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"Victimarchy": Gender Feminism's Cultural colonisation

by

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Contents

Introduction

> The entire student population is thinking about nature, they're thinking globally but our faculty are off in their little corners thinking about social constructionism
> (Paglia 1993 :258).

Feminism, as a political movement fighting for the liberation of women , is on the decline. However, feminism as a theoretical and educational project situated within the academy, lives on. Women's studies courses, offering feminism an institutional base, can be seen to represent contemporary feminism. Which form of feminism do these courses represent? What is the nature of feminist pedagogy? After more than twenty-five years of feminist scholarship, how has our society been effected? This thesis addresses these questions and demonstrates how contemporary academic feminism is undergoing intense criticism. This thesis suggests that such criticism is long overdue.

Firstly, Chapter One outlines the emergence of women's studies in the academy during the 1970s and offers examples of the major conflicts that characterise the period of feminism with which these studies emerged. Secondly, feminism's relationship with postmodernist and post-structuralist concepts is outlined. There are two main reasons for such a discussion. Primarily, postmodernist feminism encouraged feminists to abandon the canon and reconceptualise the knowledge base. Secondly, post-structuralist feminism encouraged feminists to abandon essentialist theoretical models in favour of deconstructionist theoretical models. This chapter provides a basic understanding of academic feminism from the point of view of those feminists working within the academy and is used as an objective background upon which a critique of women's studies practice can be positioned.

There are those critics who suggest that women's studies classes represent political amphitheatres where students are indoctrinated rather than educated: Others maintain that female participants in women's studies are 'recruited' and led to believe that they are the victims of mass oppression by male participants, the guilty perpetrators of this oppression. Some critics have argued that such a methodology can, at best, result in poor scholarship and, at worst, a consciousness of victimisation among women.

Chapter Two focuses on women's studies scholarship, highlighting how students of women's studies can be robbed of certain forms of knowledge on the grounds that it is 'male-centered', denied a sense of historical objectivity and veracity on the grounds that it is 'phallocentric', and told that nature has got nothing to do with sex which is instead a social construction designed to keep patriarchal power in place. This chapter suggests that feminists working within the academy sometimes operate in the name of postmodernism and post-structuralism only to reinforce totalising concepts such as a particularly 'female way of knowing' which is perceived as superior to a 'male way of knowing'.

Chapter Three focuses on the consciousness of victimisation, highlighting how women's studies classes can sometimes resemble group therapy sessions within which female students are encouraged to speak of their own experiences of oppression in the provision of a 'safe' and 'gynocentric' space. This chapter also observes how the feminist consciousness of victimisation can lead to an over-exaggerated fear of date-rape and from this, the notion that men are solely responsible for any sexual experience a woman considers to be negative. Finally Chapter Three observes how 'victimarchy' has spilled into the legal system and reinforced notions that women need special protections and are incapable of being responsible for their own actions, notions which I regard as anti-feminist.

Throughout my studies in feminism I have being trying to identify with a feminism that is not misandric (man-hating), does not maintain that all women are oppressed, and refuses to play the role of the victim. A feminism which is pro-men, proud of what feminism has achieved for women and willing to build on this achievement is preferable. 'Equity feminism', with the motto, 'a fair field and no favours', seems to represent a feminist philosophy that is pertinent to the 1990s. Equity feminists feel alienated by what they see as the 'conservative' and 'puritanical' face of academic feminism or 'gender' feminism. This thesis positions the 'equity' feminist versus 'gender' feminist debate in the context of women's studies to suggest that conflict in feminism is perhaps its most compellingly interesting aspect at present.

Chapter One

1:1 The Emergence of Women's Studies

As a political movement feminism appears to have declined in its impact in the 1980s and 1990s. If first wave feminism's principal goal of equality between the sexes was seen to have been achieved through the process of emancipation during the first two decades of this century, then second wave feminism, originating in the late 60's became a response to ,

> the lean years after the achievement of putative equality; the result of a dawning recognition that the system itself seemed to have an inbuilt propensity for institutionalising gender (as well as other) inequality
>
> (Whelahan1993:1).

Second wave feminists recognised the potential for women's liberation outside the constraints of political discourse which offered little space for women. Second wave feminists acknowledged the need to challenge the dominant ideological representations of femininity beyond militating for material changes. According to Whelahan, second wave feminism is characterised by resistance to conventional definitions of womanhood (Whelahan 1993:5). In 1968, the first widely reported 'second wave' protest occurred. Feminists staged a demonstration at the Miss America Contest in Atlantic City. They protested at how, "women in our society are forced daily to compete for male approval, enslaved by ludicrous beauty standards that we ourselves are conditioned to take seriously and to accept" (Brownmiller in Whelahan 1993:5). Throughout the event girdles and bras were thrown into a 'Freedom trash bucket' and the image of feminist as bra-burning activist was born. This protest marked feminism's departure from mainstream political lobbying and inspired the slogan common to all 'second wave' action, "the personal is political". This statement signified feminism's focus on the ideologies of femininity. It encouraged women to re-examine their families, lovers and employment (Whelahan 1993:13). From the 60's onwards feminists operated in women-only groups. They attempted to create an autonomous political philosophy.

"They wanted their movement not to reject men so much as to be independent from them" (Coote & Campbell in Whelahan 1993:177). Feminists desired non-

hierarchical formations where all members were of equal status. These autonomous groups attempted to theorise and analyse the central sites of women's oppression. Although it was commonplace to speak of feminism in the singular, differing political and theoretical strands were beginning to establish their own particular strategies and visions. These strands are loosely referred to as Liberal feminism, Marxist/Socialist feminism ,Radical feminism, Lesbian feminism and Black feminism. However each category was in itself diffuse and multi-faceted. The lack of consensus among feminists during the late 60s and 70s has prompted some commentators to suggest that, "the history of the women's movement in the 1970s was marked by bitter, at times virulent internal dispute over what was possible or permissable for a feminist to do, say, think or feel" (Mitchell & Oakley in Whelahan 1993:11). Feminists differed substantially as to what the cause of women's oppression might be. As Barrett and Phillips inquire (1992:4), was women's oppression located in the workplace or the family site? In the realm of reproduction or the realm of production? In economic systems or cultural representation? In sexuality or motherhood? It was under this barrage that women's studies as an academic discipline emerged.

Primarily, as Brooks remarks, the inclusion of women's studies within the academy facilitated 'a space', established 'a voice' and encouraged the articulation of theoretical debates (Brook's 1997:117). Women's studies is not a unified body of work, set of practices or even an easily-defined academic subject. The diversity inherent in women's studies is probably a result of the highly fragmented nature of second wave feminism from which it emerged. However common to all women's studies programmes is firstly the recognition that women have been 'left out' of codified knowledge and secondly the introduction of feminist insights which attempt radically to challenge the so-called objectivity of knowledge (Richardson and Robinson 1993:2).

As Robinson notes, women's studies exposed the absence of female voices in the academy[1], "adding women into disciplines which were not reformulated from the feminist perspective" (Robinson 1993:7). Feminists felt the 'add-on' approach alone was insufficient and began to stress the importance of feminist theory in an attempt perhaps to achieve academic credibility.

