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ABSTRACT
          This paper uses feminist theory in exploring
multicultural change in academic institutions of higher education. It
argues that multiculturalism, while attaining increased acceptance in
academic institutions, is actually being shaped to fit into the
established organizational parameters without any discomfort to or
real change within the organization. Insights are used from feminist
thinking to construct a critique of the institutional strategies
being used on some college campuses to bring about multicultural
organizational change. These insights serve as a focus for
examination of current approaches being used in multicultural
education in three areas: (1) the trouble with additive approaches;
(2) the trouble with bipolar differences; and (3) the trouble with
the problematics that define multicultural education. The paper
concludes with the argument that as long as academic institutions
attempt to implement multicultural education without first coming to
terms with the presence of racism, sexism, and heterosexist
"micropractices" on their campuses, then they only deceive themselves
and harm their students. Contains 11 references. (GLR)

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FEMINIST THOUGHT AS A SOURCE OF CRITIQUE AND

RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF MULTICULTURALISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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FEMINIST THOUGHT AS A SOURCE OF CRITIQUE AND RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF MULTICULTURALISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

I will begin with a personal disclosure about an incident that left a strong impression and which, I suspect, is behind many of the ideas presented in this paper. In the mid 70's I worked in a grassroots community organization in Trenton, New Jersey called Congreso Boricua--The Puerto Rican Congress. During my two years at the Congreso most of my energy was dedicated to advancing bilingual and bicultural education in New Jersey's school system as well as in the state's system of higher education. Although we succeeded in some important ways, many of our efforts to participate in defining the content of education for persons who came from Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Central America were met with great hostility. It was a tremendous struggle, particularly given that in those days the term multicultural was used only by those of us who spoke a different language and came from different countries. In the late seventies, I became the coordinator of bilingual and bicultural education in the New Jersey Department of Higher Education. Even though I was now part of the system, the struggle became more intensified for now I had to deal with the indifference of my colleagues, most of whom perceived bilingual/bicultural education as a compensatory educational strategy of very dubious value. Many spoke of it as an affirmative action program for Hispanics. It was practically impossible then, as I am sure it is still today, to make a

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persuasive case for the pedagogical values of bilingual and
bicultural education. A few months after I was appointed to the
position of coordinator I found on my desk an editorial
published in the Wall Street Journal entitled Against Bilingual
Education, with an unsigned note commanding me to "Read this."

In light of that encounter and many others like it in an
organizational environment that was extremely alienating and non-
supportive of educational efforts that challenged the norm, I
have watched with interest, surprise, but also with considerable
skepticism the popularization of multicultural education in
colleges and universities. The increased acceptance of
multiculturalism and the celebration of diversity are welcome
changes; nevertheless, I am concerned about the form that
multiculturalism is taking on in our campuses.

This paper consists mostly of a complaint. My complaint is
simple: I am concerned that multiculturalism is being
normalized. By normalized I mean that multiculturalism is being
shaped so as to fit in neatly within established organizational
parameters. The conflict aspects of multiculturalism are being
suppressed so as not to cause discomfort.

I am also concerned that multicultural education is being
converted into an enlightened self-interest strategy to deal with
the prospect of an increasingly nonwhite working force.

To elaborate on my complaint about the normalization of
multiculturalism I draw on insights from feminist thinking. And
through these feminist insights I construct a critique of the

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institutional strategies being used in some of our college
campuses to bring about multicultural organizational change.
The feminist concepts introduced tend to be abstract, therefore I
will attempt to make them more accessible by providing brief
examples from a case study about a university that adopted a
diversity requirement.

I turn now to the following question: <u>What does feminist
theory have to do with multicultural organizational change?</u>

Feminist thinking can be characterized as being centrally
concerned with exposing patterns of oppression based on power
inequalities between the sexes (Harding, 1991). Feminist
scholars have documented that concepts which have been (and often
still are) accepted as neutral and neuter are in fact a
reflection of male dominance over definitions of what counts as
knowledge and how reality is experienced.

