

*Proceedings of the Second Annual*

# Feminist Research Forum

*Hosted by*  
Women's Research Centre  
(Athabasca University/University of Alberta)  
October, 1989

*Edited by*  
Nola Erhardt  
Pat Leginsky

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**Faculty of Extension**  
**University of Alberta**



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## Introduction and Acknowledgements

FOR THE SECOND year the Women's Research Centre, a co-operative venture of Athabasca University and University of Alberta, hosted a Feminist Research Forum. It was held in Edmonton on the University of Alberta campus October 27 and 28, 1989. These proceedings attempt to recapture some of the voices at that event.

The Research Forum is an opportunity for women from all parts of the community to come together and share their research, regardless of its stage of development. These papers reflect this variation - some are exploratory, some quite conclusive and others reflective on process. Some presentations made at the forum are not included because we had neither notes nor audiotape from which to work. Summaries of the discussions that followed each presentation are not included due to the difficulty of capturing the tone, content and context. We also chose not to include descriptions of the various presenters because many of the women prefer to describe themselves given a particular time and space. Therefore, if you want to contact one of the presenters, please contact the Women's Research Centre at (403) 492-8950.

The Women's Program and Resource Centre, a part of the Faculty of Extension and separate from the Women's Research Centre, decided to publish these proceedings for two reasons. Being in the business of fostering women's life-long learning we work to disseminate new information. The exchange of new information at the Feminist Research Forum was limited to the 120 women who attended. We wanted to make this information more widely accessible. Publishing the proceedings was one strategy toward this end. The second reason for undertaking this activity stemmed from our desire to develop some skills and experience in producing, publishing and marketing educational materials. We dream about the development of a publishing element within the Women's Program but we need some experience to help ground our planning.

Producing and publishing these proceedings has been a large undertaking and is the result of many women's efforts. I want to acknowledge their effort, and in doing so make their work more visible.



A very special thanks is extended to all the women who presented at the '89 Feminist Research Forum and provided materials to be included in this document. Without their willingness to exchange ideas and information this project would not have been possible.

This project was undertaken amidst a hectic schedule and many changes at the Women's Program and Resource Centre. Having never before produced a document of this size or complexity, we had to learn as we worked. We attempted to anticipate the amount of time it would take to accomplish the various tasks, but many times estimates were much too conservative. Some papers were typed, others were audiotaped and needed to be transcribed, and some sessions had no record. Converting this data into an attractive and useful document took time and dogged determination.

Without the skills and expertise of Nola Erhardt this document would never have come into being. Using her background in journalism she was able to bring order to the chaos. She spent hours contacting the presenters seeking their notes and permission to use their material. She edited, input and laid out the material. She had to work with severe restrictions of time and resources. This project was not given high priority until the summer of 1990 and consequently the mad dash was on to get it completed before the third annual forum. I want to express a heartfelt thank-you to Nola for all her work.

In addition I want to thank Melody Burton, who served on the Operations Committee of the Research Centre, and had the original idea for the project. Thanks also to Mair Smith and Sheila Dunphy for the hours they spent transcribing taped presentations. Thanks to Padma Viswanathan for co-ordinating the transfer of material from one type of disc to another and to Leslie Stewart who helped near the end.

I also want to thank Canada Employment and Immigration for the Job Creation and SE/ED monies that made this whole project possible. Nola, Leslie, Sheila and Padma were all on federal grants while they worked at the Women's Program and Resource Centre.

Pat Leginsky

Director, Women's Program and Resource Centre



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## An Evening with Nellie McClung

Randi Warne

GOOD EVENING, its a great pleasure to be invited to speak with you here today and to read from some of my books. As you may imagine, I had a rather long way to come to get here but I survived even though it was cold. So, if you will just let me unpack my bag.

There.

Some of you may know that I was born in Ontario in 1873. I was born in a little stone house on Garafraxa road in October, the youngest of six children. I had an Irish Methodist father and a Scottish Presbyterian mother. As you can imagine, that made for some interesting religious dynamics in my upbringing.

Shortly before we moved to Manitoba, I went to my first church meeting. I was about five years old. My first time to be in church was at a revival meeting held at the Sauble where the reverend Mr. Reid, the Methodist minister of Chatsworth was holding special services. When my father and mother went one night they had to take me, for it seemed there was no way of leaving me. My mother, being a Scotch Presbyterian, did not hold with revival services and testimony meetings and confessions. But father was an out and out Methodist and had experienced the strange warming of the heart that John Wesley wrote about in his journal. We were late for the meeting and the alter call was sounding when we entered and crowds of people were pressing forward. As many more came in when we did, we soon found ourselves among the seekers and we knelt there with the others.

Mr. Reid put his hand on my head and said no child was too young to be reconciled to God, and he was glad to receive the lambs of the flock. I was the only child at the alter and I liked him very much for being so friendly. He was a tall man with brown whiskers and a cheerful face. He moved his ears when he talked, which I thought was very clever of him.

I had a trick too, just learned that day from my brother Will. I could shut one eye and keep the other one wide open, and I thought he might like to see me do it. So, when an old man who stuttered was giving his testimony and holding back the meeting with everyone getting impatient, I kept



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my one eye on the minister and the other one shut.

Mother said after we went home that Mr. Reid was too light a man to be preaching the gospel, for when poor old Samuel Norton was speaking, he actually began to laugh, although he did try to turn it into a cough. My father was loyal to the minister and said there was no harm to laugh at any time and it would be better if there were more laughter in the church. But mother refused to accept this and said there was a time to laugh and it was not in church. I didn't like to hear Mr. Reid criticized, so I said I wanted to go again, for I wanted to make my peace with God and that stopped the argument.

Mother was ready to talk to me then and tried to explain what it meant to be a Christian. She said I would have to stop mocking people, for that was my besetting sin, though it was not so much my fault she said as it was the fault of older people who encouraged me and laughed at me. I knew who the older people were and I was sorry that I had drawn my father into another argument.

It might sound that I had come from an unhappy home, but I didn't. I was loved and I always knew that love. I was always fortunate in my family connections. Part of this made me want to be a writer. I wanted to share the stories of the common people like my parents who had built this country from the ground up.

