

GENDER INEQUALITIES IN UNIVERSITY SPACES. A NEW FEMINIST WAVE RISES UP IN CHILE

A new mobilization of students of higher education is taking place in Chile. Its motivation is not, as it was some years ago, the limitation of access to this educational level, but the existing gender inequalities, the sexism prevailing in classrooms and the gender violence as a mechanism for the maintenance of such inequity. The activities of all or part of the universities have been paralyzed under the battle cry of a mobilization of feminist character.

The nexus between the feminist movement and the transformations of the education system in Chile is not recent. For more than a century significant contributions can be appreciated in the slow process of visibilization and elimination of the inequalities that characterize the relations between men and women, which have their origin in the gender constructions present in society. Belén de Sárraga disseminated ideas (liberal ones for her times) about the need that women participate in the formal education system; Elena Caffarena contributed to women's emancipation liberation and the achievement of voting rights; Amanda Labarca made efforts to demonstrate the social function of education and the status of women in it. Women like them have highlighted education as a tool for the improvement of the social and legal condition of women.

If the feminist waves are representative of social and political movements that achieved, in their times, the recognition of the intellectual capacities of women, their civil and political, sexual and family relations or working rights, then we face a new wave that is motivated by the recognition of the right to education without the limitations inherent to their condition of women.

Only after 1877 the admission of women to universities was allowed in Chile, while men could enter classrooms 35 years before and, although the composition of the enrollment is today roughly equal between men and women, it still shows signs of this situation. There is a positive gender gap of 52.1% in the areas associated with the care for other persons; that is, in chores typical of women such as education and health,

while in the technological domain, where women are still implicitly excluded, there is a negative gap of 64.9%.

The feminist mobilization has brought to light that practices and attitudes that affect negatively the right to education in an equalitarian manner are still present in university classrooms, complaining about a language that overshadows them. The absence of references to female authors in program bibliographies is confirmed, as if there would be no significant contributions of women to the different disciplines. Examples in which lower capacities of female students are expressed in relation to their male schoolmates are utilized. All in all, a lack of gender perspective is observed in the study programs.

It is also being denounced that, inside the universities, as in any other social context, there are different expressions of gender violence and, particularly, sexual harassment. Such situations, when adequate responses are not found, impede that universities become spaces where full respect of rights and warranties is insured to all males and females who participate in them.

In view of the challenge that the feminist mobilization proposes, the universities have the opportunity to become effective democratic spaces where all those who form part of the community can develop in an environment of respect, equality, dignity and no discrimination. The process is complex and it will have to begin with the recognition that in the most diverse circles, including universities, men and women undergo experiences in different ways, depending on the social attribution of roles and representations to one or the other, leading to inequities. Starting from there and, specially, considering the role of shaping the personality of our students, it is necessary to give way, in a joint, coordinated and participative manner, amongst all those who constitute this community, to re-think and re-configure a new mode of relating for men and women in our universities.

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