

Gendered Planning, Inside/Out?

Q: How are gender struggles for equity here and abroad “radicalizing” planning?

A: Jacqueline Leavitt Professor

The editors' question prompts another inquiry. One, inspired by Wendy Brown's essay about women's studies, reads: "Does gender in planning within the urban planning program at UCLA secure a crucial political space in male-dominated academia and practice?" For much of its thirty years, this program has led others in acknowledging the legitimacy of gender and planning classes in its professional and doctoral curricula. Associated with this: six women (four full professors, two of whom are joint appointments) make up forty percent of the full-time faculty of fifteen; more than one graduate and undergraduate class with gender or women in the title is offered on a regular basis; past and present women faculty have published award-winning books and articles; current and past students have produced similar cutting-edge work; conferences and lecture series have attracted local and international audiences; and two faculty women sit on the advisory committee to the University's Center for the Study of Women. Yet a single program, however singular it may be, does not wield that much power in other realms of academia, and the record is blemished. There is only one faculty woman of color, and the influential student group, Feminist Planners and Designers (FPD), has not functioned for about a decade. Related or not, FPD's demise also meant the loss of gender-related conferences held each year

from 1979 to 1985, and again in 1987 and 1988. No faculty women (albeit they may have chosen this path) have ever been Department Chair. As clearly, an oasis has been created within UCLA in urban planning, and this has been a bridge to others throughout the University with gender interests.

The more difficult questions persist outside academia and where the gender challenge to traditional planning knowledge and practice seems in a state of arrested development. To understand the reasons for this and to connect that to accomplishments noted above, I turn again to Wendy Brown and ask: “What is the relationship between gender and planning as to a political and intellectual mission(s)?” My response here is informed by the following assumptions:

- Teaching/learning gender may be embraced as *de facto* or passive political frameworks that relate to social change, but disparate classes do not advance collective consciousness and action;
- Without collective consciousness and action, institutional requirements and norms—in universities, organizations, and bureaucracies where students find jobs (forty-five percent of recent alumni responding to a survey report work in government)—will be likely to constrain subsequent activities around gender;
- This can be mitigated to the extent of partnering with internal and external constituencies (such as alumni, “progressive” and/or professional organizations or caucuses) who may have vague, *de facto*, or well-formed theories and practices about gender and planning;
- Developing collaborative analyses (e.g., in client or class projects) can assist in integrating gender into planning practice and informing a grounded theory of gender.

The links to action and partners outside academia are, I believe, critical. None of the questions posed above—even ones that seem internal—can be fully answered by intellectual confinement to planning’s

(inter)disciplinary boundaries. Stepping outside boundaries, adapting theories from other disciplines and from practice—about the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, class, and gender, and/or forging non-typical planner-community relationships so as to hear otherwise unheard voices—are integral contributions to the institutionalization of gender in planning in UCLA's program.

Let me close with one example of connection-building to some of the most compelling gender struggles, and which also occurs at the intersection of micro-local, local, national, and international levels. The Huairou Commission was created in 1996, an outgrowth of the United Nations Habitat II Conference in Istanbul, to ensure participation of grassroots women and the inclusion of gender equality in the Habitat Agenda. Through the Huairou Commission, multiple networks are being created—practitioners, community leaders, researchers, academicians, donor agencies—in learning and exchange projects about practices that work to sustain and advance women and support community strengths in their transformations. The first meeting I attended of the Task Force on Our Best Practices of the Huairou Commission included representatives from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Tanzania, Germany, the Czech Republic, Turkey, Costa Rica, Canada, and the US. Issues included a range: building coalitions, creating safe spaces, holding dialogue workshops with bureaucrats, developing documents for achieving citywide gender equality, training local resource teams, passing electoral quota legislation to ensure women's representation, preparing toolkits for savings and credit groups, sharing community solutions to meet needs for sanitary facilities. The strength of individual women and groups represented, authenticity of grassroots women's voices, ongoing discussions about what works and doesn't work in each locality and cross-localities/regional organizing . . . all provide a continuous series of entry points for **Re**looking and **Re**visioning and **Re**vitalizing action in any number of disciplines. As for connections to Our Planning, where interdisciplinary conversations

are uneven, let me suggest a baby step, that is, transforming the Department's orientation from "a faculty show and tell" to "an inclusive exchange of ideas." Roundtables can be developed and facilitated by students, invited guests, staff, and faculty in settings outside the campus—not only in grassroots communities to which I am partial but in the boardrooms of media, finance, and politics—and these *Critical Planning* essays might be the bases for discussing and listening. Adapting learning exchanges from the international grassroots women's movement may provide more options for advancing and linking planning to equity struggles that have more than one face.

Reference

Brown, Wendy. 1997. The Impossibility of Women's Studies. *differences*. 9 (3).

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