Well, I had those great plans of being an author but then something happened. I met the only woman that I would ever want to have be my mother-in-law — Annie McClung. What a woman! She had such a passion for women's justice. A temperance advocate, the wife of the Methodist minister, a suffrage activist, well, what could I do? I found out how many sons she had, picked the eldest one, set my cap for him and married him. But she was the one who brought about my career as a writer.

In 1905, she came to me one day and said, "Nellie, here is a short story contest for *Colliers* magazine and you are going to enter it." And I said, "But I have all these things to do." She said, "Nell dear, you go upstairs. I'll take care of the children, I'll take care of the dinner and I'll take care of Wes." And she did. I went upstairs and wrote. And even though the first chapter of the book did not win first prize, it became the first chapter of my first book *Sewing Seeds in Danny*.

The story I am going to relate now [from *Sewing Seeds in Danny*] is about two women. Two different types of women. There is an Irish washer woman, named Mrs. Watson, and a good middle class woman, very kind, but rather detached from reality, named Mrs. J. Burton-Francis.

"The only sound that disturbed the quiet of the afternoon in Mrs. Francis' sitting room was the regular rub-rub of the washboard in the kitchen below.

"Mrs. Watson is slow with the washing today," Mrs. Francis murmured with a look of concern on her usually placid face.

"Possibly she is not well. I will call her and see."

"Mrs. Watson, will you come upstairs please?" she



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called from the stairway.

Mrs. Watson, slow and shambling came up the stairs and stood in the doorway, wiping her face on her apron. "Is it me ye want ma'am?" she asked when she had recovered her breath.

"Yes, Mrs. Watson," Mrs. Francis said sweetly, "I thought perhaps you were not feeling well today. I have not heard you singing at your work, and the washing seems to have gone slowly. You must be very careful of your health and not overdo your strength."

While she was speaking, Mrs. Watson's eyes were busy with the room, the pictures on the wall, the cosy window seat and its numerous cushions; the warmth and brightness of it all brought a glow to her tired face. "Yes, ma'am, thank you kindly ma'am, it'd be very kind a ye thinkin' o' the likes of me," she replied.

"Oh, we should always think of others you know," Mrs. Francis replied quickly with her most winning smile, as she seated herself in a rocking chair. "Are the children all well? Dear little Danny, how is he?"

"Indeed ma'am, that same Danny is the upsettinst one of the nine and him only four come March. It was only this mornin' that he says to me as I was comin' away, 'Ma, do think she'll give ya pie for your dinner? Thry and remimber the taste of it won't ye Ma, and tell us when ye comes home,' sez he!"

"Oh, the sweet prattle of childhood," said Mrs. Francis, clasping her shapely white hands. "How very interesting it must be to watch their young minds unfolding as the flower! Is it nine little ones you have Mrs. Watson?"

"Yes, nine it is, ma'am, God save us. Teddy will be fourteen on St. Patrick's Day and all the rest are younger."

"Oh, it is a great responsibility to be a mother and yet few there be that think of it," added Mrs. Francis, dreamily.

"Thrue for ye ma'am," Mrs. Watson broke in. "There's my own man, John Watson. That man knows no more what it manes than you do yerself that hasn't one at all, at all, the Lord be praised; and him the father of nine."

"I have just been reading a great book by Dr. Ernestus Parker, on 'Motherhood', it would be a great benefit to both you and



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your husband," said Mrs. Francis.

"Och, ma'am," Mrs. Watson broke in hastily, "John is no hand for books and he always had a suspicions o' them since his own mother's great uncle William Mulcahey got himself transported durin' life or good behaviour for havin' a book no bigger than an almanac during the riots in Ireland. No ma'am, John wouldn't trade it at all at all, and he don't know one letther from another, what's more."

"Then if you would read it and explain it to him, it would be so helpful to you both, and so inspiring. It deals so ably with the problems of child training. You must be puzzled many times in the training of so many little minds, and Dr. Parker really does throw wonderful light on all the problems that confront mothers. And I am sure the mother of nine must have a great many perplexities."

Yes, Mrs. Watson had a great many perplexities – how to make trousers for four boys out of the one old pair the minister's wife had given her; how to make the memory of the rice pudding they had on Sunday last all the week; how to work all day and sew at night, and still be brave and patient; how to make little Danny and Buggy forget they were cold and hungry. Yes, Mrs. Watson had her problems but they were not the problems Dr. Ernestus Parker had dealt with in his book on 'Motherhood'.

"But I must not keep you, Mrs. Watson," Mrs. Francis said as she remembered the washing. "When you go downstairs would you kindly bring me up a small red notebook that you will find on the desk in the library?"

"Yes ma'am," said Mrs. Watson and went heavily down the stairs.

She found the book and brought it up. While she was making the second laborious journey down the softly padded stairs Mrs. Francis was making an entry in the little red book: *December 7, 1903. Talked with one woman today regarding beauty of motherhood. Recommended Dr. Parker's book. Believe good done.* Then she closed the book with a satisfied feeling. She was going to have a very full report for her department at the next annual convention for the Society for the Propagation of Lofty Ideals."



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We knew there could be a better way for women. That women could work together to improve conditions so there wouldn't be a situation like Mrs. Watson's with nine starving children. But, oh my dears the fight we had, and the opposition! You would not have believed the people we had to deal with and the corruption.

Well, a typical gentleman is described in *Purple Springs*. He is a conservative member of the legislature.

"Then Mr. Steadman arose! He was a stout man, with a square face and small beady black eyes and an aggressive manner; a man who felt sure of himself; who knew he was the centre of his own circle. There was a well-fed, complacent look about him too, which left no doubt that he was satisfied with things as they were — and would be deeply resentful of change. There was still in his countenance some trace of his ancestors' belief in the Divine Right of Kings. It showed in his narrow thought-proof forehead, and a certain indescribable attitude which he held toward others, and which separated him from his neighbours."

But he wasn't the worst. Oh no. Stephen Leacock — some of you may know of this man. What a terrible, terrible person! My goodness. In 1915, he wrote an article in *MacLeans* magazine saying: "Women get low wages because low wages is all that they are worth. Women should be allowed into every profession because women should have an opportunity to fail equally everywhere." I don't know what we did with people like that.

And then Sir Almroth Wright, the famous scientist, who said, "There are no good women, simply women who have come under the influence of good men." Well, is it any wonder we turned the tables on him and said, "Not only are women moral, we are certainly more moral than you, Sir Almroth." And then there was our own Sir Rodmond Roblin, premier of Manitoba. He ignored us, he patronized us, but normally he went on his own merry and corrupt little way, or at least he did until I began making speeches.

