood consisted of her staying at home while her brothers were outside."

Under "Institutions that Shape Women's Lives" (Chapter 4), Ann Crittenden gives voice to the unpaid work of mothers in the US and Tonya Mitchell to the trap that a young, black, single mother finds in welfare despite her attempts to leave. Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Hochschild describe the South Asian (Sri Lankan) nanny in the globalization of domestic work, providing a second mother to the children of affluent couples in the West—but at great cost to her own family at home. Miriam Ching Yoon Louie notes the plight of Korean female restaurant workers, abused at home and exploited at work—even as they publicly protest, countering the stereotype of the passive Asian woman. Hisaye Yamamoto, in a short story, addresses issues of control within the Japanese-American family, in the cruel silencing of an aspiring

and award-winning writer of haiku poetry by her husband.

Class discussion ranged around the low pay for waiters in general (including those students who worked in local restaurants), and the amount that could be made in tips. I pointed out that the Korean immigrant workers (I emphasized "legal" as many students assume that "immigrant" and "poor" are illegally in the US) protesting working conditions and low pay in Louie's essay had family responsibilities, whereas an uncertain income for a young student could be less of an issue if they had no other commitments. In class discussion, students didn't know about the Japanese poetry form haiku, which I explained. They asked why the woman had not been allowed to marry her lover in Japan, by whom she had become pregnant, and why she had then been forcibly married off to a Japanese man in the USA. They were unaware of the cultural specifics of social "shame" in some cultures, and consequently this was something I explained and we discussed.

STUDENTS RESPOND IN DS

Students comment on cultural aspects of the readings:

WF [ON LOUIE]: "... Traditionally in Korean culture women are supposed to take care of the family and do housework. However, ... when [they] come to the United States they are expected to start working as well—mostly in low-paying, labor-intensive occupations. So, there is a sort of clash of these two cultural expectations. ... never really thought about how two differing cultures could affect an individual in such a way."

WF: "She [Rosie, the daughter of the protagonist in Yamamoto's story] finds out

that her mother married [as] an alternative to suicide, but . . . that the marriage itself was basically an emotional suicide. Women should marry based on love, not stability or other issues . . ."

Students relate to the readings:

WF [ON LOUIE]: "I actually lived in Seoul, South Korea . . . and the amount of times I heard similar stories of abuse and domestic violence outweighed the frequency in any other country I've lived in."

IAM (INDIAN-AMERICAN MALE) [ON EHRENREICH]: "When my dad first moved to the United States to work, my mom, brother and I didn't follow suit until three years later, and we only got to see him a couple of times those three years. . . . I can see the difference it made for my older brother in his relationship with my dad."

Students comment on the commonality of exploitation and abuse of women across race:

PRF [ON LOUIE]: "It isn't only Korean women who face these problems. Race does play a big role in the fact that Korean women are getting paid less than other immigrants but the struggle of a low wage and having to tirelessly work at home is a problem across the board for all women. . . . Women of all races first need to fight the racism aspect of how immigrants are getting paid less, and then they need to fight the battle against sexism."

WM (WHITE MALE): [Yamamoto's story speaks to] "how women are hindered in a non-supportive relationship. They can't act out their dreams and aspirations, directly correlating to the American "housewife syndrome" . . . [of] the last fifty years. She [the protagonist] didn't want her daughter to get married because she felt she wouldn't be able

to live out her true dreams. She only wanted what every woman wants, the opportunity to make the choice about their future."

Students read the selection by Maria Nakae on Asian and Pacific Islander (API) women that followed the chapter on health and reproductive justice (Chapter 5). Other assigned readings were on the high rates of women infected globally with HIV and how this related to their powerlessness, by Zuniga; a critique of parental consent for underage and poor teens seeking abortions in the US by Mike Males; reproductive justice for women of color, beyond abortion politics by Loretta Ross; and Jael Silliman et al. on fetal alcohol syndrome and activism in Native American communities. Nakae describes how API women, without citizenship, insurance, worker protection, and access to translation services, deal with culturally uninformed or discriminatory health professionals. Hence, they have a low rate of Pap tests, and consequently Vietnamese women have five times the rate of cervical cancer as white women in the US.

