

Feminist Scholarship Review

Psychology at Trinity in Literature and Life



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INTRODUCTION

Inside the classrooms of Trinity College, students learn about discoveries made by famous psychologists such as Freud, Jung, Gardner, and Pavlov. But issues of psychology affect the everyday lives and experiences of students on the campus as well. Whether inside or outside of the classroom, some of the most interesting studies of mentality and behavior are those focused on gender. Both in theory and in reality, gender differences and gender tensions create a struggle for balance and introduce new obstacles to overcome when traditions or institutions are expanded.

In his article “The Transition From an All Male to a Co-Educational College: A Dean’s Recollection,” past Dean and present Professor of Psychology David Winer explores how some of these gender tensions played out on Trinity’s campus in the late 1970’s. The decision to make the College a co-educational institution created some surprising issues that Professor Winer reflects on as an interesting study in gender psychology. His observations demonstrate that the studies of esteemed psychologists begin as small-scale reflections on how change affects human behavior.

On the other side of the process, small-scale studies have potential to become the groundwork for the theories of gender that are most prominent in the field of psychology. Professor of English Dianne Hunter explores one such prominent theory in her article “Oedipus Complex Can Be Replaced.” Although Hunter gives proper respect to Freud’s theory, she also raises the question of how applying his theory to modern day women changes the groundwork of his frame of thought. She considers in her argument the work of Juliet Mitchell, whose book, Psychoanalysis and Feminism, suggests that the potential end of the patriarchal tradition challenges, and possibly refutes Freud’s Oedipal complex theory.

Regardless of whether one is learning psychology through literature or through experience, the fact that traditions and structures are constantly changing must be taken into account. Psychology, like any other science, is forever shifting and growing with experimental and ideological discoveries. Both David Winer and Dianne Hunter emphasize the importance of acknowledging these changes, and embracing the possibilities they present.

Nicole Riendeau and Jillian Rutman

The Transition From an All Male to a Coeducational College: A Dean's Recollection

David Winer*

"Bob, please remember to euthanize the rats this evening as the research has been completed." It was the end of spring classes in 1969 and I had requested my top research assistant, a graduating senior, to dispose of the research animals at year's end. I thought no more about my request until the following morning when I was informed that about three dozen white rats had been deposited on the second floor of North Campus to scare the "girls" who lived there. There were approximately twenty-five women exchange students from Vassar College at Trinity as the College's first formal introduction to becoming a coeducational college, and frightening them was not on my radar screen as a way to improve their image of the all-male institution (1).

There were many female students in my classes over the succeeding years, as psychology became a more popular major with the admission of women to Trinity. I welcomed coeducation, as did most faculty; it broadened the intellectual and academic horizons of the College. But, there were a few of my colleagues who were unhappy with the changes, and they were less receptive than the majority. There were reports in later years from alumnae of the mid and late seventies how a few of their male professors were condescending to them in class (2). I do recall one disgruntled male faculty member maintaining that, "The last bastion of male hood has been invaded, and I don't like it." He resigned from Trinity shortly thereafter.

In 1976, when Trinity had been coeducational for less than a decade, I became Dean of Students. There were a number of administrative offices reporting to me, and it was immediately obvious that some of them, including the counseling center, campus safety, and the chapel, were populated exclusively by males except for female secretaries.

The need for a full-time woman counselor (as well as women in other senior positions) was clear to me but not to many others and, in fact, some data was used to persuade the College that the need for a woman counselor did not exist. The Medical Office retained an all male gynecological group that I was able to change in 1980 as the result of the forward looking of the chair of the Board of Trustees, Dr. George Starkey, as well as President Theodore Lockwood.

In 1977 Lockwood had established the President's Special Council on Women and, as dean of students, I was part of that group. I was either the only male or one of a couple of men early on and remained part of the council for twenty-two years. The Council concerned itself with everything from needed structural changes to accommodate women to developing programs that would bring women into complete equality with their male counterparts. It was also in 1977 that the Women's Center was established. The reporting structure was specifically designed so that it was a truly egalitarian operation. It did not report to me but I was pleased to be part of the organization. In those early years the Women's Center focused primarily on issues that women, students, and faculty, might

encounter in a previously all-male college. The Center has always been in Mather Hall, and has moved rather recently from the third floor out-of-the-way location to a more central venue.