Never retract, never explain, get the thing done and let them howl! The world has never been partial to the thinking woman. The wise ones have always foreseen danger. Long years ago when women asked for an education the world cried out that it would never do. If women learned to read it would distract them from the real business of life which was to make home happy for some good man. If women learned to read there seemed to be a possibility that someday, some good man might come home and find his wife reading and dinner not ready and nothing could be imagined more horrible than that.

That seems to be the haunting fear of mankind — that the advancement of women will



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sometime, someway, someplace interfere with some man's comfort...If women would only be content to snip away at the symptoms of poverty and distress, feeding the hungry and clothing the naked, all would be well and they would be much commended for their kindness of heart. But when they begin to enquire into causes they find themselves in the sacred realm of politics where prejudice says no women must enter. A woman may take an interest in factory girls and hold meeting for them and encourage them to walk in virtue's ways all she likes but if she begins to advocate more sanitary surroundings for them with some respect for the common decencies of life, she will find herself again in that sacred realm of politics confronted by a factory act on which no profane female hand must be laid.

Politics simply means public affairs, yours and mine, everybody's. And to say that politics is too corrupt for women is a weak and foolish statement for any man to make. Any man who is actively involved in politics and declares that politics are too corrupt for women admits one of two things: either that he is a party to this corruption, or that he is unable to prevent it — and in either case, something should be done. What would you think of a man who would say to his wife, "This house to which I am bringing you to live is very dirty and unsanitary. But I will not allow you, the dear wife whom I have sworn to protect, to touch it. It is too dirty for your precious little white hands. You must stay upstairs dear. Of course, the odour from below may come up to you, but use your smelling salts and think no evil. I do not hope to ever be able to clean it up but certainly you must not ever think of trying."

Do you think any woman would stand for this? She would say, "John, you are all right in your own way, but there are some places where your brain skids. Perhaps you had better stay downtown today for lunch, but on your way please call at the grocer's and send me a scrubbing brush and a package of Dutch Cleanser and some chloride of lime and now hurry".

Women have cleaned things up since time began. And if women ever get into politics, there will be a cleaning out of pigeon holes and forgotten corners on which the dust of years have fallen. And the sound of the political carpet beater will be heard in all the land.

Then there is the pedestal theory — that women are way up on a pedestal and down below, looking up at them with deep adoration, are men, their willing slaves. Sitting up on a pedestal does not appeal very strongly to the healthy woman — and besides, if a woman has been on a pedestal for any length of time, it must be awfully hard to come down and cut the wood.

These tender-hearted and chivalrous gentlemen who tell you of their adoration for women cannot bear to think of woman occupying public positions. Their tender hearts shrink from the idea of women lawyers, or women policemen, or even women preachers. These positions would rub the bloom off the peach, to use their own eloquent words. They cannot bear they say, to see women leaving the sacred precincts of home — and yet their offices are scrubbed by women who do their work while other people sleep — poor women, who leave the sacred precincts of home to earn enough to keep the breath of life in them, who carry the scrub pails home through the deserted streets, long after the cars have stopped running. They are exposed to cold, to hunger, to insult — poor souls — is there any pity felt for



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them? Not that we have heard of. The tender ones can bear this with equanimity. It is the thought of women getting into comfortable and paid positions which wrings their manly hearts.

I understand you are having some experience of this at the university. Someone told me on the way here. This might also sound familiar: "Many men have felt perfectly qualified to sum up all women in a few crisp sentences, and they do not shrink from declaring in their modest way that they understand women far better than they understand themselves. They love to talk of women in bulk, all women — and quite cheerfully tell us that women are illogical, frivolous, jealous, vindictive, forgiving, affectionate, not any too honest, patient, frail, delightful, inconstant, faithful. Let us all take heart of grace for it seems we are the whole thing!

Almost all the books written about women have been written by men. Until the last fifty years, women have been the inarticulate sex; but although they had little to say about themselves, they have heard much. It is a very poor preacher or lecturer who has not a lengthy discourse on "Women's True Place". It is a very poor platform performer who cannot take the stand and show women exactly wherein they err. "This way ladies, for the straight and narrow path!" If women have gone astray from the straight and narrow path it is not because they have not been advised to pursue it. Man long ago decided that women's sphere was anything he did not wish to do himself, and if he did not particularly care for the straight and narrow way, he felt free to recommend it to women in general. He did not wish to tie himself too closely to home either, and still he knew somebody should stay on the job, so he decided that home was women's sphere.

One of the oldest and falsest of our beliefs is that women are protected — that somehow in the battle of life they get the best of it. People talk of men's chivalry — that vague, indefinite quality that is supposed to transmute the common clay of life into gold.

Chivalry is a magic word. It seems to breathe of foreign sands, of knights and earls and kings; it seems to tell of glorious deeds, of waving plumes and prancing steeds and belted earls — and things!

People tell us of the good old days of chivalry when womanhood was really respected and revered — when brave knight rode bravely forward to die for his lady love. But in order to be really loved and respected there was one hard and fast condition laid down to which all women must conform — they must be beautiful, no getting out of that. They simply had to have starry eyes and golden hair, or else black as a raven's wing. They had to have pale, white and haughty brow and a laugh like the ripple of magic. Then they were all right and armoured knights would die for them as quick as a wink!

The homely women were all witches, dreadful witches, and they drowned them on public holidays in the mill pond! People tell us now that chivalry is dead, and women have killed it, bold women, who instead of staying home, brodering pearls on a red velvet sleeve, have gone out to work, have gone to college side by side with men, and have been so unwomanly to have sometimes taken the prizes away from men. Chivalry cannot live in such an atmosphere. Certainly not!



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Of course, women can hardly be blamed for going out and working, when one remembers that they must either work or starve. Chivalry is like a line of credit. You can get plenty of it when you do not need it. When you are prospering financially and your bank account is growing and you are rated A-1, you can get plenty of credit. It is offered to you. But when the dark days of financial depression overtake you, and the people you are depending upon don't come through and you must have credit — must have it! — the very people who once urged it upon you will tell you, "money is tight!"