I began this section with overheads of statistical information on specific diseases that affect the health and mortality of women in the US, examining the health of women by class and race. I offered information on the Affordable Care Act and its provisions for women. In class discussion students were shocked to read about API issues, especially that Vietnamese women had such high rates of cervical cancer. They also were surprised to learn about these women's fear of racist officials as well as their lack of translation assistance at healthcare facilities, insurance, and simply access to preventative healthcare. When some students raised the issue that ille-

gal immigrants should not have access to healthcare, I again pointed out that Nakae was writing about legal immigrants. Students did comment on the injustice that this group of women were denied healthcare.

STUDENTS RESPOND IN DS

Students comment on cultural difference:

WF: "API women have a five times higher rate of cervical cancer than white women. This is ridiculous that the reason is simply because of their lack of access to health care. Cultural ignorance and discrimination by providers leads these women to distrust the medical system and therefore they do not use reproductive health services adequately."

FAF: "What I noticed is that [the struggles] are common in all immigrant communities, not just API women. All immigrant women struggle with access to health care, low wage employment, and anti-immigration policies. What did strike me as different was the extremely high rate of cervical cancer among Vietnamese women. What more can be done?"

Students relate to reading:

MAF: "I know both undocumented and legal immigrants who do not have access to proper health care."

WM: "Besides Asians and Pacific Islanders, why is it that every other race is significantly less healthy than whites living in the States? Even Asians show higher rates of certain diseases in their population than whites."

Finally, under "Violence against Women" (Chapter 7), one selection addresses institutional racism that prevents Asian women from finding help in domestic violence situations and allows

perpetrators to go free under a "cultural" defense (Lin and Tan) and another critiques the "exotic" slant by American media on kinds of violence in India (e.g., dowry murders) while suggesting that there is no such culture of violence at home (Lodhia). Sharmila Lodhia also discusses the Indian Violence Against Women Act (2005) and suggests that this law can inform the US especially where violence is "magnified by factors such as race, class, or immigrant status" (508). Other assigned readings include an essay on the International Criminal Court's recent recognition of mass rape in wartime as a crime against humanity (Copelon) and another on the prevalence and causes of rape in the US (Griffin).

I began this section by presenting statistics on the high numbers of women experiencing violence globally, nationally, and locally (in the New River Valley region, where our university is located), and outlining the laws that were in place at all levels, including for college campuses. Again, I had to explain that Margarita Lin and Cheong Tan were speaking of legal immigrants who could not access facilities at shelters because of language problems and/or cultural misunderstanding. However, the "cultural defense" for a perpetrator provoked some questions and outrage. I pointed out that immigration laws had been effectively changed, by Asian activism, to protect Asian women from abusive husbands. I explained the custom of dowry in India, its illegality there, and its abuses, including the murder of brides by in-laws, including by women, and I offered statistics (students did not know about this crime). I also mentioned high rates of domestic violence in the Asian-American community, and highlighted Lodhia's concluding comment that the Indian Domestic

Violence Act of 2005 should be useful in understanding and addressing issues for South Asian immigrants in the US.

STUDENT RESPONSES IN DS

Students relate to readings:

VAM: "Married immigrant women have it very hard . . . As a former immigrant myself, I know firsthand about the struggles of moving to a new country. You have no money or resources, and you know no one. You just feel so helpless sometimes and have nowhere to turn to. What are you going to do? Leave your husband? Or call the police to arrest him? Then what? Where are you going to live? Who's going to support you? These women have no choice but to put up with the abuse."

WF: "This . . . reading really hits the passion on the head. I want to help the Asian area culture with women's rights. My dream is to do equality law in India. This would be hard since I am not Muslim or cultured to the area. However I see the hurt and discrimination . . . and it makes me absolutely cringe."

Students critique institutional injustice in the US, in relation to immigrant women:

WM [ARGUING AGAINST "CULTURAL DEFENSE" OF PERPETRATORS IN THE US, AS DESCRIBED IN LIN AND TAN]: "We read of brutal killings that took place in America by foreign men, citing their culture as the relevant reason. . . . Murdering your wife because she wants to leave you and stop being beaten should not be okay anywhere."

