

Looking Back, Looking Forward: One Hundred Years

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Anything may happen when womanhood
has ceased to be a protected occupation,
I thought, opening the door.
—Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* 1929

A century ago, few of the women who have joined in this volume could have invoked Yale as a source of their academic degrees and honors. *Gender Matters* (in both its form as a conference and now as this monograph) marks a profound shift, occurring over the course of one hundred years, in understanding what work women can do.

The conference proved to be moving—in all senses of that word. More than 300 people gathered, just shortly after the tragedy of September 11, 2001, to explore the roles that women play in the academy and the ideas and inventions that women bring to the academy and all of life's realms. We who were faculty felt especially lucky to learn from the many distinguished women

who had Yale affiliations and who returned to meet with and teach us. At a visceral level, the conference proved powerful, both joyous and poignant.

But the commitment required for such a conference gave us something more: insight into what was both present and absent at Yale. Our joining together to create a bold acknowledgment of the distance Yale had traveled over the century moved members of the faculty to understand the work that lay ahead in the coming years.

Yale has many distinguished programs, including a rich undergraduate curriculum on women and gender studies, on gay and lesbian studies, and a program on African American Studies. Further, at the College as well as at graduate and professional schools, Yale has dozens of faculty whose expertise engages questions of gender and women's roles. For example, at the Medical School, under the leadership of Professor Carolyn Mazure, an interdisciplinary program, Women's Health Research at Yale, funds research and focuses on curricular development on science and health care practices for women. In addition, Yale has many women faculty whose work does not focus on women but who feel that their lives as professors are deeply affected by the fact that they are women. But Yale has not (yet) shaped integrated structures that enable a formerly exclusionary university to become a fully inclusive one for women.

Therefore, after the *Gender Matters* Conference, a small group of us went to the President and Provost to ask for their support in exploring how more could be done to complete the project of coeducation, begun at the undergraduate level just thirty years ago. We were warmly welcomed, with provisions for a three-year seed grant to the Women Faculty Forum to develop programs and to make suggestions about what needed to be done.

Reflective of our own commitment to knowledge and of our socialization as women establishing credentials in atmospheres often hesitant to acknowledge our contributions, we did research (our "homework" of sorts). With the able assistance first of Alison Mackenzie (now a student at Yale Law School) and thereafter of

Rachel Thomas (Yale, B.A. '02), we undertook to survey what other universities were doing to understand the effects of coeducation on their institutions and to take account of the generativity of scholarship that had been produced since women took up roles as professors.

We learned that, over the past three decades, many universities have developed interdisciplinary programs or projects with gender as a central focus. Some programs are very well funded and staffed, and others are minimally supported. The range includes research institutes, development groups, policy institutes, and mentoring programs. That research in turn resulted in our convening a seminar series, "Instituting Gender," to which we invited leaders from other universities to explain about how they had shaped their programs, the challenges, and their purposes.

We also realized that we needed to understand better our own shared interests as a community of women scholars and our status in the University. Again, our methods were and are familiar: education through joint study and research. A key issue is the degree to which, in addition to sharing the status of being women faculty and scholars at Yale, we have intellectual kinship. Our membership includes those who hold professorships in subjects ranging from architecture to astronomy, from the social sciences to the humanities, law, and medicine. Therefore, we ran another seminar, *Science, Sex, and Gender*, for which we read and to which we invited leading scholars from other universities to explore the degree to which gender and sex were—or were not—relevant to each of our own disciplines. We choose science as the template because within our group are scientists deeply committed to the proposition that gender theories do not inform their scholarship.

Not surprisingly, we learned that theories of gender have varying degrees of proximity to our scholarship and teaching. Yet all of us were clear that our gender was all too proximate to other aspects of our lives—having significant effects on our professional status within our own disciplines. Therefore, we launched a major research initiative to identify the roles women play in the University. We asked about women as faculty members,

speakers, and honorees; about where women's pictures appeared and about what leadership roles women played. That report, *Women and Yale University: A View from 2002*, was compiled in 2001–02 and taught us that our personal feelings of more or less isolation reflected institutional patterns in which some departments or divisions remain predominantly male. Concerned also about the small numbers of women of color at the University, our research data addressed the intersections of gender and race whenever possible.

We also focused on the challenges of women as workers to respond to the many demands and desires of their lives—to participate in families and to give care to those around them, including obviously the intensely demanding role of parenting. We did yet more research, on leave policies for individuals who become parents while professors and on child care facilities and support. Our roots as a group came from activism, aimed at enabling the University to mark the entry of women to Yale's faculty as a major aspect of its Tercentennial year. Similarly, our post-Tercentennial activities have also included activism, aimed at shifting the University's policies to recognize how the presence of women requires reorganization of scholarship, teaching, and professional life.

We have come as a group to aspire for much, for the University and ourselves. We hope to facilitate interdisciplinary classes, projects, and symposia and to enhance community life for women scholars, students, and administrators. We are now joining with other divisions (including the Center for International and Area Studies, the Law School, and the Medical School) in the planning of two major conferences, one on women in science and another related to migration, the nation-state, and gender. We have also launched an initiative to focus on the role of women in the classics, and in conjunction with the Beinecke Library and the British Art Center, on women in arts and literature. We have begun to develop research archives on the role of women in higher education and to explore how, given the leadership of our libraries and museums, we can enrich the research holdings on

women both at Yale and from Yale. Projects of differing scopes are possible, ranging from oral histories and filmed documentaries to development of major archives.

To help sustain junior women and to welcome beginning scholars, we have also, under the leadership of the current Research Director, Shilpa Raval (on leave from the Classics department) crafted a spring series around how one accomplishes the many tasks of a professor. One particular area of concern is support for junior faculty and the need for mentoring. We have therefore revamped our own structure by expanding our steering committee (now including Kim Bottomly from the Medical School, Paula Hyman from History and Religious Studies, and Elizabeth Dillon from English and American Studies), working out formats for discussions among the Council, and obtaining liaisons with undergraduate and graduate students. We are focusing on how the University can better understand the degree to which women are still deeply absent as well as present at Yale and what methods—such as targeted fellowships, stipends, research funds, institutes—can bring about significant changes.

Therefore, I write these concluding remarks about a project that is *in medias res*. We are only in the middle of the unfolding of the project of coeducation. The last one hundred years have answered the question of whether women could take more roles at Yale than serving as its cleaning and administrative staff, and as the wives, mothers, daughters, or sisters of men of Yale. The next one hundred years will tell us how the opening to women of all possible roles at the University reframes understandings, theories, and practices of gender and of Yale.