
Women Across Cultures

A Global Perspective



Third Edition

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Preface



In the last twenty-five years, women's studies scholars embraced diversity when they realized that women's experiences are shaped by contextual and intersectional variables. This diversity is true not only in our own countries, but globally, and it tremendously influences gender equality efforts. Stimulated by the United Nations' Fourth Women's World Conference in 1995, other conferences, and by the Internet, awareness of the global diversity in women's experiences and equality struggles continues to grow. *Women Across Cultures: A Global Perspective* demonstrates this diversity and integrates it with feminist theory and practice. This global women's studies book documents women's low status and power, violations of women's human rights due to their gender, and hope in the form of courageous women organizing for change. This work addresses the diversity and similarity of women's experience worldwide. The book's content reflects the perspective that women's human rights and respect for cultural diversity are not mutually exclusive, and in fact, must go hand-in-hand.

In this book, I try to convey the scope of gender injustice and the contextual and intersectional factors that contribute to it. Chapter 1 orients readers to a cross-national, multicultural approach to women's studies and summarizes some basic women's studies concepts, and outlines four themes of global women's studies (gender inequality as a sociocultural, socially constructed phenomenon; activism and empowerment; a multicultural, contextual, intersectional approach; and women's rights as human rights). Chapter 2 provides an overview of women's status worldwide. In Chapter 3, I move on to a discussion of reproductive health and rights and their relationship to women's status and power. Chapter 4 focuses on women's sexuality and sexual rights. Women's unpaid and underpaid labor are discussed at length in Chapter 5 as causes and effects of women's lower power and status. Women and development is the focus of Chapter 6, with the emphasis on feminist critiques of traditional development approaches and feminist efforts to bring women into the development process. Chapter 7 is on the ways that globalization has reshaped women's lives worldwide. Chapter 8 presents feminist critiques of religion as well as women's efforts to reform and reconstruct religions. Although all of the chapters to some extent focus on women's empowerment, the final three look more closely at women's political efforts. Chapter 9 examines women in national politics, Chapter 10 examines women's gender equality movements, and Chapter 11 examines the transnational women's human rights movement.

I hope that readers will be struck by the scope of gender injustice but equally struck by the scope of women's resistance and the possibilities for change. Global women's studies can read like a study of women's victimization but in fact it is increasingly a study of women's empowerment cross-culturally. Throughout the book are many examples of women's actions—from the small grassroots effort, to the use of international law for attaining gender justice. These diverse actions demonstrate that there are many meanings of feminism based on the needs, issues, cultures, and goals of diverse women. Boxed material profiling activist women and organizations, and end-of-chapter websites further illustrate the scope of women's actions for gender equality. Opportunities for readers to take action are also provided at the end of each chapter.

There is a lot of information in the book. As a long-time teacher, I am sympathetic to students' concerns about how to read and master textbook content. To this end, I have included a number of pedagogical elements. Headings alert readers to upcoming content. Important terms and concepts appear in boldface in the text and appear in a glossary at the end of the book. To liven up the often technical and factual textual material, are thought-provoking quotes in the margin and examples of women's history. Figures graphically depict text concepts to help students pull out key themes. Each chapter includes boxed examples of feminist thought and action from all over the world, including activist profiles of individuals and groups. Study questions are listed at the conclusion of each chapter. Students may use these to make sure they understand the major points of the chapter and to structure the study of text material. Discussion questions and activities follow the study questions. These are intended to stimulate critical and creative thinking and discussion. Instructors may use these as assignments or for class discussion. The book's chapters are organized by issues rather than by country or region, but an appendix provides an overall sense of women's status on a country-by-country basis using economic, educational, and health indicators. Students can use this information as the basis for country or regional reports on the status of women. This information may be enhanced by use of the end-of-chapter informational and activist organization websites.

Changes from the Second Edition

This third edition of *Women Across Cultures* is the result of a major overhaul of the second edition. The introduction has been expanded to provide more of an orientation to global women's studies including the addition of four global women's studies themes. These themes (gender as a social construction; intersectionality and contextualization; women's activism and empowerment; and women's rights as human rights) are woven throughout the text. Several chapters are significantly different from the second edition. The chapter on reproductive rights is now on women's reproductive health and reproductive rights. The chapter on lesbians is now on women's sexuality and

sexual rights (although it still retains a focus on non-heterosexual women). The chapter on women's rights as human rights and the role of the UN in gender equality is now on women's transnational feminist movements and networks and the reciprocal relationship between the UN and transnational women's networks (although it retains a focus on women's human rights). All chapters were changed based on current trends and scholarship and all include more discussion questions and activities, and updated websites. All received statistical updates, which although tedious at times, provided the opportunity to see improvement on some key indicators such as literacy, political representation, and domestic violence legislation in the last five years. In the end, I hope the result is a readable text that inspires others to share my passion for global women's studies scholarship and feminist activism.

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