Mc Robbie points to the difficulties facing women's engagement with feminist theory and claims that there was no critical place for women within the academy unless they

avoided gender-based issues. Mc Robbie maintains that Susan Sontag's reputation as "Americas best-known female intellectual" is a result of her "un-swerving lack of interest in all the debates which have fuelled the establishment of feminist criticism" (Mc Robbie 1994:79). Mc Robbie's criticism echoes the complaints made by many feminists working within the academy yet striving to challenge and destabilise the hierarchical constraints therein. As Gordon remarks, "existing in between a social movement and the academy, women's scholarship has a mistress and a master, and guess which one pay's wages!" (Gordon in De Lauretis 1986:21). Nevertheless the intellectual presence of feminist scholarship has been felt in the academy for well over two decades. Women's studies attempted to redefine theory and the act of theorising. As Evan's remarks, "women's studies has an important part to play in insuring that knowledge, itself a form of social power, is not produced solely in the interests of the powerful and influential" (Evan's in Richardson & Robinson 1993 :14). Feminists also argue that without producing specifically feminist theories, women will continue to be defined by patriarchal knowledge, which has relegated them to the realm of nature, the home, or has categorised 'woman' as the sexualised object of masculine desire (Stacey in Richardson and Robinson 1993).

The questioning of the category 'woman' became imperative among feminist theorists. In the first instance, this examination was a result of changes in the women's movement and challenges to the limits of its inclusions namely, the second wave's modernist tendency. Secondly, postmodernism and post-structuralism had a significant impact on feminist thought. These theories of ideology, subjectivity, discourse and sexual difference were seen by many feminists as capable of offering a more complex understanding of the operations of patriarchal power and the reproduction of inequality (Stacey in Richardson and Robinson 1993:66). Firstly we must understand why feminist theorists rejected 'second wave' theoretical models in favour of postmodernist and post-structuralist concepts. According to Nicholson,

> from the late 1960s to the mid 1980s feminist theory exhibited a recurrent pattern: its analysis tended to reflect the viewpoints of white middle-class women of North America and Western Europe. The irony was that one of the powerful arguments feminist scholars were making was the limitation of scholarship which falsely universalised on the basis of limited perspectives (Nicholson 1990:x).

The trends that have dominated modern scholarship have been marked by the effort to " reveal general ,all-encompassing principles which can lay bare the basic features of natural and social reality" (Nicholson 1990:2). Western scholarship's habitual quest for objectivity, has resulted in the legitimisation of certain knowledge's which claim to offer absolute truths capable of transcending the perspective of one individual or group to become significant to other individuals and groups. Postmodernism signals the challenging of the falsely- universalising tendencies of second wave feminism, which is now seen as exemplifying the modernist impulse. Each variable attempted to locate and specify a cause of women's oppression without analysing the notion of causation itself. Second wave feminists tended to stress the commonalties of women's oppression in order to establish that male domination was systematic and affected all areas of women's lives (Barrett and Phillips 1992:4).

During the mid 80s, a crisis was observed in feminism in academic circles. Barrett and Phillips provide a sketch of what they see as the key elements that aided this process. Firstly the intervention of black women's criticism was influential. Black women criticised the racist generalisations made by white feminists who engaged in discussions around class and gender but omitted those concerning race (Barrett and Phillips 1992:4). Second wave feminists ignored the fact that there are different 'sites of struggle' and potentially different 'sites of oppression' (Brooks 1997:17. Black feminists, such as bell hooks, have argued that since the "family is a site of resistance and solidarity against racism for women of colour, it does not hold the central place for women's subordination that it does for white women" (Barrett and Phillips 1992:32). Furthermore, women of colour, encouraged by the rise of non-western post-colonial feminism, pointed out how a white Western and Eurocentric tradition asserted itself as the only legitimate feminism and in doing so actually dominated and colonised black feminists. The voices of Lesbian women and Working-class women further articulated their sense of exclusion from mainstream feminist thought and in doing so suggested that feminism was quite seriously flawed in its modern conceptualisation (Brooks 1997:17). The notion of a 'sisterhood' of women which had fuelled the early days of the movement was tainted. To some extent the glorious slogan of the second wave , "the personal is political", had backfired as the

development of an increasingly complex politics of identity found that women had less, not more, in common (Whelahan 1993:129).

1:2 -Postmodernist and Post-structuralist feminism.

As feminist theory began to focus more on 'difference' as opposed to 'equality', debates developed concerning the objectivity of the category 'woman'. Feminists, noting earlier problems associated with the notion of a 'universal' female experience of male oppression, came to accept that the very subject of 'woman' could not be understood in stable or abiding terms. Female experience was neither unitary nor fixed but diverse and fluid. Women's accounts of subordination altered according to time, location, race and class. Theories based on shared experiences among women led to an essentialist reliance on the stability of the category 'woman'. Radical feminism, for example, had relied on the stability of the category 'woman' (Stacey in Richardson and Robinson). They maintained that "true knowledge is intuitive and female and that reason or rationality is an ideological weapon that men used against women" (Brooks 1997:32).

Assertions which celebrated the 'virtue' of women were seen as harmful. Feminists believed such assertions served only to reinforce the notion that biology alone was responsible for the differences between men and women's positions in society and in doing so strengthened patriarchy in the first instance. Essentialist theories have been highly contested with the emergence of postmodernist and poststructuralist debates. According to Diana Fuss, 'essentialism is most commonly understood as a belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the 'whatness' of a given entity' (Fuss 1989:xi-xii). Feminists believed that the myth's of women's special nature served only to disempower and subordinate their sex. These myths, derived from women's primary involvement with childcare, have facilitated the historical absence of women from the public sphere and relegated them to the private, domestic sphere. Through academic discourse, feminists endeavoured to

eradicate existing ideologies which subjugated women (Stacey in Richardson and Robinson 1993:68).

Feminist postmodernists attempted to deconstruct the modern sense of self and subjectivity and in particular the supposed 'objectivity' of the category 'woman'.If modernism claimed to represent a universal vision of subjectivity, then postmodernism attempts to usurp such claims. 'There could no longer be one theory of society, no one 'big picture', at best there were a number of snapshots of the same view, each aware of its own field of vision' (McRobbie 1994:5). The postmodern condition is one in which the grand narratives or metanarratives of legitimation are no longer credible. Grand narratives, in this instance, pertain to philosophies of history such as the enlightenment narrative of the progress of reason and freedom. The metanarrative, in Lyotards view, "purports to be a privileged discourse capable of situating, characterising and evaluating all other discourses" (Fraser and Nicholson in Nicholson 1990:22).

> As O'Hara maintains, when every 'system of truth' we've ever known, from oldest myth to modern medical science, has concluded that women are biologically, intellectually and morally inferior, that we are at once dangerous and naturally nurturing, that we are unsuitable for public office and should be protected and subjugated-then you bet feminists have a stake in conversations about 'truth' and 'reality'
>
> (O'Hara in Anderson 1996:151).

The loss of the grand narratives of legitimisation invited a whole new range of possibilities for feminist analyses[2] Its absence throws cultural and personal identity into crisis. As Simon remarks, "gender is probably the last enduring and universal master aspect of identity" (in Anderson 1996:152). The identity crisis created in the postmodern era can be seen as a catalyst for the interrogation of that 'universal vision', which as Owens confirms "admits only one vision, that of the constitutive male subject". Owens continues by saying, "what function did these narratives play other than to legitimise western man's self-appointed mission of transforming the entire planet in his own image" (in Jencks 1994:339). Feminists were profoundly critical of the principles and metanarratives of modernity, especially since their own complicity within modernist theoretical models had exposed them as racist and domineering in their own right. With this knowledge feminists came to realise that no single theory could account for all aspects of human experience. As Craig Owens

remarks, "this feminist position is also a postmodern condition" (Owens in Jencks 1994:338).

