

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 432 980

HE 032 688

AUTHOR Johnson, Jacqueline; Risman, Barbara J.  
 TITLE Sociology: Discipline Analysis. Women in the Curriculum Series.  
 INSTITUTION Towson Univ., Baltimore, MD. National Center for Curriculum Transformation Resources on Women.  
 SPONS AGENCY Ford Foundation, New York, NY.; Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (ED), Washington, DC.  
 ISBN ISBN-1-885303-29-7  
 PUB DATE 1997-00-00  
 NOTE 33p.; For related documents in this series, see HE 032 663-689.  
 AVAILABLE FROM Towson University, 8000 York Road, Baltimore, MD 21252; Tel: 800-847-9922 (Toll Free); Fax: 410-830-3482; Web site: <http://www.towson.edu/ncctrw> (\$7).  
 PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Reference Materials - Bibliographies (131)  
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.  
 DESCRIPTORS \*College Curriculum; \*College Instruction; Curriculum Development; Ethnicity; Females; Feminism; \*Feminist Criticism; Higher Education; Models; Race; Research Methodology; \*Sex Bias; Sex Differences; \*Sex Fairness; Sex Role; Social Class; Social Science Research; \*Sociology; Teaching Methods; Theories  
 IDENTIFIERS Gender Issues

## ABSTRACT

This essay examines the ways in which sociology, as a discipline, has been influenced by feminist scholarship in the field, and three major contributions of feminist scholarship are presented: the introduction of women into sociological theory and research during the era of "sex role" analysis; the shift to analyzing gender as a basic axis of stratification built into social organization; and a more inclusive sociological perspective that focuses on the simultaneous operation of gender, race, and class in people's lives. The essay notes that in addition to critiques of traditional sociology, feminist scholarship has transformed the discipline by developing the study of sex and gender as a subfield of sociology. It concludes by noting that feminist sociologists are currently exploring the ways that researchers can understand gender as multifaceted, supporting, reinforcing, and intersecting with many other forms of inequality. An 89-item bibliography contains information on background readings for faculty; suggested readings for undergraduate courses; curriculum resources; and professional organizations. (MDM)

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# SOCIOLOGY

## *Discipline Analysis*

*Jacqueline Johnson*

*Barbara Risman*

*North Carolina State University*

# WOMEN in the CURRICULUM

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## **SOCIOLOGY**

*Discipline Analysis*

**Jacqueline Johnson**

**Barbara J. Risman**

**North Carolina State University**

**National Center for  
Curriculum Transformation  
Resources on Women  
1997**

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**The National Center for Curriculum Transformation Resources on Women is partially supported by grants from The Ford Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education, Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, whose support is gratefully acknowledged. The viewpoints expressed herein, however, do not necessarily reflect those of the funding agencies.**

**Printed on recycled paper by Uptown Press, Baltimore, MD**

**ISBN 1-885303-29-7**

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**PREFACE**

Since the 1970s feminist and multicultural scholarship has been challenging the traditional content, organization, methodologies, and epistemologies of the academic disciplines. By now this scholarship is formidable in both quantity and quality and in its engagement of complex issues. The National Center for Curriculum Transformation Resources on Women is therefore publishing a series of essays that provide brief, succinct overviews of the new scholarship. Outstanding scholars in the disciplines generously agreed to write the essays, which are intended to help faculty who want to revise courses in light of the new information and perspectives. Each essay is accompanied by a bibliography that includes references for further reading, resources for the classroom, and electronic resources.

Elaine Hedges

Series Editor

# SOCIOLOGY

The intellectual history of sociology is one in which ideas were developed by “founding fathers”—Marx, Weber, and Durkheim—who brought their European male standpoints to the theories they created (Sprague, 1993). As in many other disciplines, mainstream thought reflected the perspective of the elite European men who developed it. Women were largely absent from their theories. When they did appear, women were usually relegated to the study of physical or social reproduction, socialization, and/or the family.

As the second wave of the women’s movement matured, feminist scholars began to challenge male-biased presumptions that had previously informed the foundations of social science and the humanities. Feminists such as Stacey and Thorne (1985) and Gergen (1988) maintained that most theories and methodologies were literally “man-made” and thereby resulted in observations and interpretations which largely reflect male perceptions of reality. Comparing sociology with other disciplines, they argued that feminist perspectives remained peripheral and isolated from mainstream sociological theory and research well into the middle and late 1980’s, while other fields, such as English and anthropology, had already begun to radically transform their centers.