My major concern as dean, to accommodate women, beyond the programmatic and structural changes made by Trinity, e.g., establishment of a Women's Studies major, never housing women on the first floor of dormitories, greater security personnel required to ensure the physical safety of women, etc. was to be available as a counselor, as an advocate, a person in whom a confidence could be held as the country as well as the College began to undertake the process of treating women as equals to men. We had a lot to do including, as examples, confronting the issues of sexual harassment and assault, having appreciation for women in student and faculty leadership roles, recognizing subgroups of women within the student body, such as women of color, and establishing the ambiance of a fully coeducational institution, not a men's college with some women present. Some of the changes occurred rather smoothly, but many were bumpy and sometimes required revision. I am pleased that for many years now the College has had in place a number of policies and regulations, based upon Titles VI, VII, and IX, which prohibit sexual discrimination in all its forms.

The problems brought to me by individual women ran the gamut, and I doubt they varied much from any college that had previously been all male or even in those that were originally coeducational. Many of the troubles stemmed from a male dominated society in which women were viewed as wives and mothers, stay at home women, women in their roles as nurses and teachers, and, most of all, women as sex objects.

Although most College social events were open to all, some Greek societies held invite-only parties, particularly on weeknights. Many women students, if interested in attending one of these gatherings, were placed at the disadvantage of having to ask brothers for an invite. Often, when approached by a woman in whom the brother had no interest, he would often say that he had none left. However, if asked by another woman who was considered desirable, the same brother would offer her an invite. Thus, fraternity brothers controlled some of the events, and some women students invested much energy in being considered attractive. This process maintained the two-tiered, male-dominated culture seen in the larger society, and pitted the non-discrimination policies against the freedom to associate mentality.

The College publishes a student handbook each year and, until the early nineties, included not only the names, addresses, and secondary schools of all the freshmen, but also their pictures. It was evident that many male students, particularly upperclassmen, viewed the women's pictures, assessed them for their appearance and, depending often on a ranking, would either pay lots of attention to them or ignore them completely. The social pressure on female freshmen was intense. So, in 1992, I removed the handbook pictures so that, at least in my mind, the freshmen women could have a couple of weeks to become accustomed to the social scene prior to the onslaught of attention. One cannot tell if the picture removal, in fact, made a significant difference, but retrospective anecdotal comments by upperclass women led me to believe I had made the correct

decision. Interestingly, some male faculty complained that it was harder to learn students' names without any pictures to aid them. But no women faculty ever complained about the change.

One of the major complaints by female students over many years was related to the problem of "hooking up." For many, if not most women, sharing sexual intimacies with males brought particular difficulties when the assumptions about relationships between both parties were, in fact, not communicated but were often at variance between the man and the woman. The usual concern went something like the following: "John and I slept together two weeks ago. I thought we had a serious relationship, but I have not heard from him since that night, and I feel used." For those coeds who saw sexual activity as part of an overall relationship, the lack of contact was often extremely upsetting and led to feelings of being violated.

A relatively common problem between women roommates occurs when one of them decides to have a love interest remain overnight. There are a number of elements of conflict but two stand out. First, the other roommate is inevitably surprised that his or her roommate would be doing this. "I can't believe that it doesn't make any difference to her that someone else may be in the room. I would think they would want privacy. Besides, it really turns me off to be there at times like that." Second, there is the thoughtlessness on the part of the roommate who is hosting the guest. "She didn't even ask me if I would mind. I have as much right to live in the room she does. Where am I supposed to go? How does she know that I wouldn't want to stay up late studying?" Although Trinity, and certainly the vast majority of other colleges, has rules against coed living arrangements, it occurs in all forms, from the occasional situation mentioned above to the arrangement in which the love interest virtually moves in as a third roommate.