The young and pretty woman can get all the chivalry she wants. She will have seats offered to her on streetcars, men will hasten to carry her parcels or open doors for her; but the poor, old woman, beaten in the battle of life, sick of life's struggles, and growing grey and weather-beaten facing life's storms — what chivalry is shown her? She can go her weary way uncomfited and unattended. People who need it do not get it. Anyway, chivalry is a poor substitute for justice if one cannot have both.

If any person doubts that the society of the present day has been made for men and for men's advantage, let them look for a minute at the laws which govern society. Society allows men all privilege, all license, all liberty where women are concerned. He may lie to women, deceive them — all's fair in love and war — he may break many a heart and blast many a fair name. That merely throws a glamour about him. "He's a devil with women," they say, and it is no disadvantage in the business or political world — where man dominates. But if a man is dishonest in business, or neglects to pay his gambling bills, he is down and out. These are crimes against men — and therefore serious. This is also a sore thought! Then when men speak of these things, they throw the blame on women themselves, showing thereby that the Garden of Eden story of Adam and Eve and the apple, whether it be historically true or not, is true to life. Quite Adam-like, they throw the blame on women and say, "Women like a man with a past. Women like to be lied to. Women do not expect any man to be absolutely faithful to them if he is pleasant. The man who has the reputation of being wild has a better chance with women than the less attractive, but absolutely moral man." What a glorious thing it will be when men cease to speak for us, cease to tell us what we think, and let us speak for ourselves! I know the world in which we are living is not the world that was meant for us. There is a better way.

And before I end, I want to say how happy I am to see so many, so dedicated, to the common cause. It heartens. There is no resignation in nature, no quiet folding of the hands, no hypocritical saying, "Thy will be done", and giving in without a struggle. Countless millions of plants and seeds are doomed each year to death and failure, but all honour to them — they put up a fight to the very end! Resignation is a cheap and indolent human virtue, which has served as an excuse for much spiritual slothfulness. It is still highly revered and commended. It is so much easier to sit down sometimes and be resigned, than to rise up and be indignant.

Years ago people broke every law of sanitation and when plagues came they were resigned and piously looked heavenward and blamed God for the whole thing. "Thy will be done," they said, and now we know it was not God's will at all. It is never God's will that any should perish. People



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were resigned when they should have been cleaning up! "Thy will be done" should ever be the prayer of our hearts, but it does not let us out of any responsibility. It is not a weak acceptance of misfortune, or sickness, or injustice, or wrong, for these things are not God's will. "Thy will be done" is a call to fight — to call for better conditions, for moral and physical health, for sweeter manners, cleaner laws, for a fairer chance for everyone — even women!

Thank you so much. It made the trip well worth while. It's been suggested that you might like to hear a little bit more and I did bring one thing with me, if I can only find it. When one is travelling across the universe it's hard to keep a tidy travel bag.

In 1921, I was invited to be the only female Canadian delegate at the fifth ecumenical conference in London, England. I was invited to speak on "The Awakening of Women". There were not many women, in fact, at this conference, and frankly, they looked quite wide awake. This is what I had to say to them:

"The "Awakening of Women" is a rather misleading title. Women have always been awake. The woman of fifty years ago who carted the wool, spun it, wove the cloth to clothe her family, made the clothes without any help from Mr. Butterick or the *Ladies Pictorial*, brewed her own cordials, baked her own bread, washed, ironed, scrubbed, without any labour saving devices, and besides this always had the meals on time and incidentally raised a family and a few chickens and vegetables in her spare time, may be excused if she did not take much interest in politics, or even know who was likely to be the next Prime Minister. But her lack of interest was not any proof that she was asleep — she was only busy!

But an economic change has taken place in the last fifty years, and the work which women did by hand is now being done in factories. I need not enumerate the number of things which come into the house now in paper cartons to which we "add boiling water and serve"! The can opener has come to stay. Women have lost their old occupations of spinner, weaver, dress-maker, milliner, canner, doctor, manufacturer. Therefore, new activities attract them.

The normal woman is not satisfied with anything less than a full-size job. So, it is happened that women have sought, and are seeking, new occupations. It is too late to discuss whether they are happier or better or the world is safer. The clock of time will not turn back.



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The church should have led women into new activities, using its best judgement to guide them safely in the perilous new ways. It did not see its opportunity and tried, blindly, to herd them back to safety.

One young girl told me when she went to her pastor with her soul on fire to do something for humanity, he asked her to keep fresh flowers on the altar! Many of the bravest, cleverest, most patriotic women who served their fellowmen in sincerity of soul, are outside the church and not concerned with it at all, and maybe you will wonder why? I can tell you if you are quite sure you would like to hear.

The church of Christ should have championed the woman's cause; it should have led all the reform forces in bringing liberty of soul and freedom of action to women. It has not done so — I mean officially. Individual members and ministers have done so and to them we are very grateful but the church has been slow to move, stiff and cold.

It preached resignation when it should have sounded the note of rebellion. Many of the brightest women grew impatient and indignant and went out the church door figuratively slamming the door. Slamming an innocent door has always seemed to me a misdirection of energy, though the impulse might be a proper one. It is better to linger after the sermon and interview the preacher."

I wonder if any of you have any questions you would like to ask before I close. What would you like to hear more about — I have written quite a bit.

*Audience:* Where are your children, Nellie? Who is looking after your children?

*Nellie:* Actually, not many of my children are living at this point, and they are well taken care of where they are staying now with me. However, that question was asked of me repeatedly, "what about your children?" Well, it got so we taught our youngest son Mark— my husband did this even though people said I did it — taught him to say, "I am a suffragette's child and never knew a Mother's love." We had to herd them through the back streets. If one was out getting dusty, the older ones would take him in and wash him up so the telegraph man wouldn't come and report in the paper that I was neglecting my children. And the comments that I would get about my husband's socks, people would ask me when I would come to speak on temperance, or factory laws, or women's property rights, or very many other



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serious and important questions, how my husband's socks were doing? More attention were paid to that man's socks than anything in the whole world. But then that was the priority of male state-craft. If any of us appeared unkempt, if we were overweight, if we were not beautiful, we were fair game. And I think if you look at some of the cartoons that we've seen, if you look through the newspaper, you will see how devastating that was. Fortunately, they were such foolish creatures themselves, it wasn't hard to make a good joke out of them.

*Audience:* How does it feel to be home in Alberta?

