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The Challenge and Necessity of Teacher Education Programs: Breaking the Cycle of Gender-Based Violence

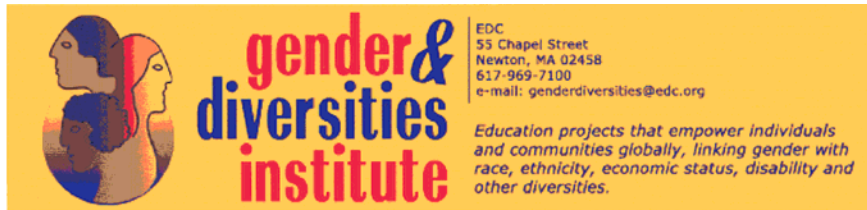
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As I have reflected on the presentation of this topic, and what focus it would take for me, it became quite clear that it is necessary to place a discussion of gender-based violence within a context of two key concepts – *culture* and *socialization* - in order that you understand the filter out of which my approach is founded and explored.

Culture is a dynamic system, ever changing, of the integrated, accepted, and patterned ways of life of a given people and society; the unique achievements, the ways of believing, doing, behaving, seeing, that distinguishes one group from the other. Culture is shared and learned. Culture defines who we are as an individual and as a people, holding alive our past, reflecting our values, and articulating our hopes. For me, multicultural education is an ongoing cultural awareness process that recognizes, respects and accepts the human dignity and cultural diversity of each individual, promoting an understanding of self and others. As process, multicultural education is a continual development of cultural awareness - an awareness that resides *within* the person's perception, attitudes, values, the hidden unconscious level of one's being, as well as within the external factors of content, curriculum, and materials. Culture structures and shapes our perceptions, conditioning each one of us to view the world around us, people, events, experiences, through a certain lens, frame of reference, or viewpoint.

Triandis (1972), in his book, *The Analysis of Subjective Culture*, confirms my belief that the internal elements of culture must not be ignored, when he introduces us to the differences between objective and subjective culture.

Objective culture, he explains, refers to the visible, tangible components of a culture and may include such things as the artifacts of a people, foods, and even names given to



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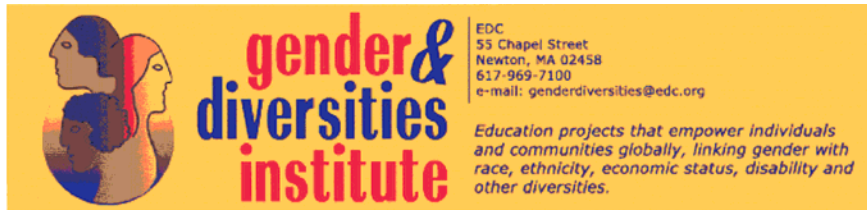
them. It is relatively easy to pick up, analyze, and hypothesize about the use and meaning of the objective components of culture. Yet, *subjective* on the other hand, refers to the invisible, less tangible aspects of a people, and includes such things as a people's values, perceptions, attitudes, norms of behavior, and roles they adopt. Triandis states: "It is often very difficult to verbalize elements of subjective culture as these things generally occur in people's minds. Most people lack the necessary vocabulary and have little practice speaking about such things...most problems people experience in cross-cultural communication occur at the level of subjective culture."

Further, Triandis likens culture to the image of an iceberg – where only 10% of the whole is seen above the surface, the objective culture, while the subjective culture, the deeper layer is the 90% of the iceberg that lies hidden beneath the surface.

I believe, like the iceberg image of Triandis, that the most meaningful part of culture is the invisible or 'subjective' component... that is the unconscious level of who we are that shapes our perceptions, attitudes, values... this critical internal dimension that forms/informs people's sense of self, assumptions, expectations, and roles in society. Culture, therefore, establishes not only the tangible, visible elements one readily sees, but also the less tangible, subtle norms of what is viewed as acceptable i.e., gender typical behavior.

The second concept that must be visited is that of socialization... that critical process of learning those social norms of a culture. Through this process, we internalize the expectations, the functions of the social and cultural roles in our society. We are socialized according to the integrated patterns of the culture in which we are raised. By observation and participation, we acquire this knowledge and these attitudes through a number of socializing agents (i.e., the school, teachers, church leaders, community members, family, peers, media, technology, athletic figures, the military, colleagues) all who to one degree or another are mediators of the various cultural attributes, and influence deeply our perceptions and sense of identity. Thus, we learn... we are taught... we teach - girls will be delicate; and boys won't cry!