Post-structuralist theory attracted feminists for its ability, like postmodernism, to destabilise, challenge, subvert and overturn some of the falsely universalising and over-generalising models of liberalism, Marxism and humanism. Both discourses deal with the hegemony of Western culture and our identity as a culture. Instead of assuming 'woman' to be a fixed category for feminist analysis, post-structuralist feminists stressed the fluidity of the concept of 'woman' in an historical and geographical context (Stacey in Richardson and Robinson 1993:20). The analysis of identity and subjectivity is central to post-structuralist debates. Post-structuralists, such as Weedon (in Anderson 1996:149), argue that there is no such thing as feminine nature, advocate the deconstruction of the category 'woman' and thereby maintain that the subject is no longer a fixed entity, a manifestation of essence, but a subject in process, never unitary, never complete (Brook's 1997). Under post-structuralist theory, the notion of a collective female experience is dismantled, and the essentialist model of subjectivity challenged. Post-structuralist feminists sought a means by which to theorise the fluidity of the subject. They adopted and reworked Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis in order to make sense of the fractured subjectivity.

Psychoanalysis investigates the manner in which psychosexuality is bound up with the unconscious process. Psychoanalytic theories emphasise the centrality of the unconscious in the formation of subjectivity. As Germaine Greer wrote, "Freud is the father of psychoanalysis, it has no mother" (Greer 1971:104). Feminists abandoned Freudian psychoanalysis on the grounds that his theory was 'male-centred'. Freud maintains that infants are neither initially feminine nor masculine but are 'polymorphously perverse', capable of developing either normal masculine or feminine identities or neither. According to Freud, the phallus represents the key agent in the child's acquisition of sexual identity. Female infants, drawing from masculine terms of sexual reference, adopt their own sexual identity, "by means of a seemingly universally acquired penis envy, leading them to regard themselves as castrated, and necessarily inferior beings" (Whelahan 95:150). In her book, The Female Eunuch(1971), Germaine Greer interrogates Freudian psychoanalysis: in traditional psychological theory, which is after all only another way of describing and rationalising the status quo, the desexualisation of women is illustrated in the Freudian

theory of the female sex as lacking a sexual organ' (Greer 1971:68). In her book, The Second Sex (1949) , Simone De Beauvoir concluded that Freud's theory was male-centred. According to De Beauvoir, Freud constructed a masculine model of individual development which foregrounds the phallus as the symbol of culture and civilisation and defined women in terms of 'lack'or obverse of the male. As De Beauvoir maintains, "Freud never showed much concern with the destiny of woman; it is clear that he simply adapted his account from that of the destiny of man, with slight modifications" (De Beauvoir 1949:70). Feminists constructed the term 'Phallocentric', whereby the phallus represents the key agent in the child's acquisition of sexual identity. In addition, feminists felt Freudian psychoanalysis promoted essentialist concepts by reducing psychical, social, linguistic or cultural aspects of sexuality to a biological essence (Assiter and Avendon 1993:90). Rejecting the Freudian hypothesis, feminists turned to Lacanian psychoanalysis.

Lacanian's centralised the role of language rather than biology in the construction of the meaning of sexual difference. Lacanian psychoanalysis theorised the post-structuralist emphasis on the split subjectivity. The subject, according to Lacan, is never stable but is constantly threatened by the unconscious which harbours fears and desires. Lacanians maintain that the unconscious and sexuality are not results or nature, biology, or some human essence, but are effects of the human subject's acquisition of language within the symbolic order. The symbolic order corresponds to social law, language and exchange. The imaginary order corresponds to the period when the infant believes itself to be part of the mother, and perceives no separation between itself and the world. The phallus exists between both orders, splitting the bond between mother and child. The phallus comes to signify separation and loss to the child. The child's desire for the mother (or the imaginary unit with her) must be repressed. Lacan believes this primary repression opens up the unconscious. When the child learns to say 'I am', it has taken up its allotted place in the symbolic order, and is in fact saying, 'I am he/she who has lost something' (Chodorow 1989:188).

Feminist theorists believed the Lacanian model was useful. The notion that the unconscious was continually threatened by the return of the repressed, for example, the imaginary, further destabilised the category of 'woman'. "Resistance and refusal of femininity is thus explicable through a notion of the unconscious, and the idea that masculinity is not exclusively the privilege of men" (Richardson & Robinson

1993:67). Lacanian concepts further distanced theorists from essentialist models of subjectivity. Brook's remarks how feminists felt that Lacan re-established the case for psychoanalysis by repositioning Freud within a new framework of linguistics (Brook's 1997:71). The Lacanian approach greatly influenced French feminist work, especially the writings of Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray. These constructivist theorists are closely associated with the poststructuralists and reopen the social-constructivisim versus essentialism debate. These writers suggested that overcoming male oppression is not so much a matter of material change as of finding a route back to language, a new "antiphallogocentric" language (Brook's 1997:69). Phallogocentric refers to a pervasively masculinist language where women constitute the unrepresentable. Antiphallogocentric designates a woman-centred language. Writers such as Helene Cixous maintain that "masculine sexuality and masculine language are phalllocentric and logocentric seeking to fix meaning through a set of binary oppositions" (Weedon 1987:66). Thus the female is described as all that is not masculine. Examples of such binary oppositions are active, passive, subject, object, phallic,castrated. Freud has also been accused of understanding sexual difference in terms of these opposites (Stacey in Richardson and Robinson 1993:69). Helene Cixous notes how male definitions of female libido are accepted by society as the norm for women. "Cixous argues that this phallocentric, logocentric order is not unassailable and that feminine writing can challenge it" (Brooks 1997:81).

By opposing the idea of an essential, unified female nature, women's studies courses encourage the student to 'deconstruct' the concept of the 'subject' within the liberal humanist traditions in order to understand and make problematic the nature of meaning produced within this tradition. As Stacey remarks, "the category 'woman' has not simply been deconstructed in women's studies classes, but has been struggled over and questioned in all kinds of feminist collectives and feminist political groups" (Richardson and Robinson 1993:71). Stacey attempts to diminish the separation between feminist theory (as an academic growth industry) and feminist politics (actively engaged in affirming the need for social change) .Stacey, among others, such as (Nicholson 1990:31), has endeavoured to bridge this disjunction by noting how feminist interventions in the academic sphere are themselves political, since they expose other inequalities within the institution such as the absence of marginalised or gendered voices.

However Yeatman notes , and I agree, "the way in which women's studies is institutionalised ensures that it is sequestered and ghettoized in relation to what is regarded as the mainstream aspects of the university". Yeatman maintains that women's studies often adds to its own ghettoisation by "adopting an insular and even separatist attitude to its intellectual enterprise" (Yeatman in Brooks 1997:112). Feminists such as Toril Moi, Tania Modeleski and Kate Campbell have also warned that there is a tendency for feminist intellectuals to become ever more distanced from the mass of women the feminist movement set out to liberate. The nature of feminist theorising and the challenge it poses to the academy has been problematic for many feminists . This has resulted in accusations that "Women's studies practitioners are 'biased'-indoctrinating students with political (and worse, feminist!) dogma. " (Richardson & Robinson 1993:15). However, feminist theorists, from the onset, displayed an unswerving conviction that by redefining academic knowledge they played a vital and revolutionary role. Adrienne Rich, writing as early as 1973, displayed such confidence. "It is by now clear that a feminist renaissance is under way. A shift in perspective far more extraordinary and influential than the shift from theology to humanism of the European renaissance" (Rich in De Lauretis 1986:1). Those who undermine such optimistic, if somewhat unrealistic claims, do so with a similar conviction and attempt to destabilise the 'safe' environment established by the academic feminists who engage in and validate women's studies.