WF: "America is one of the countries with the highest diversity of races, yet almost all resources and advocacy groups do not focus on the groups of people who need help the most."

BM: "Why should language barriers get in the way of addressing violence against

women in the US? Is the criminal justice system biased against immigrant women? . . . As Americans, can we challenge culture in order to put a stop to ideals that do not match with our own? Can we intervene in other cultures and make changes to other lifestyles and choices?"

WF: "Media will always play a huge role in what we understand about other countries. I learned that much of the information we acquire is inaccurate or romanticized to the point where we think what the media is covering is so much worse than that of which is going on in our country. . . . I . . . strongly agree [with Lodhia] that we need to direct the attention away from the culture and focus on the WOMEN. Someone's culture should never be an issue but the WOMEN being abused, killed, and violated are what we need to focus on."

WF: ". . . Domestic violence is a problem in America; we can't look at places like India and assume America doesn't have a problem just because India's domestic violence gets more media coverage."

Concluding Reflections

This article has presented student responses to a new textbook that I selected to teach for the first time, one more inclusive of diversity in general, but with substantively more material on Asian America than in the text I had used previously. Although I hoped that in general the concept of "diversity" would acquire depth and dimension in student learning, I was especially interested in having students achieve a sense of feminist solidarity across difference at this first level of study in women's studies.

Toward the goals of effective solidarity, "difference" is contextualized, variously, where even the lack of voice and women's

"silence" are to be understood in their different cultural spaces (as with hooks and Thao). The perception of sexualities as defined in relation to race and colonial history is a "difference" that drew comment where especially students of color (FAF, VAM) related to such a perception. However, the stereotype of white women's promiscuity (by Filipino society) provided a reflexive (and outraged) moment for WF students, turning "racism" against whites by people of color.

The concept of "culture" itself also drew reflexive comment. WF students felt that others seemed to imply that "America" seemed not to have any, and only people of color did; after the readings, they themselves concluded otherwise. A different implementation of American law, to exonerate a perpetrator by "cultural defense," was criticized, where the law should apply equally to all in the interests of justice. Students saw commonalities across race in the institution of the family and its patriarchal and potentially oppressive consequences for women, even as marrying for reasons other than love (a cultural difference) drew comment. American media was held to account for its ignorance of difference, making violence against women elsewhere exotic, given a culture of violence right here at home. Equality for women could happen, they said, if differences among women were brought to light—and not in terms of thanking one's good fortune to be living in the US (quoting Oprah in Lodhia's essay). Violence was violence anywhere, said students, and wrong.

Difference was also noted between generations in conflict in the Asian diaspora, as was the possibility of change for generations living and growing up in America. Interestingly, such change was desired from the viewpoint of the right

to "be oneself," as a more autonomous and "American" identity, different from the "traditional" familial sense of self in Asian cultures—one that immigrants' children could choose to now question. Students of color also related to the immigrant experience of being an "outsider" and "un-American," even as they expressed outrage that this should be so, while white students expressed surprise at this "wrong," even as they came to see white privilege. Yet one WF longed to be more than a "boring" white girl, while a student of color embraced her culture (while others admitted to a longing to be white).

Class, by ethnicity, entered the picture, where immigrant women were oppressed both at their low-wage jobs and hazardous work environments and at home. There was comment at this double injustice. This was the case too when poorer API women suffered high rates of cervical cancer because of lack of access to health care—how, asked one WM, are whites the healthiest people in America?

In sum, I would say that in this first course, students were introduced to the *mechanics* of achieving feminist solidarity—by engaging in reflexive thought and critique when confronted with difference—beyond a superficial lip service to "diversity." I argue that a pedagogy that included a combination of information on overheads in class, some lecture elements on necessary information (statistical and other), and opening up the class to their comments on the DS and ensuing class discussion facilitated a more nuanced understanding of diverse Asians, in different contexts (the chapters of the book), and also in conceptually different aspects of experience (e.g., voice and visibility, cultural aspects of

violence, working conditions). It is possible, then, by selecting multicultural and interdisciplinary course content in IWGS, and by way of pedagogical strategies that encourage giving independent, critical, and informed voice to “difference,” to educate students for the changing world they will encounter in the twenty-first century. I continue to use the Kelly text into Fall 2015.