In the last decade, however, feminists have persevered, and at times succeeded, in bringing the study of

women and gender from the margins to the center of sociology. In a recent update of their earlier critique of sociology, Stacey and Thorne (1996) contend that theoretical contributions of feminist scholarship have enhanced the discipline of sociology by highlighting how all social institutions are gendered. Once gender was recognized and problematized as a social construction, previously hidden or erased topics were brought to the forefront of sociological theorizing, such as wage gaps by gender, and sex segregation within and across jobs and occupations (Kanter, 1977; England, 1985; Reskin and Hartman, 1986). In addition, this new focus on gender, also referred to as a “gender lens” perspective (Howard et al., 1996), encouraged the development of new topics within sociological discourse and theorizing which are directed towards bringing together and challenging notions concerning public versus private domains. These topics include research on sexual harassment, sexuality, sociology of emotions, the political nature of bodies, and feminist epistemology.

In this short overview, we address three contributions of feminist scholarship: the introduction of women into sociological theory and research during the era of “sex role” analysis; the shift to analyzing gender as a basic axis of stratification built into social organization; and a more inclusive sociological perspective which focuses on the simultaneous operation of gender, race, and class in people’s lives, referred to as the “matrices of domination” perspective (Collins, 1991).

### ***Feminist “Sex Role” Research***

In the early days of sociology, women were invisible, with the exception of their status as wives and mothers.

7

Functionalist theorists did write about women but only vis a vis their "sex roles," assuming that women's specialization in family roles was efficient and effective for society (Parsons and Bales, 1955; Zelditch, 1955). Thus, feminist contributions to sociology first focussed on identifying women's very existence and their contributions outside of the family (Epstein, 1970; Lorber, 1984). Much of this early feminist discourse existed comfortably within the prevailing "sex-roles" framework, as it examined the different roles that men and women played in society. However, feminist work on "sex roles" also criticized their existence rather than accepting and endorsing their usefulness (Weitzman, 1979; Giele, 1978; Holter, 1972).

Before long, however, feminist sociologists began to question the use of "role" terminology itself. Constantinople (1979) suggested that there was little empirical documentation that a unitary sex role even existed. Furthermore, the language of roles appeared to accept a paradigm of seemingly natural difference that exaggerates actual differences between men and women, rather than highlighting similarities. Thorne (1982) suggested that sociologists should not use the language of "race roles" because the notion that roles ought to be based on race is foreign to American values. Yet, until recently, using biological sex and the language of "sex roles" as a basic dichotomy by which to organize society seemed perfectly acceptable to many. During this decade, however, feminist scholars (Ferree, 1990; Stockard and Johnson, 1992) have stopped analyzing gender as "sex roles" because the use of role terminology reinforced an ideology which justified a social organization in which men focus their attention outside the home and women remain within it.



## ***From “Sex Roles” to “Gender”***

The feminist focus on women’s oppression and subordination led from a theoretical redefinition of the study of sex roles into an investigation of gender relations within sociological discourse. Feminists moved beyond an exclusive focus on women within family relations and sex roles to expose underlying patterns and mechanisms through which unequal distributions of power between men and women are produced and reproduced throughout many institutions and structures in society (Reskin and Padavic, 1994; Lorber, 1994). No longer content to settle for modified versions of traditional theories, i.e. the “add-women-and-stir” method, feminist scholars such as Smith (1987; 1990) and Collins (1991) question the validity of mainstream methodologies and theories in sociology. Smith (1987) asserts that the goal of “value-free” sociology merely masks underlying patterns of male domination and the categorization of women that occurs in much social research. To resist these “relations of ruling” which result in abstractions and misinterpretations of the actual experiences of women, she argues that the context of social environments must be captured from the subject’s point of view, which is derived from a point of lived experience rather than some version of so-called objective reality.

When a “gender lens” (Howard et al., 1996) is used, all of society, and therefore the curriculum, looks different, and new questions emerge in every substantive area of sociology. Such questions include: Are organizations gendered? How does the gender distribution of health care workers affect the definition of appropriate care? Why are most violent criminals male; might the social construction of masculinity help explain this?