An added concern that occurred far more often after becoming coeducational had, and has, to do with friendships. It is dangerous to generalize, but female friendships that fail are usually more difficult for the parties to cope with than those that fail between males. The following is a specific instance of the challenge brought to the Dean's office. Jane (3), a sophomore, stopped in one day in early May to ask for an opinion on choosing an advisor for her recently declared major. I asked her about the "rest of her life" as I often did with students who meet to discuss academic issues. She noted her happiness living with Martha: "We have become like sisters this year. We are taking the same courses, involved in the same athletic teams, sharing our most intimate thoughts and feelings, and swapping clothes. It's like having two wardrobes." The friendship had become so close that it appeared to me that the two women had become terribly interdependent.

All appeared fine until Martha became the girlfriend of Jane's former boyfriend. It seemed that Martha and Sam had seen each other a few times over the summer at some social functions. Jane knew about this and was not at all disturbed by the meetings. After all, Martha and she were like sisters, they knew each other's feelings, and Sam had become a fixture as her boyfriend. Interestingly, what disturbed Jane the most was not the loss of Sam, but the loss of Martha and Martha's "presumption" that she could still wear Jane's clothing. This situation could have been worse had Jane mourned the loss of

Sam. But her dependency was focused on Martha and not on Sam. Jane dealt with this problem by focusing almost entirely on the issue of clothes rather than on her split with Martha. Swapping had become stealing in Jane's mind. Once Martha dropped Sam the two roommates rekindled their friendship very quickly. Although Jane and Martha's relationship had been restored, the deeper problem of excessive dependency on each other remained to be resolved.

The above anecdote attests to the complex relationship that some women often have with other women, and although this does not apply to all women and it sometimes does apply between men, the Dean's office had to learn that coeducation brought an additional dimension to the College that had, for the most part, not occupied their minds in the past.

Another new challenge erupted with the advent of coeducation, and that was the parents' expectations for their daughter's behavior versus the daughter's actual behavior. Parents, of course, worry about their sons, sometimes not enough, but the outward manifestations of their worry is almost always more vocal regarding their daughters than their sons. This led to more parental contacts with the dean's office. The dean, in turn, wanted to calm the parents while protecting the privacy of the daughter. Relying on the 1974 Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, often referred to as the Buckley Amendment, regardless of legal interpretation, never sufficed in my opinion. Most parents who call do so out of concern and anxiety about their daughter, and informing them that we couldn't tell them anything was neither sufficient nor wise. So, I had to develop a method to inform parents in ways that truly protected the daughter but relaxed the parent. This is an example of a major change at the College due to coeducation, but one that is not often thought about.

Another change required of the College, was to have sufficient numbers of professionals available to deal with conditions that, for the most part, affect women more than men, such as eating disorders, medical conditions peculiar to women, providing greater privacy in bathrooms, providing separate athletic center locker rooms, establishing varsity athletic teams, and broadening the food selection in the dining hall.

In conclusion, Trinity, by including women in its classes, learned how to engage the broader social world both within and beyond the campus. In some regards, it was certainly ahead of the curve; in others the progress was slow, uneven and, in general, happened in fits and starts. For most students, and certainly the College, the institution became a more progressive place, one that mirrored better the greater world and brought completeness to teaching the liberal arts. However, as much progress as has been made, neither Trinity nor the broader society can rest until there is complete gender equity.

*David Winer, Ph.D., has been a member of the Trinity Faculty since 1966. He was Dean of Students from 1976-1998 and Chief Student Affairs Office for twenty of those years. He is currently Associate Professor of Psychology and Dean of Students, Emeritus.

March 24, 2003

Notes:

(1) For a fuller history of Trinity College becoming coeducational, please see Knapp, Peter J. and Knapp, Anne H. Trinity College in the Twentieth Century: A HISTORY. Hartford: The Trustees of Trinity College, 2000.

(2) For the many other challenges facing undergraduate women at Trinity, please see Channels, Noreen. "Survey of the Trinity College Alumnae, Spring, 1990." Professor Joan Hedrick and Naomi Amos, the Director of Faculty Grants assisted Professor Channels in this endeavor.

(3) The names of the students have been changed to protect their privacy.

Oedipus Complex Can Be Replaced

Dianne Hunter

Juliet Mitchell's 1974 book Psychoanalysis and Feminism interprets the cultural significance of the Oedipus complex. For Freud, the Oedipus complex was the heart of the neuroses and the primary fact of civilization. Mitchell explains how it is key to social differentiation of the sexes, and argues that psychoanalysis is crucial to the uncovering of the contradictions both within the institution of the family and between the family and the fundamental structural demands of human culture.