I see the intersection between feminism and multiculturalism
in at least three preliminary ways. First, multiculturalism
focuses on the ways in which gender, race, sexual orientation,
and class differences are inscribed in political, cultural, and
cultural practices. In this regard the multicultural and
feminist project share the goal of bringing differences from the
margin to the center (Hooks, 1984). Second, multiculturalism is
about the "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" (West, 1991;
Collins, 1991). Thus, the multicultural and feminist projects
share the concern with recovering the "silenced" histories,
literature, philosophies of women, people of color, gay, and

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lesbian persons and enabling their self-representation (as opposed to representation) within the "canon." Third, multiculturalism is about the creation of democratic, non-oppressive institutions. In this regard the aim of the multicultural and feminist projects is the exposure of cultural practices, structures, and policies that are racist, sexist, heterosexist, and classist.

I turn now to a second question: <u>How can feminist theory(s) inform multicultural organizational change</u>

Before answering this question we need to understand normative conceptions of organizational change. This past year I visited three campuses as part of the national study on organizational change. These three institutions are struggling with issues of multiculturalism. Based on interviews with college officials, faculty, and trustees I became increasingly convinced that conventional approaches of organizational change are inappropriate to bring about multiculturalism.

Administrators have been socialized into viewing their campuses as if they were a cohesive whole, with all persons aspiring to a common knowledge and culture. A premium is placed on the maintenance of equilibrium; a conflict free campus is seen as a sign of effective leadership. Within this vision any out-of-the ordinary manifestation--like multiculturalism--that threatens disorder, disruption, or conflict is viewed with fear, as something in need of containment. When administrative thinking places a premium on rationality there is an inclination

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to perceive multiculturalism as a problem in need of management.
This mindset produces strategies to design multicultural
education as an adjustment, taking care not to disturb the
overall functioning and purposes of the organization. This may
be the reason why so many institutions are choosing the route of
"diversity requirements" as the favored strategy of introducing
multicultural organizational change.

When I visited the three campuses, I sensed that despite
good intentions the approaches being employed to foster
multiculturalism, were not appropriate. They were not likely to
advance the aims of multicultural education as I outlined
earlier. But I did not have a clear idea as to what was wrong
with these approaches nor did I have recommendations for
substitute approaches.

Feminist Critique of Normative Organizational Change Approaches

Feminist thinking can be helpful to us in understanding why
conventional approaches of multicultural organizational change
are unlikely to advance the three aims of the multicultural
project: (1) the recognition of how differences are inscribed in
relationships, political, and cultural practices; (2) the
insurrection of subjugated knowledges; (3) the creation of
unoppressive organizations.

In the remainder of the paper I provide a critique of
current approaches to multicultural education by drawing on three
insights from feminist thought. The three insights are: (1) the
trouble with additive approaches; (2) the trouble with bipolar

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differences; and (3) the trouble with the problematics that
define multicultural education.

    Additive approaches. Feminists have been particularly
critical of curricular approaches that attempt to deal with the
exclusion of women by simply "adding" women into the curriculum.
The additive approach generally entails assigning readings by
women, or highlighting the contribution of great women.
Feminists, have shown, that such approaches, despite the
increased presence of women, do not advance the transformative
agenda of the feminist project in that structurally the
curriculum remains unchanged, students are not confronted with
the power inequities embedded in structural processes which make
the exclusion of women appear as "natural." Additive approaches
entail a strategy of inclusion that is depoliticized in that
women get included in ways that do not defy male values of what
constitutes authentic knowledge (Harding, 1987).

    The feminist critique of additive approaches is particularly
relevant as a basis for a critique of multicultural education
approaches in colleges and universities. As mentioned earlier,
campuses are infusing multiculturalism into the curriculum
through the adoption of diversity requirements. Such
requirements, frequently, constitute an "additive approach" in
that they deal with gender, racial, sexual, ethnic, social class
differences as if they were technical, exchangeable, and
depoliticized categories, stripping them of their transformative
potential. For example, at Urban University (a fictitious name

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for a research site), the additive approach to multicultural
curricular change led to a requirement that defines diversity as
a category of eleven differences. The unfortunate outcome of
such an approach is that it mechanizes multiculturalism:
students fulfill the requirement by picking courses that address
one or more of these differences. One difference is just as good
as another. Thus the student who doesn't want to hear about
sexual orientation or homophobia can choose a course on religion.

