Are We There Yet?

Address for the 30th anniversary celebration
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Good evening to everyone. I'm truly honored to be part of this celebration, to see good friends and confirm the importance of this institute to the university and to all of us.

My title is taken from a common experience on family automobile vacation trips: hardly have you left the city limits of your home town than one of the children will ask "are we there yet?" The "we" tonight is all of us – women and men, in our country and around the world. In the aftermath of the election, we are deeply aware of the ways in which our country needs to move forward, we hope together, and the jagged divisions that make it difficult for us to do so. And the "there" in this journey that I'm especially concerned about tonight is a world in which gender contributes to human personhood and creativity without overly constraining individuals in stereotypical roles.

Are we there yet? The short answer is "no"; the more helpful answer is that we are in some demonstrable ways further along the road than we were when we last asked the question here at CROW and IRWG, in 1974 or 1984 or 1999, and that has to be good news.

This talk is dedicated to two friends who contributed enormously to research on women and gender, and thus to moving us ahead on this journey together. They were both crucial members of this community, and both died untimely deaths: Shelly Rosaldo and Susan Moller Okin. Their contributions are revealed as more and more important with every passing day; they were uncommon women, and we miss them greatly.

Celebrating our progress on the journey

First, a word about the journey we've taken over the last 30 years, the journey we celebrate tonight, by the Center for Research on Women and the Institute for Research on Women and Gender. These institutions have traveled an impressive road, and have, we believe, an even brighter future.

Those of us who were "present at the creation" in 1974 and the years immediately following envisioned a truly pioneering venture, radical for the time or indeed for any time in history. The Center for Research on Women brought together a large proportion of the active women scholars at Stanford (of which there were – and are – too few), and also some sympathetic men, to launch
research on women at a time when this topic was quite marginal to what serious people did. The scholars engaged in this research – faculty members, affiliated researchers, graduate students – were so excited about the enterprise that they reached out with missionary zeal and brought others into the fold. It was such an exhilarating place to be that even those of us with disciplinary expertise in entirely different fields (and that was true of almost everyone at that time) were caught up in the fervor, and had our lives and work transformed.

We played by feminist rules, which meant that we spent a great deal of time in discussion and consciousness-raising; not the most efficient way to get things done, but a great way to form close intellectual bonds. We made a successful bid for the editorship of SIGNs, which provided a wonderful opportunity to work together to help shape an emerging field. In 1980 CROW’s Task Force on the Study of Women at Stanford recommended the formation of an undergraduate Program in Feminist Studies. The choice of the name was contentious but deliberate, at a time when Women’s Studies Programs were being founded around the country; the university administration accepted the proposal nonetheless, as they had supported the founding of CROW. Alumnae returned to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Feminist Studies at Stanford in 2001.

As we were reminded in the faculty panel this afternoon, the work done across the years by researchers first at CROW and then at the Institute for Research on Women and Gender has fulfilled the hopes of the early pioneers, making a real difference in the world, exploring many different fields, prompting fruitful intellectual collaborations, opening up new areas of discovery. The Institute is now well established, involving many people as engaged scholars, associates, interested students and staff. It is one of hundreds of centers for research on women and gender around the world, having provided a template and shown the way. But there is more work to be done to establish the Institute on a firm financial footing, and the work of scholarship of course is never done.

Londa notes that one of the major areas of research that the Institute will be pursuing in the coming year is "how employing gender analytics has contributed to human knowledge." That's a very important, and very exciting, question. Thirty years ago, our goal was to get people in the university to pay significant attention to the lives and work of women; we've made a lot of progress towards that goal, but there is still a pernicious sense abroad that research on women and gender is a specialized niche that can be done well or badly but doesn't make much difference to the "real world" of mainstream scholarship, whatever that main stream may be in your particular discipline. Those of us here tonight know that isn't true, but we're having a hard time convincing some of our colleagues, and making this case clearly will be a significant contribution.

Thus, as far as IRWG is concerned, we are not "there yet," but we are impressively far along the way. The leaders and supporters across the decades who have made this happen deserve our celebration, and our gratitude. Yet none of us is ready to declare victory and go home, in the sense of believing that all gender problems have been solved, we know all we need to know about these topics, there are no special challenges left, so we can go on to other things. Far from it: the depth and importance of the work that lies ahead is at least as breathtaking as what we faced in the mid-70s, and that opportunity and challenge is what we celebrate tonight.
The journey in the larger world

I am well aware that the whole image of a "journey" as a way of discussing gender issues may be problematic. How do we know we are heading anywhere, rather than just going around in circles or wandering aimlessly through the wilderness? And how can we plausibly speak of "we" when there are so many different human beings with lives that overlap only in the most marginal -or the most basic – ways?

