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Review

*Women's Studies Graduates:  
The First Generation*

by Barbara F. Luebke and Mary Ellen Reilly, New York: Teachers College Press, 1995. 207pp.

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REVIEWED BY ANN CHARLES

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The authors of this book address the question "What can I do with a Women's Studies major?" by asking those who know, Women's Studies graduates. From the beginning, their idea was to "provide graduates a forum for speaking" (p. x). They ask graduates to discuss the impact of Women's Studies on their lives, both personally and professionally, and to offer advice to potential and current majors, faculty and administrators concerning Women's Studies programs. Luebke and Reilly felt particularly compelled to publish this work in light of funding cuts which affect Women's Studies and because of the backlash against feminism and Women's Studies programs. "It is critical that graduates be heard if Women's Studies faculty and administrators are to persuade officials that their discipline is essential in higher education" (p. x).

Chapter 1 gives an overview of the study and the graduates who participated in it. Eighty-eight women and one man responded to the authors' questionnaire. The respondents ranged in age from twenty to seventy, with the majority being in their twenties and thirties. The overview also includes information about race/ethnicity, family character-

istics, role models, geographic location, religious affiliation, educational history, occupations and income, and sexual orientation and relationships.

Chapter 2 discusses common reactions the graduates encounter when people hear that they are Women's Studies majors and how they respond to these reactions. Majors "must confront people's lack of information, misinformation, stereotypes, and misunderstandings about the discipline" (12). They must deal with people who criticize their major as narrow-minded, exclusive to women, and not a "real" major. They encounter people who have no knowledge of Women's Studies and those who think it is a set of classes which teach women how to cook and sew. Graduate Heather Moss says, "Often people make comments about the validity of Women's Studies as a major and dismiss it as a way 'a group of angry women can console one another and gossip' for college credit" (15). A few graduates admit to being worn down because of having to constantly defend their major; others have learned which battles to fight and which to let go. They save their energy for where they feel it will make a difference. And as to what they can do with their major, they respond that it has taught them to think critically and to analyze and question assumptions. It has given them knowledge in a number of disciplines, including but not limited to philosophy, ethics, religion, law, literature, art, psychology, science and history.

In Chapters 3-6, we get individual profiles of the respondents and their answers, mostly in their own words, to "Why did you major in Women's Studies" and "What was the personal and professional impact?" Here is where we get concrete

answers to "What can you do with a Women's Studies major?" Chapter 3 profiles graduates in a variety of professions. We hear from a communications consultant, an energy conservation manager, a union organizer, a yacht broker, an export business owner, a flight instructor, and a film-casting assistant. We also hear from artists, writers and graduate students. Chapter 4 profiles majors who have entered health, social and human services. Chapter 5 is devoted to those in education and library services and Chapter 6 to those in law and government.

As a reader who already has somewhat of an idea of what Women's Studies is and does, I found Chapter 7 rather interesting. In this chapter graduates give advice to majors and other students. They encourage others to try Women's Studies but they also warn that "this is not a program for the weak-spirited" (183). It is a personal and emotional journey. It demands an open mind and critical thinking. They advise that a major in Women's Studies may not necessarily be a career move; if you are concerned about a career or how your resume looks, some suggest a double major. They remind students that they should continually challenge their own ideas, those of the professors, those of other students, and those in the works studied in classes. Just because you are in a Women's Studies class does not mean you should stop questioning. One woman expresses concern that majors tend to stay in academia and don't go out and spread what they've learned to the rest of the world.

Speaking to faculty and administrators, the graduates address a number of important issues. They express concern that waiting until college to

start Women's Studies is waiting too long. Younger women, teenagers, should be involved in these classes. Also, Women's Studies should not be promoted as just for women but as for everyone who wants to understand oppression, have a wider scope of view and affect change. Graduates see a need for curriculum diversity which addresses issues of race, gender, class, age, and sexual orientation. One graduate asks for intergenerational classes. Another comments on the need to address anti-Semitism and to recognize religious women. Jill Tregor urges faculty to "make sure that students' own racism is challenged" (191). They recommend that theory be linked with practice inside and out of the classroom. Graduates also call for varying degrees of integration into the core curriculum while still keeping separate Women's Studies courses. It is impossible to discuss in this review all of the advice which the graduates put forth, but Chapter 7 is a valuable resource for those involved in Women's Studies. It is thought-provoking, and its inclusion in this book shows the authors' commitment to a serious discussion of what Women's Studies truly is.

In Chapter 8 the authors provide some conclusions which they draw from their study. Women's Studies graduates benefit from their education by gaining knowledge about the history and identity of women and about systems of oppression. They experience empowerment because of this knowledge. They gain self-confidence. They develop critical thinking skills and extensive writing and communication skills. They are introduced to and made familiar with a variety of perspectives and benefit from Women's Studies' interdisciplinary approach.

This book is an interesting, informative read. Although some of the profiles seem repetitive (approximately eighty of the eighty-nine respondents are profiled), the ideas more strongly impress the reader because they come directly from the graduates themselves. The book discusses real people and real experiences. As promised, the authors show their readers what a Women's Studies major can do for you and they also look at how a major could do more. This work is a good place to start for those who want to learn about Women's Studies, and check out the appendix at the end of the book to find further resources.