In this scheme differences are reduced to a "thing." Thus,
the aim of the multicultural project "to recognize the
relational, political, and cultural dimensions of differences" is
eluded. Drawing on the ideas of African American feminist Maxine
Baca Zinn and her colleagues (1986), Sandra Harding maintains
that "differences" such as "race" or "gender" or "sexual
orientation" "must be reconceptualized as a relationship rather
than a "thing" or inherent property of people" (p. 214). For
example, Sandra Harding speaks about gender differences
politically as they are inscribed in a gender stratified society.
Adrienne Rich (1980) also speaks of differences in political and
cultural terms as a product of the "institution of compulsory
heterosexuality."

The meaning of differences. Feminist theories are of
further help in elucidating the conceptualization of
"differences." Feminist theorists defy the dominant view of
differences that are posed as oppositional and hierarchical
dualisms or binarisms. Feminist scholars have developed incisive

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analysis of the male bias in dualistic thinking such as hard vs.
soft sciences; reason vs. emotion; public vs. private. Dualistic
thinking informs much of the reasoning that deligitimizes the
educational value of multiculturalism. One of the more blatant
products of thinking that posits differences in a negative
relationship is when campus leaders qualify their support for
diversity with words to the effect of "diversity without
compromising excellence."

Dualistic thinking is harmful because it makes the
denigration of multicultural education justifiable. At Urban
University (a fictitious name) one of the most impassioned
arguments against the "diversity requirement" was made by a dean
who attempted to deligitimate it by casting it, in hierarchic
fashion, as curricular decision-making on the basis of social
rather than academic criteria. In a memo to the faculty, he
wrote that "the fundamental argument in favor of a diversity
requirement rests on considerations of a social rather than an
academic nature." To bolster the inferior-superior message
encoded in the hierarchical dichotomization of
social/subjectivist vs. academic/objectivist knowledge the dean
continues in his memo to say that a curriculum based on social
criteria is concerned with awareness, whereas a curriculum based
on academic criteria is concerned with knowledge. In this
binary scheme multicultural education merely contributes social
awareness while all else--which tends to be white and male--
presumably contributes academic knowledge.

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Dualistic thinking is also evident in reasoning that is premised on the belief that for something to exist something else has to disappear; in the words of Patricia Hill Collins that it has to be decentered (Collins, 1991). I am referring to the dominant belief that multicultural education is oppositional to, and therefore threatens, community. For example, the president of Urban University, while being supportive of "diversity" efforts, in a speech to fellow presidents still felt compelled to warn of the potential dangers in "diversity." The president said, "As we move to a multicultural setting, it is important that we as leaders on our campuses do not move too far away from the vitality that our common national culture contains."

Feminist theorists have exploded the idea of a common culture. For example, Iris Young (1990), calls attention to the ideal of commonality as a totalizing force that gives rise to racism, ethnic chauvinism, class devaluation, homophobia, sexism.

The value of feminist critique and theories is in providing a counterpoint to conventional administrative thinking in that they invite us to critically engage the language we use. Feminism exposes the conspiratory role played by the language of traditional theories of academic administration and leadership in the production and maintenance of cultural practices that betray the very things to which we espouse support. The president of Urban University viewed herself as supportive of multicultural education yet the language she used was shaped by cultural values that give primacy to uniformity, coherence, and commonality.

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Such language is inconsistent with the project of
multiculturalism.

The Problematics of the Dominant vs. the Different Others

Conventional theories of administration and organizational
change are unfit as a source of knowledge for multicultural
organizational change because these theories were conceived from
a managerial point of view. Our customary ways of doing
administration are based on strategies of organizational change
without altering existing power relations. Accordingly,
multicultural organizational change that is informed by
conventional theories of "good administration" is shaped by the
"problematics" of the dominant class. Once again the case of
Urban University and its diversity requirement illustrates this
point. The curricular policy adopted at Urban construed the
"realities" of diversity in demographic terms, thus the rationale
for the diversity requirement was built almost exclusively on the
changing racial and ethnic profile of the nation, the city where
Urban is located, and its student body.

Another example that more blatantly demonstrates how the
problematics of dominant groups shape multicultural education
emerged from an interview with a trustee at an institution where
60% of the student population was of color. This trustee made it
clear that the impetus for revising the mission of the
institution to reflect a multicultural focus was based on the
changing demographics and its potential effect on US
competitiveness in the global marketplace. This is how he put

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it, "Minorities are not as qualified for jobs as workers in countries like Japan and we have to make sure that we do not waste this potential." Ironically, this was an institution where the English Department faculty had dropped the <u>Autobiography of Malcom X</u> as required reading because they were tired of teaching it year after year.