The “gender lens” perspective shifts our focus to enable us to see how even the most common institutions are gendered. For instance, by analyzing the gendered nature of organizations, feminist scholars such as Acker (1989) found that social stratification involves the organizational ranking of men and women within every realm of society in a way that disadvantages women’s overall cultural worth and limits their access to resources, power, and prestige. West and Zimmerman (1987) contend that when gender is examined from a social constructionist perspective, which focuses on the social creation of meanings and actions attached to culturally prescribed scripts, the reproduction of gender inequality between men and women is revealed in the process of “doing gender.”

## ***Standpoint Theory and Matrices of Domination***

Another contribution of feminist scholarship has been a critique of the limited viewpoints from which theories evolve. The argument that theory grows from the experiences of the theorist, commonly referred to as “standpoint” theory (Sprague, 1993; Smith, 1987), challenges the very meaning of “woman” and “gender.” Specifically, standpoint theory proposes that feminist theory must be broadened to assure that the different experiences of poor women, American women of color, lesbians, and women in less developed societies are considered as much at the center of feminist scholarship as the experiences and viewpoints of white, heterosexual, middle-class American and European women. Thus, standpoint theory forces us to theorize about difference.

Collins (1991) provided examples of standpoint epistemology in her explanations of Black women's experiences. For example, she argues that status attainment and conflict theories generally fail to account for the experiences of Black women. Status attainment research has generally explained women's class position in terms of that of their husbands and fathers. But because the focus of status attainment models is paid, rather than unpaid labor, these models tend to fall short on explanations of women's experiences. This is particularly the case for Black women, who are more likely to be constrained by the higher rates of unemployment and low wages among Black men. Conflict theories tend to be limited in similar ways. These theories have been preoccupied with examining class differences in paid labor, particularly unionized, factory labor. As a result, conflict models have historically excluded the experiences of Black women in terms of their paid and unpaid domestic labor.

Furthermore, Collins illustrates how Black women developed a body of knowledge concerning their own subordination that has largely occurred outside the academy and is therefore not widely recognized or perceived as "intellectual," although it is. Such knowledge includes the cultural work of Black women musicians, poets, novelists, activists, church-goers, and teachers. Without attention to the knowledge derived from these cultural sources, Collins argues, the unique, collective standpoint of Black women cannot be understood. She presents an epistemological framework that includes the use of the concrete, subjective or lived experiences of women, one that reclaims the subjugated feminist tradition of Black women who were unable to break through social constraints because they could not work in academic settings.

This concern with understanding the lived experiences of all women has led to a new appreciation of the

diversity of gender relations in different communities (Brewer, 1988; Collins, 1991; hooks, 1981, 1984; Zinn & Dill, 1994). Current feminist thought in sociology suggests that mechanisms of gender inequality do not exist in isolation. Rather, gender inequity is supported and reinforced by, and intersects with many other forms of inequality, such as race and class, to form matrices of domination (Collins, 1991). "Matrices of domination" refers to the means by which multiple forms of oppression, such as race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, which are usually conceptualized as different axes of social structure, operate as interlocking and often simultaneous categories of experience. In a recent anthology on race, class, and gender, Andersen and Collins (1995) describe the matrices of domination perspective in the following manner:

In this matrix of domination there are multiple, interlocking levels of domination that stem from the societal configuration of race, class, and gender relations. This structural pattern affects individual consciousness, group interaction, and group access to institutional power and privileges (xi).

Thus, according to this perspective, gender, race, and class are not simply additive forms of oppression and privilege but are related in a complicated and holistic fashion which shapes the experiences of all individuals. Andersen and Collins refer to this more complex analysis of experiences as a "both/and" conceptual stance.

The matrices of domination perspective also expands feminist theorizing beyond studies of victims of oppression to see how gender, race, and class are integral parts of social structures which impact all groups. This view forces us to expand our thinking beyond traditional dichotomies where one is seen as either weak or powerful, as either an oppressor or a victim. As Collins states: "De-

pending on the context, an individual may be an oppressor, a member of an oppressed group, or simultaneously oppressor and oppressed” (1991: 225). For instance, this perspective allows us to examine how white women can be privileged by their racial status while also being penalized by gender.