I do believe that there are ways in which progress for women in general terms can be measured, and I believe that progress for women wherever it occurs is progress for our entire species. With Charles Fourier, the eccentric but brilliant 19th century utopian socialist, I believe that the progress of women towards full personhood, respect and a wider range of opportunities in our lives is not only the best measure of human progress, but the most powerful engine of that progress, too. (When I went back to check that reference, by the way, I found that I had gotten it years ago from Susan Bell and Karen Offen, Women, the Family and Freedom -- one of the many products of the last 30 years of research at IRWG!)

Let me suggest several dimensions or areas of human life that one can look to in order to determine whether progress has occurred. I will point to eight of those, not because I think the list exhaustive but because I believe all the areas are important and that we have enough knowledge to measure how well we are doing. In no particular order, they are:

1. the extent to which women hold authority or positions of leadership in a society
2. the degree of flexibility in household and domestic arrangements
3. good provisions for the care of children
4. control over sexual and reproductive choices
5. reduction in sexual harassment, or an increase in the sense of safety and security in the workplace and the world
6. access to education
7. chances for meaningful work, getting good jobs, equal pay, opportunities for promotion
8. the degree to which cultural depictions of women acknowledge our personhood rather than dwelling solely on female sexuality

Clearly, the specific meaning of these indicators will be different in different societies. In some developing countries, where women have been enclosed within domestic walls and denied opportunities for education and economic advancement, access to education may mean learning to read and write, and economic opportunity the chance to secure a small loan in order to sell handicrafts or produce. In Western industrial societies, access to education means that all professional schools and fields of study are equally open to women and to men through the final degree, and economic opportunity may mean the opportunity to aim realistically to be the CEO of a Fortune 500 company, if that's your goal in life.

If I were grading our progress in the United States today, I'd give us anywhere from an A- to an F on these eight measures, scoring us much higher in some areas, such as education, and lower on others, including the cultural depictions of women as persons.
I will support my contentions by illustrating what we learned at Duke University two years ago when we undertook a comprehensive women's initiative on campus. Before I turn to that body of evidence, however, I want to say a few more words how a couple of these areas interact to support or impede human progress.

**Public and private conundrums**

As a political philosopher, I have always been struck by the degree to which success for women in what we conventionally call the "public realm" depends on progress in the "private realm" as well. These two terms are mightily contentious in feminist theory these days. But whether a woman who chooses to form a family can aim realistically for holding authority or getting promoted in a demanding job depends fundamentally on the state of her household. Does she have sole responsibility for the domestic arrangements and child care? Does her partner support, encourage and facilitate her ambitions?

This problem is boringly familiar, indeed axiomatic, although that doesn't mean that we have made a great deal of progress in addressing it. The lack of flexibility in household arrangements for all but a very few privileged women, the lack of good reliable childcare for all but a few very privileged families, is the daily stuff of the women's movement. And it's not as simple as just saying to your partner, "you should do more of the work," or "let's get more help around here."

There are agonizing dilemmas about whether you want your child raised by someone else, whether you can stand the guilt of not being at home with chocolate-chip cookies when the child comes home from school, or contributing your share to the volunteer mommy-arrangements in their lives. Those of us in my generation have all seen how these tough choices stress our daughters and daughters-in-law, as well as their husbands. Gaining the formal opportunity to pursue a demanding job or hold public office was a crucial step, no doubt about it. Making this operationally meaningful for most women has been a much more difficult enterprise.

Individuals, families and institutions are still finding their way through a complex maze of expectations, facing imperatives that are sometimes mutually contradictory. Nor is the change unidirectional. A small but not insignificant number of well-educated young women who might a decade ago have assumed that their lives would include, in equal measure, professional success and nurturing a family, are explicitly choosing one or the other. At the same time, more and more well-educated young men are committing themselves to substantial involvement with their homes and children in ways that create tensions with the traditional expectations of their chosen professions.