When multiculturalism is shaped by the problematics of the dominant other the agenda becomes one of ensuring that the increasingly "nonwhite" working force will contribute to the maintenance of current living standards. Multiculturalism is thus defined in ways that leave intact the structures that foster monocultural--white, male, and heterosexual--values and norms.

Feminist thinking calls attention to the importance of interrogating policies by asking, Whose problematics are providing the impetus for multicultural education? Sandra Harding (1991) maintains that the problematics that define the problems that social scientists attend to are not necessarily of concern to women. As an example, she mentions that traditional social science is more concerned with the kinds of policies towards rapists and raped women rather than "with the standards of masculine sexual behavior that create a culture in which rape might be seen as inevitable." (p. 85). Similarly, I maintain that the problematics that inform current modes of multicultural education (e.g., changing demographics, the desire for harmonious diversity) are not necessarily the concerns of the "different others."

This brings me to a last thought. Taking a cue from Sandra
Harding's assertion that "a feminist standpoint is not something
one claims but an achievement" (1991, p. 185), I pose the
following question, "Is it possible for individuals who belong
to the ruling social and sexual class, who speak the ruling
language, and are of the ruling gender achieve a vision of what a
multicultural organization can and should be? The response to
this question, I believe, is no. It is "no" because members of
the dominant classes have yet to develop an awareness of the
privileges they derive by being white or heterosexual or male and
how lack of awareness of the privileges derived from one's race,
sexual orientation, or gender contributes to the maintenance of
political, economic, and social institutions that perpetuate
power inequalities. It is not enough to pledge commitment to
diversity, there needs to be a recognition that whiteness,
heterosexuality, and maleness also constitute differences in
race, sexual orientation, and gender and that these differences,
whether overtly or covertly, operate, nevertheless, in opposition
to the multiculturalist project. Black feminists have made use
of their "dangerous memories" and of their positions of
"outsiders within" (Collins, 1990) the academy, advantageously,
to create knowledge that is oppositional to the dominant
narrative. At the risk of sounding essentialist,
multiculturalism should be viewed as a process that must take
into account the vision of those who have experienced the
struggles of existences that have been silenced and made

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invisible by normative powers. This is not to say that there is a unique and distinct "female experience" or "lesbian experience" or "Latina experience" or "woman of color experience," nor do I want to imply that one's race, gender, social class, or sexual orientation make one qualified to represent the entire community (Fuss, 1989).

Reconceptualizing Multicultural Education

I want to conclude by offering a final observation that concerns how feminist thought can inspire the reconceptualization of multicultural education. I began this talk with a personal incident I experienced as coordinator of bilingual education in the NJ Department of Higher Education. As I prepared my remarks I went back and forth, should I say that this happened at the NJ Department of Higher Education or should I give it a fictitious name and maintain, as we researchers say, confidentiality? This problem of naming or not naming is central to our discussion. The dilemma of confronting practices that undermine institutional commitments to multiculturalism poses an inexorable barrier that we need to overcome. As long as we try to implement multicultural education without first coming to terms that our campuses are full of untold, racist, sexist, and heterosexist "micropractices" (Foucault, 1980) then we deceive ourselves and we harm our students.

A core concept in feminist thinking is that the personal is political. Recently, several women intellectuals have empowered this concept by disclosing personal experiences that publicly

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expose how the micropractices of racism and sexism shape daily
life in the academy. Patricia Williams (1991), an African
American law professor, in The Alchemy of Race and Rights
provides a series of personal essays through which she chronicles
in sharp detail the many forms by which racism and sexism are
practiced and perpetuated within the law classroom, in her
interactions with her colleagues, in exam questions that present
women and people of color in stereotypical roles, and in the
content of student. evaluations of her course. The testimony
that Patricia Williams provides is powerful and moving, yet, I
dare say that within most circles of influence such testimony is
dismissed as too personalized, too subjective, too much emotion
and not enough facts.   Indeed, the penalties for the courage of
such testimony are emotionally and professionally costly. So
what we are left with on most campuses is silence for we have yet
to develop the norms to engage in dialogues about the "personal."
Without difficult dialogues about the personal multicultural
education will hover at the margins of the academy, its promise
for an educative and transformative practice unfulfilled.

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