NOTES

1. Gwyn Kirk and Margo Okazawa-Rey (xvii), like Margaret Hobbs and Carla Rice (139–40), note the increasingly challenging climate for WGS courses on US campuses and the continuing need to make this program relevant to students’ interests and lives. The understanding of difference in feminism’s “story” needs to be reconceived to counter the “politics attendant upon academic knowledge production,” writes Danielle Bouchard (5).
2. According to the 2010 US Census, the Asian-American population is at 17.3 million and is the fastest growing minority.
3. Some 8 percent, or a little over two thousand, undergraduates at Virginia Tech identify as Asian/Asian-American.
4. Ajantha Subramanian notes that changes to immigration law in 1965 opened the doors to highly educated, technologically skilled Asians as this nation competed with the USSR in the space race. At this time more English-speaking Indians entered American universities and the US economy. Today, numbering at around three million, Indian Americans are a largely successful minority.
5. It is also possible to supplement a choice of text with a multi-genre selection of readings from the considerable opus that is available. While texts like Min Zhou and James V. Gatewood’s offer scholarly articles across a broad spectrum of topics, Shamita Das Dasgupta’s edited volume, *Body Evidence*, covers a range of issues related to violence against South Asian women, as well as legal changes to immigration laws in the US. Lora Jo Foo informs us about Asian-American feminist activism in contexts of work (sweatshops, domestic labor).

Sonia Shah’s collection, *Dragon Ladies*, gives us the voices of Asian feminists, while Leong Russell provides a selection on sexuality and Asian American gay and lesbian activism. Personal testimonials, oral histories, short fiction, and poetry can be found in collections such as *Making Waves* (Asian Women United of California), *Making More Waves* (Kim and Villanueva), *Asian Americans* and *Asian Americans in the Twenty-First Century* (both edited by Joann Faung Jean Lee), and *A Patchwork Shawl* (Das Dasgupta). I have found especially effective Andrew Garrod and Robert Kilkenny’s collection of Asian students’ personal stories.

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A Feminist Approach to Teaching Community Psychology: The Senior Seminar Project

JANELLE M. SILVA AND THE STUDENTS FOR GENDER EQUITY

Since the establishment of the first women's center at the University of Minnesota in 1960, women's centers on college campuses have provided a wide variety of resources, including but not limited to support services (such as counseling, childcare, and sexual education), as well as workshops and networking opportunities that can benefit the individual both personally and academically (Byrne 48). Women's centers, in particular, often meet needs that institutions are unable to address given a growing diverse student body, and they are frequently established by current students who are seeking a space for community (Kasper 185). Unfortunately, not all colleges and universities house women's centers, despite the need for such spaces for their students. Having taught feminist courses, I saw the need for a women's center at my current institution, the University of Washington Bothell (UWB). UWB is home to over four thousand students, with 51 percent identifying as female and 28 percent identifying as women of color, respectively ("Fast Facts"). As UWB has grown in size, so has our ethnic diversity, with over 51 percent of students in the 2013–14 academic year

identifying as being a student of color ("Fast Facts"). Our institution prides itself on being a diverse and inclusive college campus, yet lacks the centers needed to foster a sense of community that promotes these values. Knowing this, I designed a senior seminar grounded in feminist pedagogy and community psychology principles to develop a space where students could learn to work as a collaborative group to facilitate social change on our campus. Over the course of one quarter, eighteen community psychology undergraduate students investigated the need for a women's center on our campus through student surveys and faculty interviews. This paper is a collective illustration of their class project regarding establishing a campus women's center as written by their faculty instructor and all eighteen students.

Feminist Pedagogy in Community Psychology Senior Seminar

As a feminist teacher and a community psychologist, I design my classrooms to be spaces to foster collaboration, understanding, and social action. Feminist