One interesting question here, to me, is why the dualistic pattern doesn't seem to hold in the opposite direction, or holds much less weakly. What I mean is this: it's obvious that providing more support and flexibility in the private sphere is essential if women are to make more progress in careers and in the public arena. But it's not so obvious that it improves the situation in the private sphere if more women have high-powered careers and hold public office.

On the "public" side, there are a few women in public office, and a few women in high-powered jobs in big companies – and a few men too, God bless them – who have made it their business to use their authority to improve opportunities for other women by instituting better child-care
arrangements, establishing policies that support flexible work time without damning somebody forever to second-class status by making this choice early in life, and a number of other useful instruments. But there are very few such people, and it's not obvious that they are more likely to be female. In fact, discouragingly enough, it appears that women who hold such high-powered jobs may be less inclined than some men to acknowledge the challenges that ambitious women with families face, even if they themselves have had to overcome the challenges to get where they are.

So it's true that there are undeniably more women judges, governors, mayors, senior vice presidents and university chancellors than there were when CROW was founded – or even when IRWG celebrated its 25th anniversary five years ago. We are, in other words, making slow but steady progress on our first metric. But rather surprisingly, that doesn't seem to be helping much with the intractable obstacles that still face women in the other spheres, and for this reason, the progress towards more high-powered jobs and public office will inexorably remain very slow indeed.

This issue cuts close to home for me, based on conversations I have had with many women in high-powered corporate jobs who are very reluctant to "rock the boat" by expressing any interest in domestic arrangements or demonstrating any sympathy for feminism. Some of them just don't get it; others get it very well, but have made a decision that taking up "women's issues" is a sure-fire way to get branded as not serious about your work, not really "one of the guys" after all.

It cuts even closer to home because I realize that whereas at Stanford and at Wellesley I was free to be as feminist as I jolly well pleased, when I got to Duke, I made a more or less conscious calculation that I wouldn't put issues around women and families high on my priority list in the early years, since that would just confirm the suspicions of those who doubted that a feminist from a woman's college could possibly understand Duke, much less run the place. It's not that we ignored the issues, but we did very little.

During my last three years at Duke, I repaired that omission consciously and on a fairly public scale. I'm glad I did, and we accomplished a lot. But it does allow me to understand how difficult it is to put women's issues at the forefront if you want to be taken seriously as a major player. I waited until I was already taken seriously and then used that prestige and clout to turn to women's issues. That may have been the right strategy; but I am still sorry it took me so long.

**The evidence from Duke**

In May 2002, I charged – and chaired – a steering committee of sixteen women and men to launch a women's initiative at Duke. The group presented its final report more than a year later, in September 2003. It's available on the web from Duke, by the way, if you are interested in following up on what I will describe briefly tonight. This initiative had its roots in Duke's history of educating women, which extends back for more than a century, just as Stanford's does. More immediately, it sprang from a set of conversations I had with many people in the 2001-2002, spurred by my desire to understand the situation of women on campus better before the end of my time as president.
The dilemmas documented in our report are not unique to Duke, nor unique to women. Mentoring, child care, self-confidence, professional development, equitable promotions and pay—all these are of interest to any community intent on fairness. Some things we found were Duke specific, but I am confident that the broad outlines are pertinent to the situation on other comparable campuses—and to our larger questions of how well we are faring on our journey towards a brighter future—and that's why I wanted to share some of the results with you tonight.

The steering committee for the initiative was a broadly representative group of people who each had the authority to carry out decisions in their areas of responsibility across Duke, and to bring together sub-committees of students, faculty and staff members in each major area. We formulated questions, supervised multiple forms of data-gathering and analysis, and came up both with policy actions and recommendations for others.

Some of the policy choices were so clear-cut and pertinent that we moved forward on them immediately. Others are still in the process of being implemented, and still others are still being formulated for the future. Taken together, they help chart a path from where Duke is to where we hope to be: a truly co-educational, more egalitarian institution.

Professor Susan Roth, a member of the department of social psychology at Duke and now dean of the social sciences, wrote the report. She's a hard-nosed social scientist who convinced us that the report would be persuasive to the skeptics only if we could back up every single one of our claims with hard data, and so we did. I did, however, introduce the report with a more lyrically feminist essay, just to make sure we didn't lose sight of our more visionary goals.