*Nellie:* Well, it's one of my many homes and I like it tremendously. I must say that the spirit of reform was so lively in Alberta when I was here in the '20s and it seems that was not kept on through the years. I would enjoin all of you here to engage that fight again because it is possible to change things. Working together, it is possible to change things. We did what little bit we could do and I know looking around this room that there is hope yet. Thank you.



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Audience: How does it feel to be home in Alberta?

Nellie: Well, it's one of my many homes and I like it tremendously. I must say that the spirit of return was so lively in Alberta when I was here in the '30s and it seems that was not kept on through the years. I would enjoy all of you here to engage that right again because it is possible to change things. Working together, it is possible to change things. We did what little bit we could do and I know looking around this room that there is hope yet. Thank you.



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## Social and Economic Problems of Immigrant Women

Sushila Samy

I WILL present a brief outline of some issues and concerns facing immigrant women.

In spite of popular stereotypes, there is no homogeneous group of immigrant women. Immigrant women come from different backgrounds and have different histories and experiences. Even women who are of the same race, have the same religion and language and come from the same country can be quite different in their political ideologies and have different interpretations of experiences. The reality is that difference between immigrant women and white women is noticed more than difference between immigrant women.

What immigrant women have in common is they all have to deal with a sexist society with a sexist immigration policy, a labour market which is segregated and a society which discriminates on the basis of race — both overtly and systemically.

Throughout history, only men's experiences and work have been validated. This is also true in the immigrant community. Therefore, there is little or no record of the work of immigrant women, though historically, both men and women were brought to work in Canada. It is only recently that studies have been undertaken on immigrant women's role in the labour force. This is largely due to the fact that immigrant women have begun to organize and demand to participate equally in society.

Studies undertaken do not take into account the role of a large number of women in the hidden economy — home cleaners, baby-sitters, etc. More recently, immigrant women have begun to do their own research in order to write their own history and claim their power.

Immigrant women face triple disadvantage in Canadian society — as women, as foreign-born and as women of colour. An obvious consequence of racial discrimination in employment is income disparity between white and non-white women. This disparity is borne out by statistics.

A 1981 census shows that 81,500 immigrant women were in the labour force. (This included women from the U.S., the U.K. and Southern Europe.) Of this, only 17,560 women (21.6 per cent) were in managerial and professional occupations. There were 78.4 per cent in clerical and service



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industries. Although 50 per cent of the women were from Asia, they held only 20 per cent of the managerial and professional jobs.

Contrary to the stereotype, 83.4 per cent of immigrant women arriving in Canada between 1980 and 1985 had secondary school or a higher educational certificate. Of these, 77 per cent were from the Independent Class (in the immigration category). Recent arrivals of immigrant women have higher educational levels than Canadian-born women, yet are not represented equally in managerial and professional positions.

We should remember that immigrant women "increase competition for jobs, thereby providing industries and businesses with a relatively cheap pool of labour that can be manipulated to meet the needs of employers" (Ng & Das Gupta 1983). One reason for this is deprofessionalization of the labour of immigrant women. Universities and professional bodies have refused to recognize foreign qualifications of immigrant women. Although immigrant women are encouraged to work as volunteers in their areas of expertise, they do not get jobs when a vacancy arises in the field. For example, a social worker will be asked to do volunteer work but will not be offered a paid position when a vacancy arises because her professional qualifications are not recognized. In instances where an immigrant woman has undergone retraining, she will still not get a paid position, or will be forced to take a lower salary because of her lack of "Canadian experience".

In order to provide some means of financial support for her family, an immigrant woman may decide to take any job offered to her. In most cases, she is the only source of financial support for her family. So although she is a trained social worker, nurse, teacher or doctor, she is forced to work in a low-paying, non-unionized, monotonous job that demands long hours and does not use any of the skills she possesses—a job such as baby-sitting or cleaning. Being in a new country and not knowing her rights, she is exploited and afraid to speak out. Most immigrant women take these jobs thinking it is only for a short time and they will go back into their professions soon. The sad fact is that most tend to stay on in these dead-end jobs with no alternatives.

Further, lack of English language programs causes serious problems and adds to the economic and social stresses experienced by immigrant women. A 1986 survey by Alberta Career Development and Employment showed that "50 per cent of all immigrants arriving in Alberta had no knowledge of English. Among refugee, 85 per cent had no knowledge of English." Yet job-related and community-based English as a Second Language programs are totally insufficient and the programs are being cut back rather than expanded.

Between 1973 and 1979, 60,000 domestics workers (mainly women) entered Canada. Most of these women were from Third World Countries—the Caribbean and the Philippines. Domestic work has normally consisted of poor pay, long hours and low status. When domestic workers are from another country, speak little English, are unfamiliar with Canadian law and are not protected by legislation, the potential for abuse becomes great. In Alberta, domestic workers are not covered by the



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*Individual's Rights Protection Act* or by minimum wage laws. As such, they are easy victims for financial, sexual and physical abuse.

An immigrant woman goes through a great deal of mental and physical stress in moving to a new country and starting all over again. At a time when she needs all the support she can get, she lacks a traditional family network and familiar resources like friends, family and a close-knit community. She begins to blame herself for not being able to cope, and her lack of fluency in English further hinders her from seeking support from the outside.

Social workers who counsel her do not try to understand her culture or background. I know of a number of instances where a woman has been prescribed tranquillizers that have further depressed her. This can lead to all kinds of physical illness and psychosomatic problems.

Socially, an immigrant woman faces a problem in maintaining her cultural norms and traditions while trying to accept and adjust to her new environment. This causes great conflict within her, especially when she is raising children as she is afraid they will lose their cultural values. As the children become more and more Canadianized, there is an inevitable clash between newly acquired values of the children and traditional values of the parents. The mother, normally, feels guilty for not being able to bring the children up in her own culture and feels she is a failure. The social isolation of an immigrant woman is intensified by her inability to speak English, and when her children start speaking English, she finds she is unable to communicate with them and their friends. Both the children and their mother are embarrassed, and her isolation is increased.



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## Maternal Feminism: A Useful Category for Examining Women's Past?