Chapter two

2:1-Constructing 'Herstory'

> The constitution of the American Women's Studies Association claims that, women's studies owes its existence to the movement for the liberation of women, the feminist movement exists because women are oppressed... women's studies, then, is equipping women... to transform the world to one that will be free of all oppression (Sommers 199:51).

In stark contrast, writer Christina Hoff Sommers, argues that much of what students learn in women's studies classes is not disciplined scholarship but feminist ideology. They learn that the traditional curriculum is largely a male construction and is not to be trusted. They learn that in order to rid society of sexism and racism one must first realign the goals of education, purging the curriculum of it's white male bias and 'reconceptualising' its subject matter' (Sommers 1995:51). As is clear from this description, Sommers does not look upon women's studies favourably. Sommers is an associate professor of philosophy at Clarke University, Boston and the author of 'Who stole feminism: how women have betrayed women' 1995. The book is described as "a scathing indictment of the feminist establishment" which exposes "erroneous statistics and mean-spirited, male-bashing falsehoods" (Sommers 95).

Sommers maintains that women's studies in American universities is potentially destructive and renders them illiberal, anti-intellectual and humourless places. She maintains that among the principal causes of the decline was the failure of intelligent, powerful and well-intentioned officials to distinguish between the reasonable cause of equity feminism and its unreasonable, unjust, ideological sister Gender Feminism (Sommers 1995:53).

Christina Hoff Sommers classes herself as an equity feminist and distinguishes between the two forms. As she explains it, equity feminism arises out of classical liberal beliefs that all people should enjoy simple equality under and before the law. Thus, an equity feminist makes only one request on behalf of all women: "a fair field and no favours" (Sommers 1995:51). In contrast, Sommers characterises gender feminism as self-preoccupied, elitist, divisive, gynocentric and misandric (man-

hating). Sommers is a long time proponent of equity feminism and an ardent opponent of gender feminism.

Sommers is evidently concerned with the 'Gender' feminists' incursions into the halls of higher education and how their agenda has become entrenched in the colleges and universities throughout the United States. Of particular concern to Sommers is the 'transformation movement' which, according to Sommers, has gone virtually unnoticed by the public. Sommers believes that what began as a reasonable attempt to redress the absence of female voices in the curriculum has become a potent force affecting the American classroom at every level, from the primary grades to graduate school (Sommers 95:53).

"On April 16 1993 more than eight hundred teachers, college professors, school administrators and state officials gathered at the Hilton Hotel in Parsippany, New Jersey, for a three day 'National conference on curriculum transformation " (Sommers 95:53).

Recognising that the experiences and perspectives of women are almost totally absent from the traditional curriculum, the transfomationists seek to rewrite history in order to give women the recognition that was often denied them in past accounts. Sommers points out that due to such revisionism it is common practice in high-school textbooks to revise history in ways that attribute to women a political and cultural importance they did not have. Sommers offers examples of such an inclusion, noting how Maria Mitchell, a nineteenth century astronomer who discovered a comet gets far more attention than Albert Einstein. In another popular high school text, there are three pictures of Civil War nurses but none of General Sherman or General Grant (Sommers 1995:58).

According to Sommers, transformationists want 'Herstory', yet in doing so deny objectivity and historical veracity. She maintains that there is no honest way of writing women back into the historical narrative in a way that depicts them as "movers and shakers of equal importance." (Sommers 1995:58) Linda Gordon's essay, 'What's new in women's history', coincides with Sommers beliefs. She writes that " naming the new women's history 'herstory' does us no favour. Implying that we are the first to fight this ideological battle deprives us of a history we already have."(Gordon in de Lauretis 1986:20) Feminist theorists engaging in postmodernism and rejecting the possibility of objectivity are urged to create new myths to serve their aspirations. Gordon maintains that it is problematic to decide, as some have, that

because objective truth may not be possible, that there are no objective lies. She maintains "there may be no objective canons of historiography but there are degrees of accuracy, there are better and worse pieces of history" (Gordon in de Lauretis1986:22). Similarly Sommers remarks, "bad old history may cede to bad new history" (Sommers 1995:61). Both Sommers and Gordon accept that scholars have been inaccurate in their failure to recognise the role and importance of many gifted female historical figures. They believe that these neglected women deserve their place in history and that historians have a professional obligation to give it to them. Sommers maintains that over the past ten or fifteen years these obligations have been fulfilled.

> Feminist literary scholars have discovered and rescued many gifted women writers from undeserved oblivion. Textbook publishers now take pains to see that women are duly represented and that they are not demeaningly stereotyped (Sommers 199:54).

Sommers concludes by saying that, once a woman appreciates the extent to which culture and civilisation has been male-dominated she is faced with two choices. Firstly, she can study women's achievements as well as the reasons that their contributions to the larger enterprise were not greater. She can then avail herself of the freedom she has to join with men on equal terms in the development of a new and richer culture. Secondly , "she can react to the cultural and scientific heritage as 'androcentric' and move consciously to reconstuct the 'knowledge base'. Sommers confirms,

> It is at this juncture that equity and gender feminist academics begin to go their separate ways. The former stay within the bounds of traditional scholarship and join in its enterprise. The latter seek to transform scholarship to make it womancentred (Sommers 1995:53).

Feminist historians face a similar demarcation. Some writers feel impelled to document women's oppression, chart the structures of domination and mourn the subsequent repercussions. Others feel compelled to document women's achievements and strengths on the road to liberation. Gordon notes how writers Simone De Beauvoir and Mary Beard stood respectively for each tendency. De Beauvoir wrote of women's oppression, their pain and humiliation. Mary Beard, as Gordon notes, "has been a far less attractive figure because she wrote and embodied women's capability, not their fragility" (Gordon in de Lauretis 1986:23). Edward Said maintains that, "what is interesting is how a victim emancipates himself or herself and moves

towards liberation, not the horrors of being persecuted and beaten down."[1] Sommers asks, "why can't we move on to the future and stop wasting energy on resenting [and 'rewriting'] the past?" Many of us who call ourselves feminists are very much aware of the past indignities and depravations that have limited women in the arts but we must appreciate that the situation has changed. Today, many artistically gifted women do have their level playing field. We can acknowledge the standards of greatness and explore the more constructive alternatives now open to us, where we judge our best prospects to lie.

As Sommers maintains ,Transformationists deny traditional ideals of striving for objectivity and historical veracity. As Chapter One stressed, feminist postmodernists deconstructed traditional notions of 'truth' and 'objectivity' arguing that what becomes culturally legitimised as knowledge is the result of definite exercises of social power; that 'truth' is an effect of the rules of a given discourse and 'objectivity' an agreement of those in power, "a rhetorical form that masks their specific social interests" (Nicholson 1990:6). Feminist postmodernist and poststructuralist concepts have been seen by many theorists, such as O'Hara, as offering "an enormous sense of relief, hope and responsibility " (O'Hara in Anderson 1995:151). Nevertheless feminist transformationists and educators have a responsibility to offer students some degree of accuracy and intellectual security based on the historical and social evidence available to them. Shouldn't Objectivity represent the ideal toward which fair-minded teachers aspire? Sommers maintains, transformationists are impatient with history that threatens the process of revisionism that gender feminists demand as part of a 'transformed knowledge base' (Sommers 1995:59). She notes how gender feminists pad history with their own facts designed to drive home the lessons feminists wish to impart, determining what is to be excluded from textbooks even more so than what is to be included. In a survey of the new textbooks written under feminist guidelines, themes of romance, marriage and motherhood are absent. As psychologist Paul Vitz remarks, "though great literature, from Tristan and Isolde to Shakespeare to Jane Austen to Louisa Alcott, is filled with romance and desire to marry, one finds very little of that in these texts "(Sommers 1995:61).
Feminists report on the success of the hundreds of curriculum projects around the country since1980. As Alison Jagger, director of women's studies at the University of Colorado, remarks, " we're developing a whole reconstruction of the world from the

perspective of women, with the keyword being 'womancenteredness' academia will never be the same again "(Sommers 1995:51).