Twenty undergraduate focus groups were drawn from a wide variety of student organizations; graduate and professional students were studied through additional focus groups and a web survey; we held another six focus groups for alumnae in cities where they were highly concentrated; faculty were studied through a Women's Faculty Development Task Force, which collected both quantitative and qualitative data, and a Medical Center Focus Group Project team; and employees were studied through surveys, forums, focus groups, roundtables, and reports. Even trustees were surveyed by a participating member of the board.

And what did we discover? Using 1973, when Duke's Woman's College merged with its male counterpart, as our benchmark, we found a good deal of statistical progress. Conveniently, that was of course exactly the period when CROW was established, as part of the same broad social movement.

In 1973, 28% of the students in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Duke were women; in 2003, the corresponding figure is 47%. Across all graduate and professional schools, in 1973, 20% of the candidates for advanced degrees were female; today, 43%, with parity in the social and biological sciences, the medical school and the law school, and progress being made in business, the natural sciences and engineering. More than half the professional, technical and managerial staff today at Duke are women, and about a third of the university's senior administrators—vice presidents, vice provosts, deans—are women; this would surely not have been true in 1973. Fourteen of the 36 members of our board of trustees are women, compared with five in 1973.
In the faculty, the numbers are not so impressive. In 1973, 8.4% of the Duke faculty outside the School of Medicine were women; today, 23% of the tenured and tenure track faculty across the university are female, with somewhat higher percentages among other "regular" faculty ranks and in several of the schools. Progress, but hardly an indication of robust success.

This fact, and the continuing small percentage of women in the ranks of the very senior leadership, provide the first evidence that the progress towards full inclusion of women in the faculty and administration of Duke University remains slow and uneven across the institution. These data provide a striking contrast with the progress that has been made and is being made in the admission and graduation of students in each of the schools of the university.

Such findings have often been interpreted as evidence for the "trickle up" or "pipeline" hypothesis, with the connotation of a steady flow -- that women are making their way into the professions gradually, achieving equality first in the classroom, then in the ranks of the junior professionals, and eventually will be equally represented at all stages. Our analysis does not support this hypothesis, nor the alternative that the pipeline is "leaky" at every stage along the way. It is clear that the flow through the pipeline now moves smoothly until particular specific points are reached. There is a stubbornly durable blockage at the point when an individual could be moving into the junior faculty, and another blockage at the stage of promotion and tenure, or movement into the senior administrative leadership. We suggest that the appropriate metaphor is of a pipeline that is obstructed, or blocked, at specific points, rather than with "leakages" all along the way.

Women and men, our data make clear, increasingly follow the same paths through Duke to the point where they take their final professional degrees. But then striking differences begin to emerge, in terms of the numbers of women who choose to commit themselves to the goal of becoming full members of the tenured professoriate or the senior leadership of the university, and are able to sustain these ambitions to the point where the goal is achieved.

To provide the context for these findings, one needs to combine quantitative data analysis with more subtle qualitative observations, gleaned from conversations and focus groups. We were reminded, for example, that most undergraduates come to Duke with a fairly well-developed set of cultural expectations about how women and men should behave, communicated in powerful ways by the messages of contemporary popular culture and formative high school experiences. We have learned that, contrary to what one might wish for in an residential educational institution dedicated to personal growth and exploration of diverse experiences, such cultural expectations are powerfully reinforced for many students at Duke. These norms are clearly not conducive to equal participation as members of a community of scholars; but they are profoundly influential in the lives of our students. They are strongly gender-specific, in terms of everything from what one should eat or how one should dress to romantic and sexual encounters, even reaching into what is regarded as appropriate in terms of intellectual assertiveness or interest in leadership.

The ideal of "effortless perfection" described eloquently by many Duke female undergraduates in our initiative creates a suffocating climate that too often stifles the kind of vigorous exploration of selfhood and development of enlightened respect for members of the opposite sex that one
would hope to see at a place like Duke. It also perpetuates a strongly heterosexual norm, and can make things especially difficult for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered students.

On the positive side, students, faculty members and employees report very little direct sexual harassment. But there is a disturbing sense of lack of equal respect or perceived equal opportunity for advancement, surely not across the board, but in many situations. Here, as in a number of other instances, race can be a crucial factor along with gender, and the experiences of African-American women, especially, differ in significant ways from those of white Americans.

Finally, graduate and professional students, faculty members and employees alike report consistently that their lives are very complicated in terms of juggling career and family. The lack of accessible, affordable child care was reported early and often as one of the major obstacles women face to professional development.