Randi R. Warne

THE INTERPRETIVE category "maternal feminism" has been pervasive in second-wave feminist attempts to document and understand the actions of their first-wave feminist foremothers. Yet suspicion is arising amongst some feminist scholars that the term may not be as universally serviceable as once thought; indeed, in certain cases it seems to have truncated and distorted the subject matter under investigation beyond all reasonable limits. Our presentation today addresses this problem. We will discuss "maternal feminism" in relation to its origins and in its relation to our own work, concluding with suggestions for a more adequate frame of reference for investigating this time period. Overall, we would suggest that the burden of proof now rests with those who would use "maternal feminism" in light of what we would argue are its now obvious limitations.

First, a definition: "maternal feminism" is generally understood to refer to the patriarchal conservative view of a dual-nature humanity, as articulated by women. Fundamental biological and ontological differences between the sexes are assumed, but the value of those traditional qualities shifts so that in "maternal feminism" traditional female values are accorded higher status than their male counterparts. ("Feeling" is considered superior to "reason", for example, and "nurturance" to "autonomy".) It is a "special nature" view of women which holds that the public realm needs to be morally "purified" and transformed by women's presence, hence the campaigns for suffrage, temperance, etc...

This term emerged as a scholarly tool in a particular time and place, and is marked with the political agenda of that period. In the 1960s a new kind of feminism was emerging. It emphasized individual freedom, the abolition of traditional gender roles, a so-called "sexual revolution". There needed to be some way to describe this phenomenon in a way which differentiated it from the feminism of the past. Looking at literature from the earlier period, it seemed that while in the mid-19th century women used "equal rights" as the basis for their claim to participation in the public sphere, as time passed they began to demand such participation on the grounds that, as wives and mothers, they needed political power to protect their children. Moreover, they argued that women were morally superior beings whose



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insight and priorities could “clean up” corrupt political life. This emphasis on moral motherhood led scholars to coin the term “maternal feminism”.

Two things need to be remembered here. First, the '60s were a time of economic expansion. The political climate was liberal — anything was possible for the independent, creative, dedicated individual. For whites at any rate, the public sphere was considered to be neutral. Biology, as the birth control pill implied, was something to be overcome. In short, all the realities of women's traditional lives — all women's *specificities* — were things to be rejected.

The second point is informed by the first. Scholars who began to investigate first-wave feminism did so with a very particular political agenda in mind. They were trying to show why first-wave feminism “failed”. They assumed that because the women who struggled for suffrage did not achieve total transformation of the world, there must have been something wrong with *them*. They were “inconsistent” in asking for equal rights on the basis of their maternal role. They claimed to be “morally superior” to men, an outrageous assertion in the “egalitarian”-minded '60s. Moreover, they asked for things like temperance and sexual fidelity which, in the mood of the time, were obvious indicators of prudishness and personal limitation. “Maternal feminism”, in short, was a pejorative term which presupposed inadequacy and failure.

Additional negative baggage developed with the emergence of socialist feminist critique, which saw these women's emphasis on home and family as supporting the patriarchal, bourgeois norm, by definition. That their demand to have domestic work valued might have significant economic implications, or that working men's (person's) rights in the labour market might not be the only significant locus for the sparking of social change was rarely considered.

When I began my own work on the social activism of Nellie McClung, “maternal feminism” stood in my way like a roadblock. The problem was further complicated in that I was looking at the *religious* grounding of McClung's feminism — and in the ideology of socialist feminism, that meant that McClung and others like her were deluded and conservative by definition. Seen through this lens, McClung was supposed to be pious, judgemental, moralistic and dogmatic. Yet when I read her literature, I found an individual full of wit, humour, passion and delight. Moreover, far from limiting the scope of her social activism, McClung's religion seemed to be the sustaining base of her most radical challenges to the status quo. What was going on?

There are many ways to answer this question. However, for our current purposes, I will provide one example of omission which illustrates how ideologically-laden terminology, used uncritically, serves to distort understanding.

The omission is the oft quoted passage from McClung's *In Times Like These*: “Deeply rooted in almost every woman's heart is the love of home and children...” But then McClung *goes on*: “but independence is sweet and when marriage means the loss of independence, there are women brave enough and strong enough to turn away from it.” That makes a considerable difference.



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Part of the problem for these researchers issued from the fact that they read the texts they encountered straightforwardly, as theoretical positions, without much concern for context or strategy. The later Victorian era was dominated by the ideology of "separate spheres", and saw the atypical location of religion and morality in women's "separate sphere" of domestic life. Unwittingly, this gave women a powerful rhetorical weapon for use in their struggle for decent treatment. Unlike earlier times, where women were considered simply carnal, irrational inferiors, women had an institution - the church - which though it fought it furiously, could be called upon as proof of women's moral claim. As well, it needs to be remembered that the dominant discourse of the time centred on evolution, specifically social evolution. Moral motherhood, with women as "mothers of the race," gave women a specific, and powerfully determining, role to play in social evolution.

Finally, it is important to lift up the anti-feminist context within which these women were working. Arguments about women's physical, mental and moral inferiority abounded on all sides; no one single argument existed against women's rights, which then could be systematically addressed and dismantled. *The environment was one of distorted political discourse.* It is small wonder that many women, McClung among them, adopted the rhetorical strategy of turning dominant discourse on its head. While many women undoubtedly believed themselves morally superior and spiritually distinct, that stance does not differ markedly with many held as "radical" today, lesbian separatists among them. It should also be remembered that revealing one's true agenda is not always the most expedient strategy in gaining political advantage! As Ernest Forbes' excellent article illustrates, what women actually said at their meetings and what they were willing to reveal publicly were often two different things. These women were pragmatists, and were intent upon actually achieving their goal.

An alternative reading of the material suggests that at least some so-called maternal feminists were actually mounting a profound challenge to the androcentric world. Constrained by a prejudicial political environment, they used the dominant public language available to them and stood it on its head. They called the public sphere to be accountable to women's experience — not women's experience as it sought to mimic men's, but women's *specific, traditional* experience. And whatever their rhetoric, as the McClung quote illustrates, they were calling for a world within which women would be allowed to make their own choices about their lives. Seen in light of this observation, and those made above, the reality of first-wave feminism looks considerably changed.