2:2- 'Womancenteredness'

Equity feminist Camille Paglia claims, " it's time for every American feminist to admit that both mainstream and academic feminism have been guilty of ideological excesses that require correction."[2] Paglia is the professor of the Humanities at the University of the arts, Philadelphia and the author of Sexual Personae: Art and decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickenson (1991). She is often referred to as the spokeswoman for the anti-feminist backlash. Paglia maintains that academic feminism has become elitist and totalitarian, claiming that , " it's time for every American feminist to admit that both mainstream and academic feminism have been guilty of ideological excesses that require correction."[3]

Paglia maintains that campus feminism became addicted to theory in order to prove its own academic legitimacy. The first major theoretical style adopted by campus feminism was, according to Paglia, a French Import, derived from the 'highly abstruse' and 'convoluted' deconstructionism and poststructuralism. Paglia explains feminism's 'addiction' to French Theoretical thought as a case of simple careerism. "Attaching oneself to feminism or French theory guaranteed employment, promotion and at the top huge financial rewards."[4]
She writes, "teachers who assign Lacan, Derrida and Foucault to unprepared students are fools. There is so much else to learn and know. The French fad is now a skeleton wreck "(Paglia 1992:242). Noting feminism's abandonment of Freud, on the grounds that his theories are male-centered[5], Paglia writes, "cheap gibes about Freud, epidemic in women's studies are a symptom of emotional juvenility" (Paglia

1992:243). She maintains that feminism's comprehension of Freud, "has been tainted by the swindling Lacan" (Paglia 1992:243). She adds, "its outrageous that women undergraduates are being made to read Lacan who haven't read Freud and therefore have no idea what Lacan is doing" (Paglia 1992:243). Paglia believes that Freud is crucial, not necessarily for his conclusions, but for the "bold play of his speculative intelligence. He shows you how to frame long, overarching arguments, how to verbalise ambiguous, nonverbal psychic phenomena" (Paglia 1992:243). Although Paglia asserts that Foucault, like Lacan and Derrida "is forty years out of date"(Paglia 1992:226) , she herself looks back with nostalgia to her own scholarship which entailed the pre-Socratics through to Mendel and Darwin. Paglia maintains that, "A feeling for the past is the great gift we can bequeath to our students, trapped in the busy, bright, brazen present" (Paglia 1992:238). There is more than a hint in Paglia's text that she may "mourn modernity's passing" (Owens in Jencks 1992:338). In fact Paglia rejects the "modernist idea that culture has collapsed into meaningless fragments" (Paglia 1990 :xiii), She warns students not to read Lacan , Derrida and Foucault and to "treat as insignificant nothings those that still prate of them" (Paglia 1992:243).

In their critique of the imperial male culture , the gender feminists regard logic and rationality as 'phallocentric'. We are reminded of the Post-Lacanian French feminists, Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous, whose desire was to create a new 'antiphallogocentric' language.[6] Attempts to create this new language have begun as gender feminists replace seminars with 'ovulars', history with 'herstory', theology with 'thealogy' and refer to their style of text interpretation as 'gynocriticism' or 'clitoral hermeneutics' (Sommers 1994 :51). Biological coinages appear frequently in these reinterpreted terms which, according to feminists, constitute 'women's ways of knowing'. The authors of 'women's ways of knowing'(1980) contrast 'separate knowing' (belonging traditionally to boys), with a higher state of 'connected knowing' that they view as the more feminine.[7] In this way, gender feminist pedagogy plays into old stereotypes that extol women's capacity for intuition and emotion, those very essentialist notions that poststructuralist feminists deconstructed and supposedly eradicated. Feminist Catherine MacKinnon, infamous for her anti-pornography lectures, plays on the biblical double meaning of knowing to refer both to intercourse and cognition. MacKinnon claims that men approach nature as rapists approach women, taking joy in violating her. MacKinnon maintains that feminists have finally

realised that for men " to know has meant to fuck" (MacKinnon 1993:636). In a similar fashion, Sandra Harding suggests that Newton's principles of mechanics might just as aptly be called "Newton's rape manual" (Harding 1986:113). These views highlight the extremist ideologies adopted by the gender feminists. Such statements are an embarassment to women working within the fields of science.

2:3-Biology as destiny?

> Neither militant feminism, which is obsessed with politically correct language, nor academic feminism, which believes that knowledge and experience are 'constituted by' language, can understand preverbal or non-verbal communication. Feminism, focusing on sexual politics, cannot see that sex exists in and through the body.
>
> (Paglia 1993:52)

In the feminist classic, The Feminine Mystique (1965), author Betty Friedan asserts that, "woman was been left behind. Anatomy was her destiny" (Friedan 1965). In Sex, Art and American Culture (1993), Paglia updates Friedan's claim to suggest that, far from being left behind an American woman has never had so much freedom yet with this realisation must accept that her anatomy is her reality. Paglia maintains that feminism alienated itself from sexual history. She asserts that feminists suppressed the sexual myths in literature, art and religion, myths which exemplify the mysteries, turbulence and passions of sex (Paglia 1993:52). Feminism, she maintains, "has put young women in danger by hiding the truth about sex from them" (Paglia 1993:49). Paglia adopts the Freudian view which upholds that, sexuality pervades every aspect of our human consciousness. Feminists adopted Lacan who maintains that, "sexual 'drives' are not real, biologically determined or natural; rather, they are mediated by the particular socio-cultural setting in which they present themselves" (Assister and Avedon 1993:94). Paglia maintains that the essentialist versus social constructivist

debate, led to a wholesale disregard of nature by feminists. Paglia writes, "we cannot hope to understand sex and gender until we clarify our attitude toward nature. Sex is a subset to nature. Sex is the natural in man" (Paglia 1990:xi).A number of feminist theorists working within the academy have also criticised the feminist emphasis on post-structuralist concepts of gender identity. Among them is de Lauretis who believes that the post-structuralist project to de-essentialise and deconstruct the category 'woman' leads to a form of nominalism as concerns women, where women have no name. She notes that, "if the concept of woman is a fiction, then the very concept of women's oppression is obsolete and feminism's raison d'être disappears,"(de Lauretis in Brooks 1997:23).

Rod Van Mechelen remarks, "I had to laugh at one comment a female doctor made on CNN during a 'woman in combat' debate: 'We have found no biological differences between men and women." Van Mechelen adds that, given the context of the debate he assumed the doctors statement was meant in some figurative sense because, he writes, "last time I checked women were still having babies and men were still trying to figure out when they can hold the door open for women without being charged with sexual harrassment."[7] There are biological differences between women and men, and these differences impose an agenda over which we have little control. As Hewlett remarks , "recognising the special burdens these differences impose on women, gender-feminists demand laws to compensate for these by legally handicapping men both economically and socially." It would not be to the gender feminists advantage to admit men carry burdens unique to the male biology. To do so would be either to concede men are victims, or to accede women are not victims. The aspects of the male biology that are recognised by gender feminists fall only into the category of those which imperil women.