Here, as in other ways, economic class reinforces gender differences. For lower-paid employees, making ends meet and providing opportunities for their children often means that one or both parents work two jobs, and child care arrangements depend on the help of family and neighbors as well as affordable child care providers. More highly compensated employees can pay for arrangements that make parents feel comparatively comfortable working long hours outside the home, although none of this is ever easy. As one medical faculty member put it: "It really does take a village. And I've hired a village."

**How does this all add up?**

If we take these findings and refer back to my list of eight metrics, my grading standards should be clearer. I would give us very high marks in this country for access to education, at least for many women although surely not for all; obstacles of class, race, ethnicity have by no means disappeared. But as far as our institutions are concerned, the barriers to advancing to a final degree in your chosen field appear to have fallen in most areas, and to be eroding fast in others.

The opportunities for getting a job, getting promoted, holding authority, are clearly much less bright, on the Duke evidence. We still have a long way to go for equity in these areas. And the poignant concerns expressed by Duke people about the need for more and better and more affordable child care, and for more flexible work arrangements to compensate for inflexible requirements in the home, make clear that here, too, we still have a long way to go.

The fact that so few people in any part of Duke spoke of sexual harassment as a major problem is good news. Yet the vivid descriptions from our undergraduates about the pressures they feel to look beautiful, dress well, and generally knock them dead socially, make very clear that cultural depictions of women still emphasize sexuality and stereotypical femininity. On this score, we have a very long way to go indeed.

One disturbing finding that is relevant to our work as faculty professionals is that the undergraduate women (and quite a few graduate students and junior faculty as well) spoke longingly of the desire to have more contact with older women, women who have made it and struggled with these same issues successfully, who can mentor them and support them
sympathetically. We thought we had a lot of support structures in place for our students, and indeed we do, but they spend a great deal of their time in peer specific situations, and the contacts with women professors or successful alumnae are few and far between. We can, and should, do more of this.

My hunch is that the findings would not be wildly different if you did such a study at Stanford. And that you would find that there are havens of sanity – that things are better for women athletes, for example, who feel less pressure to conform to these stringent norms and have more of a women's community to support them – and examples of good behavior, on geological field trips or in outward bound experiences as freshmen where nobody can possibly expect you to have your eye makeup perfect every morning. Faculty and administrative support networks are also a positive sign, and there is evidence that they may be increasing on some campuses, after a period when they went into decline.

**Conclusion**

Tonight, in closing, I want to recall a fascinating circumstance about each of the times I have previously given a speech at CROW or IRWG.

On May 13, 1981, I presented some of my ongoing work in feminist theory to the Wednesday noon discussion series, under the heading "The Nature of Woman and the Liberal Arts." It was, I pointed out, the third time I had had that honor, and I went on to say: "it is an appropriate symbol of the interdisciplinary quality of feminist studies, especially at Stanford, that I, a political theorist and historian of ideas, have each time focused centrally on poetry."

The first time I used as my text Adrienne Rich's "Diving into the Wreck." The next time I interviewed the poet Susan Griffin as part of a series on West Coast Women Poets. And in May 1981 I framed my thoughts with another poem by Adrienne Rich, "Planetarium." I first heard this poem read by Diane Middlebrook at a CROW retreat at a ranch in Woodside, a memorable sunny Saturday which I can still picture after almost 30 years, where we gathered for "a sustained exchange of feminist scholarly ideas" and also good food and wine and even swimming.

Then on February 8, 1988, as a Visiting Scholar at the Institute on leave from Wellesley, I addressed the Associates' Day Program on "Women, Power and Authority." I closed that speech with another favorite poem, by Muriel Rukeyser, called Myth. As a tribute to continuity in this anniversary celebration, and because it remains one of my favorite poems, I'd like to end with it today.

Long afterward, Oedipus, old and blinded, walked the roads.
He smelled a familiar smell.
It was the Sphinx.

Oedipus said: "I want to ask you one question. Why didn't I recognize my mother?"

"You gave the wrong answer," said the Sphinx.
"But what was what made everything possible," said Oedipus.

"No," she said. "When I asked, What walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening, you answered, Man. You didn't say anything about woman.

"When you say Man," said Oedipus, "you include women too. Everyone knows that."

She said: "That's what you think."