#### Material Feminism: An Alternative

The alternative interpretive framework we would propose is that of "material feminism". The term originates with Dolores Hayden's ground-breaking work, *The Grand Domestic Revolution*, and emerges out of her exploration of American domestic reform in a period of profound social change. Through her work on theoreticians and practitioners like Charlotte Perkins Gilman and



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Melusina Faye Pierce, Hayden concludes that the entire period of late Victorian feminist activism has been misunderstood. Rather than being a sentimental paeon to the patriarchal family, the feminist concern for domestic life reflected something much more profound, and radical. As Hayden states:

"The overarching theme of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century feminist movement was to overcome the split between domestic and public life created by industrial capitalism, as it affected women. Every feminist campaign for women's autonomy must be seen in this light."

She goes on:

"Whether feminists sought control over property, child custody, divorce, 'voluntary motherhood', temperance, prostitution, housing, refuse disposal, water supplies, schools or workplaces, their aims were summarized by the historian Aileen Kraditor: "women's sphere must be defined by women"."

In a larger sense, what this meant was that these feminists "defined women's control over women's sphere as women's control over the reproduction of society...Their insistence that all household labor and child care become social labor was a demand for homelike, nurturing neighborhoods." Our current struggles around the recognition of women's unpaid labour in the home give evidence to the profound challenge thus posed to the public sphere in an androcentric world.

We would suggest that material feminism as an interpretive category provides the basis for investigating the individual particularities of women's lives in relation to the material conditions which shaped their possible choices. It respects the tension between theoretical formulation and pragmatic application, and allows for the investigation and analysis of structural bias independent of the preset agenda of much socialist feminism. In short, it allows for an interpretive moment where scholars can attend to the specificities of real women's real lives, and in so doing, evaluate the significance of choices made without having to engage in a quest for heroes and villains. We have found it a fresh and fruitful place from which to start.

This being said, we do not advocate it as the only acceptable feminist stance, or consider it exhaustive of all the material it engages. However, we have found that it opens new windows of interpretive possibility, and makes available the rich and varied texture of women's individual and collective lives.



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## Teasing Out Gender from "Genderless" Systems at the University of Calgary

Anna K. Koutis

WHAT I have to share with you are the procedures followed and the blocks encountered in compiling a booklet called *The Women's Guide to the University of Calgary*. The purpose of creating this booklet was, initially, to make it possible for women to know: what women's groups existed on campus; what their mandates were; and if they were by chance duplicating each other's efforts and services.

The final product is more broadly defined. It lists and describes programs, services and issues of concern to all women: faculty, staff and all levels of students at the University of Calgary. And so the questions answered by the finished product are the following. What does the U of C have? What does the U of C offer that is of concern or interest to women on campus? How can women access those services, or become involved with that group? In order to give you a sense of what we are discussing, I will list the table of contents for you and give a few samples from the information given in the booklet. Following that, the more important underlying task today -- explaining the procedures and difficulties in producing the booklet -- will be addressed.

### Contents:

- Education
- Research
- Finances
- Employment
- Committees Involving Women's Issues
- The Students' Union
- Women's Groups
- Women's Journals, Newsletters and Books



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Doors, Shelves, Walls and Boards  
Other Clubs that Address Women's Concerns  
Student Centres and Services  
Entertainment and the Arts  
Fitness and Sport  
Health  
Counselling  
Legal Assistance  
Vehicles and Security Services  
Housing  
Children

Samples:

**"Women's Studies Courses**

The focus here is on the experiences of women. By analyzing recorded law, history, literary forms and other topics, these courses uncover the gender bias in scholarship while offering a gender specific understanding of society. For further information on all the above, call Dr. Martindale at 220-7246."

**"Pandora's Studio**, a women's collective, produces a radio program of the same name. The show, on CJSW 90.9 FM, Tues. 8-9 pm, is about women, for everyone. It features interviews on the arts, politics and issues of concern to women, reviews, editorials, music and networking information in a different voice. The collective meets monthly. Members participate in all areas of the show: writing, announcing, interviewing and teaching. Some men are involved as contributors only. Campus and community women are invited to join. Prior radio experience is not necessary. Fees are \$5/students, \$15/ others. For further information contact Kerry at 127 MH, 220-3903."

Doing the Work

That is the extent to which the contents of the booklet will be addressed in my talk. Samples of the yet unprinted booklet are here for you to look at, and a sheet to sign if you would like me



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to send you a copy after it has been published. The following are the questions that had to be dealt with in simply doing the work.

- 1) What *issues* should be considered when choosing the services, programs, groups and resources to be included in the booklet?
- 2) How does one tease out *gender specific information* from areas on campus that believe themselves to be undifferentiated in regards to gender?
- 3) What are the *feminist ethics* that ground the report writing style of the work?
- 4) How is the booklet to be written in order to appeal to both women who do, and women who do not, ascribe to a *feminist perspective*?
- 5) A practical concern: how are the money-holders in this institution to be convinced this is a worthwhile project towards which they should allocate *funds* to cover the printing costs and also offer *computer support*?

Let me answer these questions in some detail.

#### 1) *Issues*

I used two points of reference here:

a. I chose topics that have been identified by feminists as "of concern to women", for example: non-traditional educational opportunities; women's organizing and journals; mental and physical well-being, including concerns with relationships, children, safety; and several others.

b. I addressed topics identified in the past on university campuses. This information was found in Student Union archives and came from studies performed at the U of C by faculty, students and the U of C Status of Women Committee, Advisory to the President, as well as studies from other universities. Some of these were, for instance, concerns with safety on campus after dark and special needs of the adult student in relation to health care, counselling and child care. All this information was readily accessible to me. The difficulty lay in the relative absence of current research at the U of C, a situation that needs remediation if women's experiences at this institution are to be validated.

#### 2) *Gender Specific Information*

In order to tease out gender, I conducted lengthy interviews with directors of different departments and presidents of clubs. Especially when people interviewed felt they offered no services



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which specifically targetted women, the interviews included all aspects of the department until some relevant information was revealed.

Frequent reactions to my asking for information about women were polite hostility or overt perplexity as to why I would wish to be divisive and concern myself with only women rather than humanity in its entirety. My general response to this is documented in the introduction to the booklet:

"Considering that in the past, women were not allowed to participate in any aspect of post-secondary institutions, it is not surprising that printed information about campus life is written in a genderless fashion with the assumption that what is useful for men to know, is also useful for women to know. True, *all* information about the University is useful to women, and some things which are identified as "of concern" to women are of concern to men as well. However, in our society and at this point in history, some concerns are closer to the actual experiences of women than of men, and some are simply articulated more by women than by men."