Women's studies, Paglia maintains, is institutionalised sexism. As an alternative Paglia proposes sex-studies. These studies would,

> take in the hundred- year history of international commentary on sex; it would make science its keystone; it would allow both men and women as well as heterosexuals and homosexuals to work together in the fruitful dialogue of dislike, disagreement, and debate, the tension, confrontation and dialectic that lead to truth
>
> (Paglia 1993:242).

Chapter Three

3:1-The Feminist Classroom

Five professors from the university of Massachusetts describe the feminist classroom as,

> the place to use what we know as women to appropriate and transform, totally, a domain which has been men's....Let us welcome the intrusion/infusion of emotionality- love rage, anxiety, eroticism-into intellect as a step toward healing the fragmentation capitalism and patriarchy have demanded from us
>
> (Sommers 1995:87).

Feminist classrooms are referred to as 'liberated zones' and 'safe spaces', where 'silenced' women feel free to verbalise in 'a secure gynocentric ambience' (Sommers 1995:88). Forty percent of the students grade comes from:[1]

1. Performing some 'outrageous' and 'liberating' act outside of class and then sharing feelings and reactions with the class;
2. Keeping a journal of 'narratives of personal experience, expressions of emotion, dream accounts, poetry, doodles,etc.
3. Forming small in- class consciousness raising groups.

Professor Susan Arpad, a women's studies teacher of fifteen years describes the effect such courses have on the student. "It is a radical change, questioning the fundamental nature of everything they know....At its worst it can lead to a kind of psychological breakdown. At its best it requires a period of adjustment" (in Sommers 1995:89). A strict confidentiality rule prevails in many of these courses as instructors encourage students to relate possible experiences of victimisation, such as rape, battery and sexual harassment. These are difficult subjects and professor Kali Tal of the George Madison University outlined the 'rules of conduct' applied to classes of this nature.

1.There will be no interruption of any speaker.

2.There will be no personal criticism of any kind directed by any member of the class to any other member of the class.

3.Because some of the material discussed and viewed in this course contains extremely graphic and violent material, some students may find it necessary to take an

occasional 'breather'. Students should feel free to stand up and walk out of class. It is permissable and encouraged to ask a classmate to accompany you during such a break.

As an endnote professor Tal informs students, "this class is not a therapy session" (Sommers 1995:101). Gender feminists have also outlined ways of dealing with antagonistic male students. Sommers attended a conference entitled, 'white male hostility in the feminist classroom'. Feminists expressed difficulty with male students who refuse to use gender-neutral pronouns. The consensus among attendants was to grade them down. Sommers remarks how one woman was applauded when she told of a feminist student who silenced an "obnoxious male by screaming, 'shut up, you fucker!'". More perplexing perhaps was the problem of what to do with hostile female students. One feminist noted , "if the students are comfortable, we are not doing our job" (Sommers1995:92). Joyce Trebilcot of Washington University in St. Louis describes her main pedagogical duty: "if the classroom situation is very heteropatriarchal-a large beginning class of 50 or 60 students, say, with few feminist students-I am likely to define my task as largely one of recruitment...of persuading students that women are oppressed' (Sommers 1995:92).

3:2-Victimhood on campus

This production and distribution of newly oppressed female students has, according to Katie Roiphe, led to a consciousness of victimhood and contributed to a climate of fear with regard to daterape on campus. In Roiphe's first book, The Morning After:Sex,Fear and Feminism(1993), she offers a "scathing critique of the willingness she sees among women to embrace the role of the victim" (Roiphe 1993:review) Roiphe offers a first hand account of her experiences as an undergraduate at Harvard

and later at Graduate school in English literature at Princeton. She writes, "the feminists around me had created their own rigid orthodoxy. You couldn't question the existence of a rape crisis.....Listening to feminist conversations in and out of class, I was surprised at how fenced in they were, and how little territory there was that could actually be disputed" (Roiphe 1993:5). Roiphe describes the elaborate measures taken to prevent sexual assaults at Princeton, from the Blue Light system,[2] to the issuing of whistles to freshman women on orientation day, from rape counselling sessions to the 'Take back the night'[3] rallies on campus. Roiphe denies that these measures are a desirable and beneficial force within American campuses. She maintains that between 1983 and 1993 only two rapes were reported to the campus police and that male students are more likely to be the victims of assault (Roiphe 1993:47).

Roiphe outraged feminists when she questioned the Koss study. The study was released in 1988 and as Sommers confirms "revealed some disquieting statistics, including this astonishing fact: One in four female respondents had an experience that met with the legal definition of rape"(Sommers 1995:41). Roiphe remarked, "if one in four of my female friends were really being raped, wouldn't I know it ?" She also questioned the feminist perspective on male/female relationships:

> these feminists are endorsing their own utopian vision of sexual relations: sex without struggle, sex without power, sex without persuasion, sex without pursuit, if verbal coercion constitutes rape, then the word rape itself expands to include any kind of sex a woman experiences as negative
> (Sommers1994:22).

Roiphe was subsequently called a traitor who had sold out to the white male patriarchy (Sommers:222). Perhaps more interesting is the fact that the Koss study, 'one in four' statistic prevails, despite the many journalists and academics who proved its studies unsound. Among these figures was Neil Gilbert, who published his analysis of the Koss study in 1990.[4] Despite his rational criticism, he was widely condemned. As Sommers notes, "at one demonstration against Gilbert on the Berkley campus, California, students chanted, 'cut it out or cut it off' and carried signs that read 'Kill Neil Gilbert!' (Sommers 1995:222).

It is astonishing that feminists and male and female students alike did not express relief at the falsity of such a scarifying statistic. Evidently those promoting the research were bitterly opposed to seeing it exposed as inaccurate. Rape is the most underreported of crimes. We need the truth for policy to be fair and effective. Gender feminists are, however, immune to criticism. Gender Feminists have been influential in the academy far beyond their numbers partly because their high zeal and single-mindedness brook no opposition; or rather they treat opposition to their exotic standpoint as opposition to the cause of women. When students criticise women's studies they are not taken seriously. Criticism is seen as resistance, a refusal to accept the gender feminist 'reality' of women's oppression: "afterall", as feminist Bauer writes, "students have been thoroughly 'socialised' to their gender roles and class loyalties; only a painful process of reeducation can free them from those roles and loyalties" (Sommers 1995:95). In a term made popular by Karl Popper, gender feminism is non-falsifiable, making it more like a religious undertaking than an intellectual one. If, for example, some women point out that they are not oppressed, they only confirm the existence of oppression, for they show how the system dupes women by socialising them to believe they are free, thereby keeping them free and docile (Sommers 1995:96).

Many University officials, in an unwillingness to appear insensitive and retrograde and out of a fair sense of equality and indeed policy, situate women's issues firmly on the agenda. Gender feminists abuse their status, hard won by previous feminists and inevitably short-change their students. Sommers asserts that if one regards all knowledge of science and culture as a 'patriarchal construction' designed to support a 'male hegemony', then one denies important differences between knowledge and ideology, between truth and dogma, between reality and propaganda and between objective teaching and indoctrination (Sommers 1995:97). As the political impact of feminism declines, gender feminists utilise the institutional base as a political forum. Their first task is to convince female students that they are indeed oppressed. Who wants to attend university in order to experience a 'collective sense of oppression'? As Edward Said remarks, "the idea of the classroom as a political amphitheatre is completely absurd."[5]

3:3- Victimhood in the Legal System

In The Myth Of Male Power (1993), Warren Farrell[6] upholds and extends the equity feminist's beliefs that, "feminist consciousness is a consciousness of victimisation....to come to see oneself as a victim" (Bartky 1990:15). Farrell maintains that feminism justified 'victim power' by claiming that we lived in a sexist, male-dominated and patriarchal world.Farrell claims that the world is 'bisexist', both patriarchal and matriarchal (Farrell 1993:18). Farrell attempts to support his claim by pointing to the American legal system.