Kenneth Cushner (1999) in his book *Human Diversity in Action* explains, "gender is what it means to be male or female in a society, and gender roles are those sets of behaviors thought by a particular people to be "normal" and "good" when carried out by the



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assigned sex.” He challenges us to take a closer look at some of the generalizations regarding gender role socialization in U.S. American society:

A Girl/Woman is Taught

- to do what she is asked
- to be pleasing to a man
- to hurt no one’s feelings
- to look good
- to be taken care of
- to compete for male attention
- to care for others before self
- to follow rules
- to let others make choices
- to be friendly, helpful

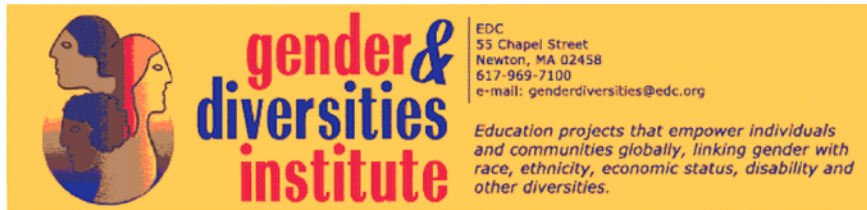
A Boy/ Man is Taught

- to control
- to score, to achieve
- to pursue goals, to take charge
- to discuss women’s bodies
- to be independent
- to take risks and challenges
- to be tough
- to make rules and decisions
- to put women on a pedestal
- to expect service from women

What is it we learn about being a girl...a boy in U. S. American culture? What is it that we teach about being a girl... a boy in U. S. American Culture/? How are the socially constructed roles ascribed to females and males in U. S. American society influencing and shaping a woman/man’s self-perception, self-worth, and sense of gender identity?

What might be the results... the consequences of such a socialization process? We must ask - What part are we playing in this socialization process as members of the educational system within society, particularly as teacher educators?

With this contextual framework before us, I would like to turn our attention to the heart of the matter, the definitions of the terms *Gender and Violence* as seen through the lens of the U. S. American culture. The U. S. American culture views gender in a *limited* way... all human beings are either female or male... with no room for any alternative form. The term *GENDER* is used to describe those traits of women and men that are socially constructed, different from the biological distinctions i.e., sex characteristics that denote female and male. An individual is born female or male, but through the socialization process learn what it is to be girl and boy... woman and man... one is taught the appropriate behaviors, attitudes, and roles of being female and male in one’s society. These roles change over time and vary widely within and between cultures, yet one learns quickly the consequences and results of nonconformity. These learned traits influence



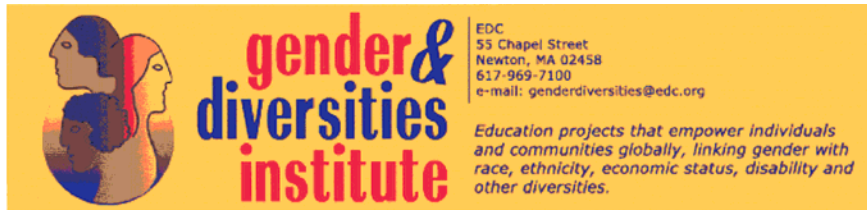
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one's sense of gender identity, self-esteem, and determine one's choices, social place and status in their society.

The accepted notion of the term “the opposite sex” in U. S. American culture is based solely on anatomy, and is in itself an artifact/tangible element of the U. S. American society's rigid perception of sex roles. Thus, an individual described as “the berdache” in some Native American cultures, who does not fill a society's standard male role and would be more accurately characterized as an androgynous person with clearly recognized, accepted social status, serving as mediator between women and men and occupying an acceptable alternative gender role... would be considered in the eyes of some in the U. S. American culture as abnormal, aberrant, and deviant...someone who most likely would be the recipient and victim of violence.

We know that violence takes many shapes and forms. For me violence is the implicit, explicit put downs aimed at another in order to divest someone of a sense of self-worth, and strip one of human dignity and respect. Violence could take the form of name-calling, bullying, harassment, intimidation, and/or abuse. No matter what form, violence is a malicious misuse and manipulation of power. How may gender-based violence be manifested in the U. S. American culture? Let us take a look at two authors who delve into gender role socialization in order to see what they discovered “below the surface.”

