

WOMEN VS. WOMEN'S STUDIES

By Malcolm A. Kline

American colleges and universities have been introducing, and even institutionalizing, women's studies programs during the past three decades. Ironically, these programs themselves may not be popular with coeds, mostly because college girls seem to notice a disconnect from reality in their course offerings and output.

"Nearly every elite campus we cover features some sort of 'women's center'-typically dominated by radical feminists or lesbians," John Zmirak, editor of *Choosing the Right College*, notes. The Ford Foundation itself funds hundreds of these programs. American taxpayers underwrite thousands more. At the same time, the percentage of women identifying themselves as feminists has plummeted over the past decade and a half: where self-professed feminists were in a majority of women polled in 1990, today about one-quarter of females surveyed accept that label.

Some campuses have Women's Studies departments. On still others, the courses are an interdisciplinary effort cobbled together from various sociology and humanities classes. Researcher Melana Vickers found

that the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill spends about \$400,000 in taxpayer funds on its women's studies program for 14 undergrads majoring in the field. "My question is, what would

I do with a women's studies degree other than work at the Carolina Women's Resource Center?," Kat Rodgers, a UNC-Chapel Hill junior asks.

We can see that Rodgers is not alone at UNC-Chapel Hill. Vickers found that women's studies were about as popular with distaff undergrads in sev-

eral other University of North Carolina branches as well.

"When the Mel Gibson/Helen Hunt film *What Women Want* came out several years ago, a colleague who teaches 'Gendered Communication' told me that she was surprised to discover that many of her students—both males and females—thought the film not only was a humorous portrayal of men and women, but also accurately captured their natural and very different motivations and desires," Professor Gwen Brown says. "My colleague was shocked and dismayed."

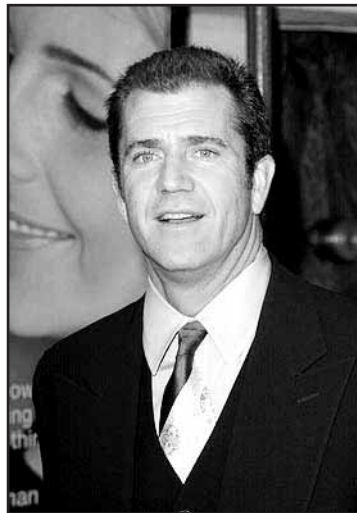
"Didn't they understand, she fretted, that this film plays into and fosters the most negative

stereotypes of men always thinking about sex and women always focusing on how appealing they are to men?" Dr. Brown, an associate professor of communications at Radford University in Virginia, spoke at the annual meeting of the Virginia Association of Scholars (VAS) in Charlottesville.

"I asked my colleague what she would think if her students were correct," Dr. Brown remembers. "That is, what if men and women truly were different in their preferences and predilections and what if it were the case that the differences between them were a result of their sex, their nature as male and female, and not a result of learned behavior?"

"Her response was at once a question and an exclamation; 'are you serious?'" The cadre of professors who teach courses with titles like 'Gendered Communication' are, of course,

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dead serious, even when they are publishing unintentionally comic academic articles, as columnist Mike Adams has observed.

Recently, Michigan State University sociologist Linda Kalof and two of her grad students banged out a study entitled "Animals, Women and Weapons: Sexual Boundaries in the Discourse of Sports Hunting." Their research for the paper consisted of reading 15 issues of *Traditional Bow Hunter* cover to cover.

"In the U.S. cultural landscape, the language of hunting is a discourse of patriarchy," the authors write. "Hunters' attitudes and actions toward social and natural objects (weapons or hunted prey) are constructed by a combination of experiences and absorbed cultural messages that validate and exacerbate white male dominance and power."

"Further, the cultural construction of hunting as rooted in a symbolic system that values predation and dominance conjoins hunting and sex with women and animals."

Among the author's other findings:

- "Violence against animals and women is linked by a theory of 'overlapping but absent referents' that institutionalizes patriarchal values."

- "The murder of a family dog is common in domestic violence; in such cases, the absent referent is the abused woman."

- "The underlying messages of the sexualization of weapons in *Traditional Bow-Hunter* cannot be dismissed simply as a hoax. They are resilient popular culture images that celebrate and glorify weapons, killing, and violence, laying the groundwork for the perpetuation of attitudes of domination, power, and control over others."

Perhaps the intellectual arm of the feminist movement focuses on ersatz phenomena because actual trends work against them.

Percentage of women polled who identify themselves as feminists:
1990-50%
1995-30%
2000-25%

Note: Percentages are rounded figures drawn from graphs
Source: Dr. David Armor and Ph.D. candidate Sarah Maxwell of George Mason University

This might have a ripple effect on women's studies enrollment as well. It is hard for women to think of themselves as a repressed minority when they can look around their own campuses and see that they are a majority.

"A recurring issue in the gender debate is whether men and women are treated equally in education and in the workplace," Dr. David Armor said at the VAS annual conference. "Recent research shows that gender equity has become a much smaller issue

in the 21st Century."