> In an era of alleged female independence, one law after another came to be made with such attention to protecting women that if a man's constitutional rights conflict with a woman's protection, most of his rights disintegrate before most of her protection disintegrates
> (Farrell 1993:237).

Farrell points to the 'Pre- Menstrual stress (PMS)' defence in particular. Farrell remarks, "in 1970, when Dr. Bergman said women's hormones during menstruation and menopause could have a detrimental influence on women's decision making, feminists were outraged. Bergman was soon served up as the quintessential example of medical male chauvinism" (Farrell 1993:259). Farrell points out that by the 1980s feminists were using the excuse of PMS to allow a female accused of killing her boyfriend go free. "In England, the PMS defence freed Christine English after she confessed to killing her boyfriend by deliberately ramming him into a utility pole with her car "(Farrell 1993:259). Similarly Sandie Smith, guilty of killing a co-worker, was put on probation with one condition, "she must report monthly for injections of progesterone to control symptoms of PMS" (Farrell 1993 :259). Farrell's observation deftly illustrates the disconnection between feminist theory and practice. Despite post-structuralists desire to eradicate gender ideologies based on biological difference, "by the 1990s the PMS defence paved the way for other hormonal defences" (Farrell 1993:259). For example, Sherly Lynn Massip, after killing her 6-month-old son, claimed postpartum depression and was given outpatient help. Farrell concludes that the PMS defence leads the way to testosterone poisoning (TP) defence. "If women can murder and claim PMS, why can't men rape and claim testosterone poisoning" (Farrell 1993:260).

Writing in The Irish Times, Nov.25, 1996, John Waters points to instances in the legal system where sentenced women project a consciousness of victimisation that has a profound effect on the media and the public at large. He refers to an Irish woman who receives a short jail sentence abroad for making false accusations of rape: "suddenly the Irish airwaves are submerged in calls for her immediate release, Irish disc jockeys, of both sexes, inundate her gaolers with demands about her welfare, and engage in profound analysis of the justice system of this savage foreign jurisdiction. The Irish authorities demand that she be pardoned, which she is." Waters remarks , "it is rarely mentioned that the present 'system', although ostensibly run by men, is actually run by men attempting to curry favour with women." Waters concludes that, "misandry is one of the most pervasive, but invisible afflictions of our age."

In The Irish Times Feb.2, 1998, Joe Carroll, reporting from Washington, writes, "feminists and women's groups are coming under fire for their reticence over the Monica Lewinsky affair in contrast to their out-spokenness about earlier sex scandals involving political figures. They are being accused of 'double standards'". Carroll recalls how feminists sprang to the defence of Anita Hill when she was criticised for accusing her former boss, Clarence Thomas, of sexual harassment. At that time, Thomas was nominated by President Bush to become a Supreme Court justice. Sommers notes how during the Thomas-Hill hearings, Catherine MacKinnon, the influential anti-porn feminist, "seized the opportunity for a 'national teach-in' on feminist perspectives" (Sommers 1995:25). MacKinnon referred to the senate's treatment of Ms. Hill as 'a public hanging' and was quick to promote the trial as an example of how women suffer when other women are mistreated adding that, "when it happens, the target population cringes, withdraws , identifies and disidentifies in terror" (Sommers 1995:25). Camille Paglia rejects Anita Hill's claim of sexual harassment: "What transpired between her and Clarence Thomas we can never know. That Hill was distressed by references to sex may indeed be the case. But since they were never threatening and never led to pressure for a date, I fail to see how they constitute sexual harassment". Paglia maintains that this case is not a gender issue but our personal duty to determine what we will and will not tolerate (Paglia 1992:47). The failure of feminists to denounce Clinton, in light of Lewinsky's accusations of sexual harassment, has been seen by some critics as a result of Clinton's avocation of Women's rights, childcare and affirmative action throughout his presidency. Writing

in The New York Times, Maureen Dowd remarks, "Ms. Lewinsky must die so that the women of America can have better childcare, longer maternity leave, toll-free domestic violence hotlines and bustling mutual funds" (Irish Times Feb.2, 1998).

This pattern of political protest, concerning sexual harassment and the legal system, suggests firstly, that feminists appropriate or subsume their ideologies according to their own vested interests and not necessarily for the cause of women's rights. Secondly, Paglia notes how the 'hostile workplace' category of sexual harassment policy returns women "to their old status of delicate flowers who must be protected from assault by male lechers" (Paglia 1993:47). She concludes that , considering the sexual revolution of the sixties which, "broke the ancient codes of decorum that protected respectable ladies from profanation by foul language.....It is anti-feminist to ask for special treatment for women" (Paglia 1993:47). Thirdly, it is the woman who defines the 'hostile workplace'. As Farrell points out,

> not even the mans intent makes a legal difference .In all other criminal behaviour, intent makes all the difference. Even in homicide. Sexual harassment legislation in its present form makes all men un-equal to all women. It is a blatant violation of the fourteenth amendment's guarantee of equal protection without regard of sex
>
> (Farrell 1993:288).

The feminist 'consciousness of victimisation' inherent in women's studies encourages the notion of 'woman as child'. Farrell adds, "when the entitled 'child' has the majority of votes, the issue is no longer whether we have a patriarchy or a matriarchy-we get a victimarchy" (Farrell 1993:346). While both parties, Democratic and Republican, require the female vote, the former party depends more heavily upon it and "keeps its 'child' a 'child' because it fears losing her. And the female in transition who wants the option of independence without losing the option of government as substitute protector.

Conclusion

> There is no easy solution to the atmosphere of exclusionism endemic to a feminism which now does most of its maturing in universities, and where elements of cultural elitism are difficult to avoid
>
> (Whelahan 1993:247).

As this thesis has progressed it has charted the expansion of feminism from its initial epistemological developments in the academy, and reached into more abstract areas where contemporary feminists are accused of maintaining 'double standards'. This transition suggests that academic feminism has faltered under the sheer weight of its contradictions.

Chapter One observed how, during the mid 80s, feminists welcomed postmodernist theory and, by arming themselves with the deconstructive tools of post-structuralism, began to dismantle traditional notions of 'truth' and 'objectivity'. In their critique of male knowledge, 'truth' and 'objectivity' are branded 'modernist' and 'phallocentric'. However, Chapter Two observes how the feminist quest to reconceptualise the knowledge base from a female perspective has resulted in the construction of new forms of 'truth' and 'objectivity' particular to women's studies along with the perception that these forms are somehow immune to a postmodernist critique. The gender feminists are convinced that they are in the vanguard of a conceptual revolution of historic proportions. Sociologist Jessie Bernard compares the feminist scholars to the philosophers of the French enlightenment, comparing the explosion of research in women's scholarship to 'the storming of the Bastille' (Sommers 1993:51). To paraphrase Craig Owens in Chapter One, what function do these narratives play other than to legitimise gender feminism's self appointed mission of transforming the entire curriculum in its own image, the keyword being 'womancenteredness'?

Feminist theorists abandoned essentialist theoretical models on the grounds that they led to the perception of women as a 'natural' group in need of special protections. However, the gender feminists overlook the fact that their universalist concept of male sexuality is in itself essentialist. Their perception of sex as a social construction designed to keep patriarchal power in place has resulted in the notion that women are the victims of an oppressive male sexuality. The consciousness of victimisation promoted in women's studies has led to sexual naivety among women with special protections for women within the legal system, and reinforced the notion that men are solely responsible for any sexual experience a woman perceives as negative. Victimarchy has supported the 'woman as child' equation.