Reviving Ophelia (1994) written by Mary Pipher, a clinical psychologist, describes the dangers of being young and female in U. S. American society. In her work she has discovered that “something dramatic happens to girls in early adolescence. Just as planes and ships disappear mysteriously into the Bermuda Triangle, so do the *selves* of girls go down in droves... studies show that girl's IQ scores drop and their math and science scores plummet. They lose their resiliency and optimism and become less curious and inclined to take risks. They lose their assertive, energetic and “tomboyish” personalities and become more deferential, self-critical, and depressed.” Pipher likens the plight of young adolescent girls in the U. S. American culture to Ophelia, the young adolescent girl who “when she falls in love with Hamlet, she lives only for his approval. She has no inner direction; rather she struggles to meet the demands of Hamlet and her father. Her value is determined utterly by their approval. Ophelia is torn apart by her *efforts to please*.” As you are familiar with the story, Hamlet spurns Ophelia because she is an obedient daughter...she is overcome with despair and eventually chooses to drown herself. So too, some young adolescent girls, due to the pressures they experience to



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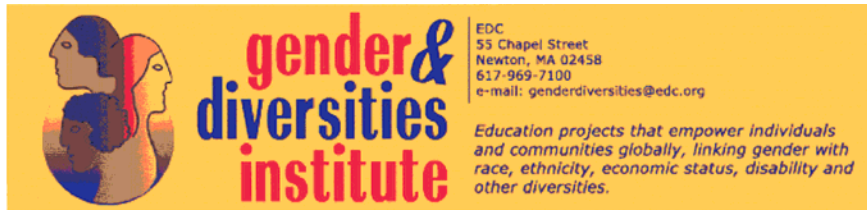
conform to the socially constructed roles ascribed to them as female in U.S. American society, lose themselves, lose their voice, become fragmented, draw inward, and some figuratively...others literally choose to die. This is gender-based violence, in one of its many forms!

It is a surprise to some that the plight of young boys in U. S. American culture may be just as detrimental. William Pollack (1998) in his book *Real Boys* discovered the “myths of boyhood” and the need for our boys to be rescued from the “mask of masculinity.” He explains that from a young age “boys learn the boy code.” In a study entitled “Listening to Boys’ Voices” boys stated they learned that they must “keep a stiff upper lip,” “not show their feelings,” “act real tough,” “be cool.” You hear in these words the pressure of conforming to the strict rules that society placed on them, and the fear instilled in them if they were even to consider breaking the code. What young boys learn and absorb through the socialization process is the heart of the “Boy Code” – be stoic, strong, independent, be tough, be aggressive, be mean, dominate, and control. Never let your feelings show. There is no room for “sissy stuff.” And if you fail to conform, society is visibly right there to ridicule, taunt, insult, intimidate, erode the core of self-esteem, and leave you to be a man and suck it up. This is violence, in one of its many forms!

The task before us as developers/implementers of Teacher Education Programs may be perceived as daunting if seen as the responsibility of *one* individual... the dean... the chairperson, the director... the faculty member with a multicultural specialization. The preparation of our teacher educators, as sensitized multicultural persons, must be the fundamental, life-giving, collaborative endeavor of *all* constituencies within the Teacher Education Program.

So, what does this entail? How do we bring to the surface the 90% of the hidden, unconscious, unspoken dimension of culture...the perceptions, attitudes, values, stereotypes underlying what ultimately images, shapes, molds the sense of identity i.e. gender identity of each member of the society? Where do we start in our teacher preparation programs in order to break the cycle of the malicious manipulation of power... specifically, gender-based violence?

Let us keep the adage before us – you can’t give, what you don’t have! We, the Faculty of the School of Education, Northeastern University, USA, the *who* of the Teacher Preparation Program must begin with ourselves. *Individually*, we need to become aware of our cultural history, or what I call my cultural baggage, the invisible, unconscious



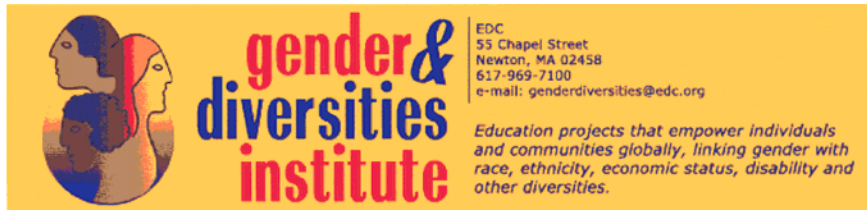
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cultural casing we carry throughout the day, throughout life, that has shaped and shapes who we are in relation to our microcultural memberships i.e., gender, sexual orientation, race, socioeconomic class, ethnicity, beliefs, language, as well as in relation to the broader national, macrocultural society. We must acknowledge and affirm our self-concept and gifts; we must understand and confront our misconceptions, prejudices, biases, stereotypes; we must be willing to take the risk to reframe our lens, change our frame of reference, and see through a new awareness, a culturally sensitized lens.