Dr. Armor is a professor of public policy at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. He based his comments on research conducted by one of his recently graduated students—Sarah Maxwell, now a lecturer at the University of Arizona. Both the professor and his protégée discovered that:

- "According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, males and females score about the same in math, but women score higher in reading."

- "During the 1970s and 80's men generally had higher college graduation rates than women, but the gap was eliminated by 1995 and, as of 2002, women had passed men in college graduation rates."

- "With respect to degrees in science and engineering and especially higher degrees, women have closed the gap in most fields and now hold the

majority of Bachelor and Master Degrees in the natural sciences, psychology and the social sciences." (They still lag behind in the other sciences and engineering but they are closing that gap as well.)

- "There is still a gap in annual earnings, although even here the gap closed considerably between 1970 and 1995."

The pivotal point in this history came in the early 1970s. In other words, you can trace the feminization of higher education

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to the Vietnam War. "In 1969, when President Nixon ended graduate school deferments for the draft, it led Ivy League graduate and law schools to recruit women," remembers Dr. Lillian BeVier, a law professor at the University of Virginia. When Dr. BeVier graduated from law school in 1965, she was one of only five women in the graduating class. Now she finds herself part of another minority.

"I'm not stereotypical," Dr. BeVier said at the VAS conference. "I'm not left as most women in academia are and most women in law school are." Dr. BeVier may have hit on a key reason why women's studies courses are mushrooming in inverse proportion to the number of female students who actually take them.

"Sarah Maxwell concluded that the great progress women have made in education and the workplace have caused the women's movement to lose

steam," Dr. Armor reports on his Ph.D. candidate's dissertation. "Correspondingly, she shows that the membership in women's movement organizations has declined considerably."

As described to a fare-thee-well by Professor Steven Rhoads, also of UVA, what is happening is that the custodians of women's studies are fighting reality. It is a contest that they cannot hope to win.

Dr. Rhoads pointed out at the VAS meeting that just about every survey of women shows that the basic premises of the feminist intelligentsia are wrong:

- In a survey of 40-year-old women who have never had children, two-thirds of the ladies polled say they wished that they had had children.

- When the father works long hours, the kid's grades go up.

- When the mother works long hours, the kid's grades go down.

- When the father likes his job, the kid's grades go up.

- When the mother likes her job, the kid's grades go down.

Believe it or not, Dr. Rhoads' book, *Taking Sex Differences Seriously*, is used as a text in 70 schools. On his home campus, he finds that he has gotten off extraordinarily easily in light of the politically incorrect nature of his work.

"I only had one cartoon ripped off my door," Dr. Rhoads said at the VAS meeting. "In the cartoon, one woman with her feet up in the air sitting down says to another woman with her feet up in the air relaxing, 'What I'm really looking for is a man who is sensitive in general but macho in emergencies.'"

Malcolm A. Kline is the executive director of Accuracy in Academia

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DIRECTOR'S CORNER

By Malcolm A. Kline



January, 2006

Dear Reader,

Happy New Year! We are being ably aided and abetted by a new staff writer named Julia A. Seymour. Julia comes to us from the Leadership Institute and has been with us since the Thanksgiving holidays ended last year. You will be seeing her articles in upcoming issues of this publication. Julia got off to a running start covering two raging controversies for our web site—www.campusreportonline.net. On that site, you can read the information Julia unearthed on the higher and lower education establishment's attempts to censor both Christmas and criticism of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution.

Speaking of censorship, I write this one day after participating in a conference call with a state representative from Pennsylvania. State Rep. Gibson Armstrong, R-Lancaster, is crafting an Academic Bill Of Rights (ABOR) modeled after the proposal made famous by legendary author and activist David Horowitz. The other participants in the conference call were Don Francis and Mary Young of the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities in Pennsylvania (AICUP), Peter Teague, the president of Lancaster Bible College (LBC), and Dick Fox, a trustee of Temple who works with Mr. Horowitz. Of the quartet, only Mr. Fox supported the ABOR and saw a problem with the way in which higher education is delivered to consumers.

The remaining trio saw a problem with ABOR. Without me, then, the line-up against ABOR would have been three to one. Dr. Teague averred that LBC has no problems with bias or indoctrination. Dr. Francis and Ms. Young adamantly did not want the private colleges and universities in their association covered by an ABOR. I asked Dr. Francis and Ms. Young how many of the 83 private colleges and universities in AICUP receive no government funding. They could name only one—Grove City College.

Neither of them would admit to a problem in academia until Mr. Fox and I gave our evidence. "I'm sure there is indoctrination from the left and the right," Dr. Francis said. I challenged him to show me one case of right-wing indoctrination on a campus. "Well, my suspicion is there is," he said. I pointed out to him that others have shared that suspicion with me but could not provide verifiable facts when I tried to investigate their hypotheses. Participating in meetings such as this one is one way in which Accuracy in Academia tries to provide a check and balance on the higher education establishment.

As you have doubtless concluded from reading our dispatches, the Ivory Tower needs adult supervision. With your help, we try to provide it. Thank you for all the support which you have given us. We appreciate all the help you can give us.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mal Kline", written in a cursive style.

Mal Kline
Executive director