Understanding the holistic nature of gender, race, and class requires us to think analytically and critically about existing systems of power, privilege, and equity as they shape individual and group experiences and as they pattern social hierarchies and institutions within the larger context of social relations and society as a whole. For example, in the United States about two thirds of the nearly 34 million people living in poverty are women who are mostly single mothers with children, a phenomenon which is often referred to as the “feminization of poverty.” Poverty rates among these women vary by race. U.S. Census reports indicate that in 1993 female-headed families constituted roughly 70 percent of all poor Black and Latino families, compared to 47 percent of all white families (*U.S. Statistical Abstracts* 1993, Table 737). These poverty rates provide statistical evidence that while women as a group are particularly vulnerable to social causes of poverty, such as the economic effects of divorce, births to unwed mothers, and the lower wages paid to women, the combined effects of race and gender result in even more severe disadvantages for women of color (Fullbright, 1986; Merritt & Reskin, 1992; Sokoloff, 1992). However, feminist scholars caution that in order to fully understand women’s disadvantage we must not only have statistical evidence of hardship, but must also understand the viewpoints of the women struggling to survive and raise their children in such overwhelmingly difficult conditions (Risman and Ferree, 1996; Smith, 1987; Collins, 1991).

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## Conclusion

Feminist scholars have been working toward transformation of the male-centered knowledge base in sociology for more than two decades. According to Stacey and Thorne (1996), sociology, unlike other social sciences such as political science or economics, is especially promising for such a feminist transformation. While political science and economics tend to be defined by their focus on public and political power, sociology is a fragmented field with a broad scope that involves all of society. Therefore, there is plenty of room for expansion in sociology to include feminist scholarship, with many nooks and crannies for feminist ideas to take hold. Also, unlike political science and economics, there are significant numbers of women sociologists. Thus, by successfully challenging the methods, procedures, and assumptions of traditional sociology, feminist ways of constructing knowledge are increasingly considered as legitimate frameworks for examining and explaining social institutions and human interactions.

In addition to critiques of traditional sociology, feminist scholarship has transformed the discipline by developing the study of sex and gender as a subfield in sociology. A primary journal devoted to the study of sex and gender, *Gender & Society*, has gained recognition and prestige within the discipline of sociology. Also, several graduate programs in sociology now offer students the opportunity to focus on sex and gender as a primary area of concentration, complete with preliminary examinations and related dissertation research.

Feminist sociologists are also currently exploring ways that researchers can understand gender as multi-faceted, supporting, reinforcing, and intersecting with many others forms of inequality. Increasing numbers of new ac-



ademic positions call for scholars to teach classes and to do research on sex and gender across mainstream areas of sociology, including class, criminology, organizations, as well as family sociology. Furthermore, feminist researchers have been successful in bringing new topics to the forefront of gender theorizing. For instance, recent feminist research on gender has not only been influential in addressing how femininity is socially constructed and patterned within cultural relations, but has also brought insight to how masculinity is socially shaped in ways that are enabling and constraining for men, as well as for women (Schwalbe, 1996; Connell, 1995).

Finally, the proliferation of feminist scholarship has significantly contributed to the growth of membership in the American Sociological Association (ASA), specifically within two Sections: Sex and Gender, and Race, Gender, and Class. Sections are designed to facilitate communication and interaction among ASA members around issues concerning research, teaching and curriculum development in specified areas of sociology. The Sex and Gender Section is currently the largest section of the American Sociological Association and also includes the largest number of graduate and undergraduate student affiliations and paper presentations. Race, Gender, and Class is a relatively new Section of ASA, devoted to examining the simultaneous and interactive effects of race, gender and class phenomena in society. This section currently has over 650 members.

It will be the students and teachers of the future who will decide whether this cutting edge knowledge remains at the margins or continues to move to the center of the discipline. Only if this new scholarship transforms both our classrooms and the world outside of them will feminist goals of equity for all women and men come closer to realization.

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We also want to alert readers to a new book series forthcoming from Sage Publishers and Pine Forge Press titled THE GENDER LENS (co-edited by Judith Howard, Barbara Risman, Mary Romero, Joey Sprague). This series has the express goal to transform the sociology curriculum, to provide short monographs which provide a "gender lens" on every topic of concern to sociologists, and to our students. Books published in 1997 include Yen Espiritu's *Asian American Women and Men*, and Judith A. Howard and Jocelyn Hollander's *Gendered Situations, Gendered Selves*. Books forthcoming include those on families, masculinities, and medical sociology. In the future, the series will include Gender Lens books on the African-American community, the Latino/a community, education, stratification, and race relations. Check with the following publishers for publication dates:

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## **Curriculum Resources**

The American Sociological Association supports a Teaching Resources Center which provides a vast array of academic, teaching, and career resources and materials on sociology to members and non-members. These resourc-

es, including books, computer software, videos and films, syllabi sets, papers, and bibliographies, are available on a fee basis and include an impressive list of materials on feminist scholarship and curriculum transformation, as well as the sociology of sex and gender. A catalog of these materials may be obtained at the following address:

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The Center for Research on Women at the University of Memphis also maintains a collection of materials on feminist scholarship, including bibliographies, research papers, books, manuals, and videotapes. This center specializes in research on Southern women, women of color, race/class/gender issues, and education. For a complete list of publications, please write or call:

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The University of Memphis  
Memphis, TN 38152  
(901) 678-2770 Voice  
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### ***Professional Organizations***

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Mary French, Executive Officer  
062 Rike Hall



Wright State University

Dayton, OH 45435

Membership in this organization entitles one to subscribe to the SWS LISTSERV, an electronic discussion group that provides access to syllabi, recommended readings, etc.

American Sociological Association

1722 N Street NW

Washington, DC 20036

(202) 833-3410

Email: [Membership@MCIMAIL.COM](mailto:Membership@MCIMAIL.COM)

Society for the Study of Social Problems

906 McClung Tower

University of Tennessee

Knoxville, TN 37996-0490

(615) 974-3620

Email: [TomHood@utkvx.utk.edu](mailto:TomHood@utkvx.utk.edu)

Association of Black Sociologists

Dr. Ian Jacobs, ABS Membership Chair

Armitage Hall

Rutgers University-Camden

Camden, NJ 08102

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## About the Authors

Jacqueline Johnson is currently a doctoral candidate in sociology at North Carolina State University. Her research interests and published work include: economic development in the U.S. South (Tomaskovic-Devey, Donald and Jacqueline Johnson, 1995. "Southern Rural Economic Development and the Branch Plant/Local Firm Development Options." Southern Rural Development Center, Mississippi State, MS. Publication No. 197) and; gender and racial inequality among managerial, professional, and supervisory jobs ("Movin' On Up: Gender and Race Inequality in Professional, Managerial, and Supervisory Jobs." Master's Thesis, Unpublished). Her current research concerns job search and hiring processes ("Decisions, Decisions, Decisions: Race and Gender Inequality in Hiring Procedures." Unpublished paper).

Barbara J. Risman is an Associate Professor of Sociology at North Carolina State University, where she was also the Founding Director of Women and Gender Studies. Barbara has served as the Chair of the American Sociological Association's Sex and Gender Section, and the Chair of the Committee on the Status of Women. She has a forthcoming book titled *Gender Vertigo: Toward a Post-Gender Family* (Yale, 1997) in which she argues that gender must be re-conceptualized as a social structure, and one that currently retards feminist social change in intimate relationships. She is also one of the co-editors of a forthcoming edited work (Myers, Anderson, and Risman, Sage) titled *Feminist Transformations: Toward Transforming Sociology*. She is co-editor (with Judith Howard, Mary Romero, and Joey Sprague) of THE GENDER LENS book series (jointly published by Pine Forge and Sage).

She has published more than twenty articles, most of which focus on gender in American families. Her current research focuses on understanding the development of women's movements in post-Soviet Russia.

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## Publications of the National Center for Curriculum Transformation Resources on Women

### WOMEN IN THE CURRICULUM

The following publications consist of directories, manuals, and essays covering the primary information needed by educators to transform the curriculum to incorporate the scholarship on women. The publications have been designed to be brief, user friendly, and cross referenced to each other. They can be purchased as a set or as individual titles. Tables of contents and sample passages are available on the National Center Web page: <http://www.towson.edu/ncctrw/>.

➤ ***Directory of Curriculum Transformation Projects and Activities in the U.S.***

The *Directory* provides brief descriptions of 237 curriculum transformation projects or activities from 1973 to the present. It is intended to help educators review the amount and kinds of work that have been occurring in curriculum transformation on women and encourage them to consult project publications (see also *Catalog of Resources*) and to contact project directors for more information about projects of particular interest and relevance to their needs.

386 pages, 8½ x 11 hardcover, \$30 individuals, \$45 institutions, ISBN 1-885303-07-6

➤ ***Catalog of Curriculum Transformation Resources***

The *Catalog* lists materials developed by curriculum transformation projects and national organizations that are available either free or for sale. These include proposals, reports, bibliographies, workshop descriptions, reading lists, revised syllabi, classroom materials, participant essays, newsletters, and other products of curriculum transformation activities, especially from those projects listed in the *Directory*. These resources provide valuable information, models, and examples for educators leading and participating in curriculum transformation activities.

