

**Meaningful Learning? Gendered Experiences with an NGO-Sponsored Literacy Program
in Rural Mali**

Addie Fuhriman, Emeritus Professor of Psychology

Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Director, Women's Research Institute

Carol Ward, Professor, Department of Sociology

Yodit Solomon, Research Associate, Women's Research Institute

Kacey Widdison-Jones, Research Assistant, Women's Research Institute

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the effectiveness of an NGO-sponsored literacy program in rural Mali. The study employs ethnographic techniques to examine the type of literacy instruction provided, the level of participation, the meanings of literacy to participants, and the contextual factors that influence the social and personal effects of literacy. The analyses reveal that the program has been more advantageous for men, particularly in terms of opportunities for the use of literacy skills. Oversight of the cultural context combined with programmatic challenges including failure of the NGO to meet its own critical literacy goals have limited women's ability to access and derive benefits from the literacy program.