Psychoanalysis and Feminism accomplishes an enormous task. It summarizes Freud's work on the psychology of the sexes through the fifty years of his writing; it refutes arguments made against psychoanalysis by radical and radical-feminist critics; and it proposes that the way to end father supremacy is to find out how it is psychologically transmitted and to expose the contradiction between family ideology and the material realities as post-industrial capitalism.

The Oedipus complex is the psychology of patriarchy. Under capitalism the psychology is conveyed by nuclear family relationships. Both sexes start out bound to the mother for food and love, and make an identification with her. This is the basis of constitutional bisexuality. The Oedipus complex introduces the law of the father (incest taboo) and enforces a differentiation of genders. "Feminine" and "masculine" for Freud are alternative modes of solving the problem of the father's privileged relation to the child's chief object of desire. To the child's mind, the father's phallus symbolizes his ability to connect with the mother. The girl realizes she is without this connector, and the boy, seeing the female's lack, fears the loss of his own. These, it must be emphasized, are the unconscious processes behind the psychological formation of the sexes. Girls are socialized to give up their pre-Oedipal attachment to the mother in favor of an affirmed identification with her. In an act of massive repression, girls convert their active sexuality to a passive aim. Freud says women are more bisexual than men because they have more to renounce in becoming "feminine." Boys retain their pre-Oedipal attachment (also repressed) yet defer to the father's phallic superiority, accepting a present symbolic castration for a future accession to the paternal role. The boy will inherit the father's place. The girl will symbolically compensate for the phallus she doesn't have by having a baby. She will be a reproducer.

The maintenance of the pre-Oedipal attachment through identification with the father is what is called "masculine." Substitution of the father for the mother as love object is what is called "feminine." This difference conventionally divides boys from girls. But Freud points out that boys can have "feminine" resolutions to their Oedipus complexes. Male children can maintain their pre-Oedipal identification with the mother and change their attachment to the father. And female children can maintain their attachment and take on a "masculine" identification. These identifications and attachments, and the childhood notions of castrations, do not require an actual father to be

enforced, they are part of the human social order. They are unconsciously acquired with the incest taboo that divides human kind from the animal world. What separates the sexes is what separates nature from culture. That is, moving from the pre-Oedipal to the Oedipal stage, each child recapitulates psychologically the initiation of human society.

Both Freud and anthropologist Levi-Strauss see the institution of the incest taboo as the origin of human civilization. Whereas Freud focuses on the familial content of the taboo (incest, father as law giver), Levi-Strauss sees the principle of exogamy as more fundamental. Exogamy means the regulated exchange of marriage partners between kinship groups, and the act of exchange is what holds any society together.

But there are other possible exchange objects: gifts, goods, money. The more primitive a culture in regard to its forms of work and production, the greater the importance accorded sex definitions since women-as-reproducers remain the chief items of exchange. As the productivity of labor develops, commodities assume primacy. Accumulation of wealth introduces the domination of economic exchange over exogamy, making the incest taboo structurally redundant. In the exploitation of surplus as capitalism, exchange between classes prevails over kinship structures. The exchange of labor-for-money between the working and the ruling class, not exogamy between clans, is the central structure holding society together. But women as reproducers of the workforce are economically essential. Thus, at the same time as the emancipation of women became structurally viable, the ideology of the patriarchal family reached a peak of intensity in the 19th century in the economic service of reproducing workers for the industrial revolution.

The nuclear family's replacement of the extended kinship system as the carrier of the incest taboo created an internal contradiction. If the family transmits the taboo, it also maintains the conditions for the perpetuation of the wish. The Oedipus complex is our version of exogamy; but it is also our version of incest. It intensifies natural biological relations at the same time that it forbids them. Enter neuroses, Freud, and the radical critics of the family. Mitchell thinks that patriarchy will ultimately fall apart with the exposure of the contradictions behind its ideology, but she shows that we cannot neglect the analysis for a dream.

Suggestions for Further Reading:

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Kurzweil, Edith, The Age of Structuralism: Levi-Strauss to Foucault (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

Levi-Strauss, Claude, The Savage Mind [1962] (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

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