But even beyond this, we need to intentionally set aside time to come together *collectively*, on an ongoing basis, and converse with one another, get to know one another's ideas, interests, professional competencies, and reflect upon who we are as an educational community of learners... aware and willing to be a visible, personal and professional model of cultural diversity...symbolizing the diversity within our microcultural memberships i.e., gender, race, age , socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, beliefs, language. We must be authentic and 'walk the talk,' be who we say we are, do ourselves what we require of our students, our community/school partners through examining the following:

- Our own perceptions for stereotypic thinking that is our image of female/male and alternative forms of gender i.e., gay, lesbian, bisexual
- Our language, verbal and nonverbal, for violent, oppressive, debasing expressions
- Our demeanor and deportment for attitudes, perhaps unconscious and unintentional, that might insult, humiliate and intimidate

This year, as part of our effort to revise the Teacher Education Program at Northeastern, Jim invited the Faculty of the School of Education to engage in a full day of Retreat where we would take a closer look at our Mission Statement, and how this impacts our work individually and collectively. An outcome of this Retreat Day was an awareness of the need for faculty to get to know one another personally and professionally ...who we are, what we do, our areas of interest and expertise, and how this influences and shapes our planning, teaching, our relationship with one another and with our community/school partnership sites. We have begun the journey by making it a priority as an educational learning community to gather monthly just for this purpose. As we come to a common sense of who we are and what we value, as we work collaboratively toward creating a reflective, respectful, nonviolent, bias-free learning environment and teacher preparation program...our interactions, our nonverbal language, our outward demeanor will speak of authenticity, integrity, and human dignity.

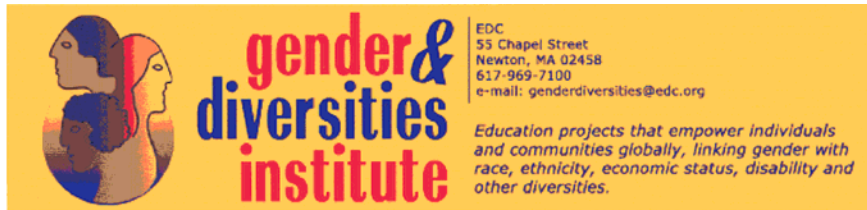


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And therefore, the students in our teacher education program, the various Colleges within Northeastern University, and our community/school partners, will know that we are true to our word...our credibility is visible and viable! In our *Teacher Education Program* and *throughout our courses*, in *our hidden curriculum and our content curriculum*, we, the Faculty of the School of Education, will reflect in our membership and develop in our program:

- An integration of multicultural competencies, especially gender sensitive principles within our program and courses (as Jim articulated, not a token add-on course) but a philosophy, a framework out of which we teach and deliver all our courses.
- A set of practical, relevant gender-awareness techniques that faculty members, from their areas of expertise and reflective practice, bring to faculty forums for an assessment of their effectiveness, and an identification of multiple-ways of implementation.
- An intentional planning of relevant opportunities and experiences that engages our education students in reflective dialogue and practice, within our courses and our cooperating sites, which speak to the prevention of gender-based violence in our classroom/school environments.
- A culturally responsible, collaborative approach to the supervision of our student teachers/interns within their field-based experience. This is the “real world” where we bridge the gap between theory and practice. This is where the responsibility of the University supervisor is to be “another set of eyes”... keen to observe the classroom interactions and/or the instructional strategies utilized that may implicitly or explicitly foster gender-based violence, and with a firmness and respect, be ready to identify, articulate, and provide practical feedback, alternative responses, relevant suggestions, and bias-free instructional practices.

The availability and accessibility of current, relevant, multicultural resources i.e., books, journals, videos, software, hands-on materials etc. for the personal, professional development of our faculty and students, as well as resources for classroom application that will be housed within an identifiable on-campus location. Presently, at Northeastern, we are in the process of doing just that, restructuring and updating our Educational Resource Center located within the University Library.



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Since the implementation of Title IX in 1972, cultural diversity, especially the area of gender equity in the United States, has received substantial attention in K-12 education. Now is the time for our School of Education Faculty within the Teacher Education Program to take up the gender equity challenge... to see through a multicultural lens, to ask the critical, sometime difficult questions, and to address and integrate gender sensitive issues within our *hidden* and content curriculum in order to break the cycle of gender-based violence.

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