(Available fall 1997)

➤ ***Introductory Bibliography for Curriculum Transformation***

The *Introductory Bibliography* provides a list of references for beginning curriculum transformation on women, especially for those organizing projects and activities for faculty and teachers. It does not attempt to be comprehensive but rather to simplify the process of selection by offering an "introduction" that will lead you to other sources.

15 pages, 6 x 9 paper, \$7, ISBN 1-885303-32-7

➤ ***Getting Started: Planning Curriculum Transformation***

*Planning Curriculum Transformation* describes the major stages and components of curriculum transformation projects as they have developed since about 1980. Written by Elaine Hedges, whose long experience in women's studies and curriculum transformation projects informs this synthesis, *Getting Started* is designed to help faculty and administrators initiate, plan, and conduct faculty development and curriculum projects whose purpose is to incorporate the content and perspectives of women's studies and race/ethnic studies scholarship into their courses.

124 pages, 6 x 9 hardcover, \$20 individuals, \$30 institutions, ISBN 1-885303-06-8

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➤ ***Internet Resources on Women: Using Electronic Media in Curriculum Transformation***

This manual gives clear, step-by-step instructions on how to use e-mail, find e-mail addresses, and access e-mail discussion lists relevant to curriculum transformation. It explains Telnet, FTP, Gopher, and the World Wide Web, and how to access and use them. It discusses online information about women on e-mail lists and World Wide Web sites. Written by Joan Korenman, who has accumulated much experience through running the Women's Studies e-mail list, this manual is a unique resource for identifying information for curriculum transformation on the Internet. Updates to this manual will be available on the World Wide Web at <http://www.umbc.edu/wmst/updates.html>.

*130 pages, 6 x 9 hardcover, \$20 individuals, \$30 institutions, ISBN 1-885303-08-4*

➤ ***Funding: Obtaining Money for Curriculum Transformation Projects and Activities***

This manual is intended to assist educators who lack experience in applying for grants but are frequently expected to secure their own funding for projects. The manual provides an overview of the process, basic information and models, and advice from others experienced in fund raising.

*150 pages, 6 x 9 hardcover, \$20 individuals, \$30 institutions, ISBN 1-885303-05-x*

➤ ***Evaluation: Measuring the Success of Curriculum Transformation***

This manual outlines several designs which could be used when assessing the success of a project. *Evaluation: Measuring the Success of Curriculum Transformation* is written by Beth Vanfossen, whose background in the teaching of research methods as well as practical experience in conducting evaluation research informs the manual's advice. Evaluation is an increasingly important component of curriculum transformation work on which project directors and others often need assistance.

*(Available fall 1997)*

➤ ***Discipline Analysis Essays***

Under the general editorship of Elaine Hedges, the National Center has requested scholars in selected academic disciplines to write brief essays summarizing the impact of the new scholarship on women on their discipline. These essays identify and explain the issues to be confronted as faculty in these disciplines revise their courses to include the information and perspectives provided by this scholarship. The series is under continuous development, and titles will be added as they become available. See order form for essays currently available.

*27 - 60 pages, 6 x 9 paper, \$7 each*

➤ ***CUNY Panels: Rethinking the Disciplines***

Panels of scholars in seven disciplines address questions about the impact on their disciplines of recent scholarship on gender, race, ethnicity, and class. The panels were developed under the leadership of Dorothy O. Helly as part of the Seminar on Scholarship and the Curriculum: The Study of Gender, Race, Ethnicity, and Class within The CUNY Academy for the Humanities and Sciences. For this seminar CUNY received the "Progress in Equity" award for 1997 from the American Association of University Women (AAUW).

*56 - 85 pages, 6 x 9 paper, \$10 each*

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Essays in this *Discipline Analysis* series, edited by Elaine Hedges, summarize the impact on specific disciplines of the new scholarship on women. Written by scholars in the disciplines, these essays identify and explain the issues to be confronted by faculty in individual disciplines as they revise their courses to include women. Each essay provides a valuable bibliography, frequently with a separate listing for internet resources.

### Publications available in **WOMEN IN CURRICULUM** series

- Directory of Curriculum Transformation Projects and Activities in the U.S.
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33

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