The gender feminists' belief in the superiority of 'women's ways of knowing' fosters a sense of solidarity and cultural community that seems to have allowed them to overlook the fact that their doctrine tends to segregate women in a culture of their own and inevitably increases social divisiveness along gender lines. Academic feminists speak of the diversity and pluralism in women's studies. Those outside of women's studies can see its inherent monolithic homogeneity that its instructors fail to recognise. As Robert Hughes remarks, "the big problem is the cutting of the connective tissue between the academic audience and the general intelligent audience."[1] Paglia maintains that politicians, businessmen, soldiers, artists, engineers and scientists should visit universities regularly. She also suggests that the faculty should do outreach work by giving lectures at public libraries, schools and churches, and concludes by adding that, "A sense of the general audience must be recovered" (Paglia 1992:237).

Kate Millett's fusing together of the words 'sexual' and 'politics' in the 1970s led to the assertion that all things 'private' and 'personal' in women's lives were affected by the state and patriarchy. Chapter one noted the collapse of the 'second-wave' slogan, 'the personal is political', with the introduction of postmodernist insights which emphasised 'difference' as opposed to 'equality'. I suggest that feminism's insistence on political correctness in the 90s echoes that earlier slogan by representing an external censor maintained in the name of the oppressed that may moderate our social and sexual behaviour. Hence, a lack of political correctness in our everyday social interactions may leave the

way open for the development of victim consciousness, dividing people into 'victims' and 'oppressors'. Discussing PC , Robert Hughes remarks, "a very important thing about one's personal life and its cultural extensions is to find that point beyond which politics may not go."[2] If there are no areas of exemption from politics then the possibility of cultural liberation is undermined.

In Playboy May 1995 Paglia writes, "feminism has betrayed women, alienated men and women, and replaced dialogue with political correctness"
After twenty-five years in American Universities, women's studies should invite re-examination and welcome the addition of new voices, external to the academy. The gender feminists exclusionist policy serves only to intensify suspicion and curiosity. Gender feminists reside in the academy, much like the patriarchal society they so wish to dismantle, hostile to criticism and reluctant to change.
This thesis has provided a critique of contemporary feminist practice within the academy. I still owe an incalculable debt to those earlier feminists who came before me and fought long and hard, ultimately with spectacular success, to gain for women the rights that were formerly the exclusive privilege of men. However, admiring these earlier first-wave feminists does not constitute an acceptance of all ensuing forms that choose to call themselves feminist. It is up to each generation of men and women to define what feminism means to themselves. Gender feminists appear to indoctrinate their students with predetermined definitions of a feminist ideology which is dogmatic, misandric and resentful-in short, an impediment to real progress. I argue for a feminism that's pragmatic, men-friendly, proud of what feminism has achieved for women and willing to build on this achievement. However as Roberts remarks, 'for those who like to see feminists as castrating harridans, this is perhaps asking too much. For those who believe women are still caught in the patriarchal web, this may be perhaps asking too little"[3].

Endnotes

Chapter one

[1] Surveys conducted in the 1970s revealed that history textbooks devoted less than 1% of their coverage to women; that literature courses contained on average, only 8% of female authors and that the most widely used textbook in art history did not include a single female artist (Sommers 1994:56).

[2] Other feminist theorists are skeptical about the femnist/postmodernist relationship. Di Stefano asserts that, "since men have had their enlightenment they can afford a sense of the decentered self and a humbleness regarding the coherence and truth of their claims" (Nicholson 1990:6) Di Stefano notes how women on the other hand are only beginning to establish their own truths. She maintains that feminism's adoption of a feminist/postmodernist position, "is to weaken what is not yet strong" (Nicholson 1990:6).

Chapter two

[1] On Political Correctness.
Edward Said in conversation with Robert Hughes and Camille Paglia.
In, States of America - Presented by Christopher Hitchens, Produced by Michel Jones.
Channel 4 , 1993, London.

[2] Camille Paglia, Feminists must begin to fulfill their noble animating idea
-NETSCAPE, 21.2.97
-http://www.roisin.ubb.uib.no/users/bubsy/apollon.html

[3] IBID no.2

[4] IBID no.2

[5] 'Malecentered' See Chapter One, page (9)

[6] 'Antiphallogocentric' See Chapter One, page (11)

[7] Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Matuck Tarule, Womens Ways of Knowing (New York:Basic Books, 1986).

Chapter three

[1] The model syllabus can be found in Johnella Butler, Sandra Coynes, Margaret Homans, Marlene Longnecker, and Caryn McTighe Musil, Liberalk learning and the Women's studies major: A report to the Professions, Washington ,D.C:Association of American Colleges, 1991.

[2] "The blue lights above security phones-part of what is called the blue light system-were erected on many of campuses in the eighties. Since the phones aren't actually used much for emergencies, their primary function seems to be to reassure the lone wanderer. Having started with fifteen lights and added some each year, Princeton now has around seventy. The blue lights mark a new and systematic sense of danger. People have always been scared walking around campuses at night, but now, bathed in blue light, they are officially scared" (Roiphe 1993:8).

[3] "Take Back the Night"marches are organised to end sexual violence against women. According to Roiphe, "The ritual is this: at various points in the march everyone stops and gathers around the microphone. Then the survivors and occasionally the friends of survivors get up to speak out." (Roiphe 1993:30) Roiphe maintains that the line between fact and fiction is a fine one when listening to survivors stories. "In the confessional rush of relating graphic details to a supportive crowd, the truth may be stretched, battered, or utterly abandoned. It's impossible to tell how many of these stories are authentic faithful accounts of what actually happened" (Roiphe 1993:42).
Roiphe concludes that "Take Back the Night" rallies operate as umbrella marches, covering women's fear and frustration in general and "the belief that men are out to get women" (Roiphe 1993:46).

[4] Neil Gilbert, a professor at Berkley's School of Social Welfare concluded that the Koss study was unsound. Koss and her colleagues had counted as victims of rape any respondent who answered 'yes' to the question, 'Have you ever had sexual intercourse when you didn't want to because a man gave you alcohol or drugs?" As Sommers remarks: "certainly, if you pass out and are molested, one would call it rape. But if you drink and , while intoxicated, engage in sex that you later come to regret, have you been raped? Koss does not address these questions specifically, she merely counts your date as a rapist and you as a rape statistic" (Sommers 1995:212) For Gilbert, the most serious indication of an unsound study was that the majority of women Koss classified as having been raped did not believe they had been raped. Of those Koss counts as having been raped, 27% thought they had been; 73% did not say what happened to them was rape (Sommers 1995:212).

[5] Edward Said in conversation with Camille Paglia and Robert Hughes.
On "Political Correctness"
In "States of America" , Pres. Christopher Hitchens, Prod. Michel Jones
Channel 4 , 1993, London.

[6] Farrell served on the board of directors of the National Organisation for Women in New York City for three years. Prominent feminist journalist, Susan Faludi maintains that "as feminism lost its media glitter, Farrells enthusiasm seemed to fade" (Faludi 1992:233). While feminist writers are quick to point out the entrepreneurial interests men may have in feminism, they rarely acknowledge that women may have the same interests.

Conclusion

[1]On Political Correctness -Robert Hughes with Camille Paglia and Edward Said.
In "States of America"
Pres. Christopher Hitchens.
Prod. Michel Jones.
Channel 4, 1993, London.

[2] IBID no.1

[3] Roberts, M., "Reclaiming the F-word", The Independent on Sunday, Jan.18,1998.

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