

How Higher Education “Studies” Men

In 2013, Stony Brook University (part of the SUNY system) revealed plans for a new “Center for the Study of Men and Masculinities.” Since I’m a Stony Brook grad, I was quite interested in this development. Would the new Center do anything to enhance the school’s reputation for scholarship?

I didn’t think it would, but the announcement of the ten advisory board members erased all doubt. Six were well-known women: feminist icon Gloria Steinem, actress Jane Fonda, author Eve Ensler (author of the play *The Vagina Monologues*) and leading women’s studies figures Madeleine Kunin, Catharine Stimpson, and Carol Gilligan, whose claims that girls were being denied their “voices” in education led to Christina Hoff Sommers’ book *The War Against Boys*.

Only four men were included: Martin Duberman, a queer studies historian, and three obscure individuals, psychiatrist James Gilligan (who is married to Carol Gilligan), physician Frank Ochberg, and Chris Howard, president of Hampden-Sydney College.

As I noted in [this piece](#), Steinem, Ensler, and the female academics had spent their careers preoccupied with women, not men. To put such a crew in charge of a center for men’s studies seemed like a joke—but is perfectly routine in today’s academy, where the few courses on male issues tend to be part of women’s studies and invariably view maleness exclusively through a feminist lens.

The Stony Brook center was to be run by sociology professor Michael Kimmel, [author](#) of *Angry White Men*, co-editor of an anthology about “pro-feminist men” and a protégé of men’s studies founder Robert W. Connell, who coined the term

“hegemonic masculinity,” had sex-reassignment surgery, and changed his name to Raewyn. The whole point of Connell’s discipline, as I wrote in my book [The Victims’ Revolution](#) (2012), “is that men are authoritarian bullies.”

It seemed clear from Stony Brook’s press release, in any event, that Kimmel’s center would be right out of the men’s studies playbook. In other words, we live in a patriarchal culture in which all men enjoy systemic privileges denied to all women, and the goal of any proper academic study of maleness should be to teach men to recognize and check their privilege and to dedicate themselves to helping women to achieve true equality.

In his press release, Kimmel announced that the center—founded with a grant from the MacArthur Foundation, with additional funds from the university and anonymous donors—would study men through “the prisms of feminist theory, multiculturalism and queer theory” and pursue dialogue “between academics and activists.”

Four years after its founding, I thought it might be worth checking in on Stony Brook’s men’s studies center. One glance at its [website](#) and I had a distinct impression that the whole thing has turned out just as foreseen: the first thing that greeted me was a slideshow of photos of Fonda, Steinem, a woman named Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka (“Executive Director of UN Women”), and, last but not least, Kimmel giving a TED [talk](#) entitled “Recruiting Men to the Cause of Gender Equality.”

In sum, it is an ideological rather than a scholarly project.

The center has held several seminars, among them a talk about “the need for further regulation on pornography” in the European Union. It has sponsored a [white paper](#), “Men as Allies in Preventing Violence against Women,” in which Bob Pease lays down the law: men should take part in such violence prevention, but because of their “dominance and privilege

and...structural gender inequalities,” they should play only “a supporting role...under women’s leadership” rather than seeking to be “leaders or equal partners.”

Pease makes another point: women deserve “women-only spaces,” but men-only spaces are *verboden*, because excluding women “reinforces the notion of male authority” and men “need to learn how to communicate outside of traditional frames of masculinity and male sociality.” (Pease, as it happens, is the author of a book called *Recreating Men*, which argues that men need to undergo fundamental change for the sake of women’s equality.)

The Men’s Center, in short, is not about *understanding* men’s psychological and emotional development and their personal and professional lives; it is about encouraging young men to feel guilty about being born male, to check their own natural male impulses and interests, to emulate (as best they can) the manners and mores of women, and to subordinate themselves, in all ways and all circumstances, to their female friends, relatives, and colleagues.

The center has a [blog](#), which is full of whining about “toxic masculinity” and about men’s lack of respect for women. After Trump’s election, it featured a [letter](#) addressed to “White Men.” It read, in part: “This is on us. And now it’s up to us to undo it. I keep hearing us say: ‘we’ll be fine.’... [But our] friends of color, our Native American friends, our Muslim friends and Latino friends, our LGBTQ friends and the women in our lives are not fine... They are afraid of what is to come. And they will be, and already are, under attack. If you’ve ever questioned the existence of the concept of privilege, being able to say ‘we’ll be fine’ is painful proof of its existence.”

One big piece of news from the blog is that the Center is in the process of developing the first MA program in masculinities studies. Stony Brook, it should be noted, is a

major international research university that turns out top-flight physicists, chemists, biologists, and engineers who make a real difference in this world. It is a puzzlement, and a disgrace, that this splendid institution should want to institute an advanced degree program in identity studies that involves not education but indoctrination and that doesn't prepare graduates to do anything other than spend their lives whining about gender inequality.

Other identity group "studies" at least purport to advance the cause of the group in question, even if through dubious scholarship. Stony Brook's version of men's studies, however, is about demonizing men and teaching them to knuckle under to women—this in a culture that already teaches boys that they're oppressors-in-training and potential rapists and where more and more young men skip college because they perceive campuses as anti-male environments.

Fortunately, there is an alternative to "Men's Studies." In 2010, in reaction to its ["denigration of maleness,"](#) as Rutgers anthropologist Lionel Tiger put it, several respected authors and scholars founded [Male Studies](#), which seeks to study male identity from non-ideological perspectives. But such courses are still rare at American institutions of higher education, where they face hostility from feminist faculty and administrators.

Case in point: Professor Dennis Gouws, who for several years taught a "Men in Literature" course at tiny Springfield College in Massachusetts. Then the campus feminists stepped in. As Peter Wood [wrote](#) in the *Weekly Standard* in May 2016, Gouws was dragged before administrators and accused of creating a "hostile environment." His course was canceled, and he was [placed](#) on "Official Warning Status."

This is the fate, mind you, of a professor at an obscure college who dared to offer a single undergraduate course that addressed men on their own terms.

Meanwhile, at Stony Brook, where the men's studies center is an entirely feminist-oriented operation, Michael Kimmel is a superstar, rubbing elbows with Jane Fonda and being cheered for talks in which he essentially apologizes for being male. All of that does nothing but degrade the academic standing of Stony Brook University and waste the money of New York taxpayers.

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