More importantly, the things which I think got me past this barrier were tight interviewing skills, attentiveness and womanly empathy towards the feelings, concerns and investment my interviewees had in the principles by which they ran their departments.

One difficult issue which I must address at this point is the fact that I did *not* interview *recipients* of the different services at the U of C. This was due to time constraints of the project. A random sampling of recipients of the services, some time in the future, would be very useful in order to determine whether women agree they are receiving the services which the programs profess to be offering them, and to what degree these programs facilitate their lives at the U of C.

Also, I want to give an example of the progressive changes in an entry. Through the interviewing method, the information I gained was by department. However, in one particular instance, the departmental divisions did not seem appropriate. For instance, how does the Parking Services Department or the Security Services Department address women's concerns? Because these are separate departments, they see themselves as unconnected. However the *issue* of my concern with both of them was assistance with vehicles. In this instance, the issue, not the department was the focus of my query. The respondents saw my interviews as free advertising for their department and reacted against combining their services. Here is an example:

**"Assistance with cars**

Assistance in starting a stalled car is available by calling 220-6772 from



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7:30 a.m. to midnight every day. If the car cannot be started, its occupants will be driven to the nearest appropriate bus stop. The Parking Services employees who offer this assistance can be identified by their red U of C cars displaying the words PARKING SERVICES on them.

The number 220-6772 is also displayed on the Motorist Assistance Program (MAP) signs that are posted close to the entrance of all the campus parking lots. Phones are available for emergency use in most parking lot ticket booths. Parking Services cars are continually driving around the campus until midnight, therefore it may be possible to simply flag one down when help is needed.

After midnight emergency calls should be directed to Campus Security at 220-6333. The security guards will not assist with the car, but will they take its occupants to the nearest appropriate bus stop as well. The guards are available all night, 7 nights a week."

The book also includes entries on natives, adult students, lesbians and services for persons with disabilities. These entries are informed by awareness that one of the key problems of the women's movement today is that it is based on issues of relevance to middle-class, Anglo Saxon, heterosexual and fully abled women, and that it discriminates against minority women. These entries are an effort to rectify this problem. On a university campus, students past the age of 25 are also treated as a minority population, regardless of their growing numbers.

### *3) Feminist Ethics*

Another questions was: should this particular work be written in a straightforward journalistic style, or should feminist critique and analysis be appended to each of the topics? The primary purpose of the booklet was to facilitate the lives of all women on campus. My decision was to simply present the information and dispense with editorializing. My commitment to social change was expressed by the following method of positive action: when I found a service which lacked a certain aspect which affected women's lives, I searched out other services, similar in purpose but containing that aspect which the first one lacked (if it existed) and then included that service in the booklet as well. I have had both negative and positive responses to this approach: negative from my feminist friends and positive from the conservative element (which is extensive) at the U of C.

I will defend my position by saying that it is just that conservative element which I was



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hoping to affect. One of my concerns with this project was to demonstrate to this conservative and largely anti-feminist campus the positive contribution of feminist thought in regards to women's daily lives. Because I wanted the contents of this booklet to facilitate women's experiences on campus, an indirect rather than direct approach to social change was my goal. And so the contents are in a descriptive, journalistic form, rather than an editorialized form. I feel the more direct approach to social change on this campus will have to come from other sources such as the U of C women's collective, Artemis, which I helped to form over the summer months, and whose mandate includes action for change at the U of C.

#### *4) Feminist Perspective*

The information was gathered from directors of programs regardless of their stand in regards to feminism, and their input on the written draft was sought. Therefore, the information included and the way in which I have related it to the concerns of women has been fully authorized. This was accomplished by making numerous contacts with the persons interviewed and by requesting all forms of feedback on my rough drafts of their topic.

The final copy of the booklet requires something of both groups of women. Feminists must accept it as a booklet containing information without criticism or suggestions for social change. Women not of a feminist perspective must accept that information can be divided along gender lines.

#### *5) Funds and Computer Support*

These have been the most difficult aspects of the entire project. It is widely recognized that women's groups and women's endeavours are, to a large extent, frustrated by limited access to resources. Without a sound financial base, we are at the mercy of the male power and bureaucratic structures. The point here is that women do not have resources to act as independent entities. Lack of those resources demands that persons undertaking a project such as this take into account that the bureaucratic system works at its own pace. For instance, the compiling of the information -- my primary concern -- was undertaken during the summer months and was funded by a Summer Employment/Experience Development grant. The grant, however, does not cover printing costs nor research support. These must be solicited from other sources, for instance the university community. Much of the university community is dispersed all over the world in the summer months, therefore executive committees do not meet and cannot make funding decisions during summer months. Therefore, the completed form of the booklet cannot be realized until at least one or two months after the academic session has reconvened in the fall. This should be taken into account when taking on such a project unless it is possible to convince the money-holders to donate towards the cause in advance.

This concludes my meta-analysis of *The Women's Guide to the University of Calgary*. I have briefly summarized how I tackled the problems of: choosing the right issues; adhering to feminist ethics; sorting out gendered aspects of services; addressing the target audience in a way that would get a



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receptive response; and gathering financial support for a feminist project from a very conservative institution. I had one way of addressing these issues; it certainly is not the only way of doing so. I would like to point out, however, that I found it interesting during the course of listening to Randi Warne's talk about Maternal Feminism, that 60 years after the active work of Nellie McClung, women still have to be cautious with the ways and means of getting their message across so as to accomplish the job without offending those who hold the power. I find this depressing because it is only one of many indicators of how little we have advanced our cause over that period of time, and how much work is still left to be done. In regards to *The Women's Guide to the University of Calgary*, itself, my hope is that it will reach those women at the U of C who can benefit from facilitative information regarding their lives on campus, and that the booklet will be updated from year to year with new editions printed and distributed annually.



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## Women's Archives

Introduction by Susan Jackel

I work in the Department of Canadian Studies at the University of Alberta, teach women's history and write about the history of women in the Prairies. As a working historian I know that none of us can do our jobs without archives, documents and sources. In teaching the history of women in Canada, there are no textbooks and few articles and monographs and studies I can use. Similarly, there aren't a lot of books and articles about women in the Prairie Provinces. It is difficult to obtain other sources for my work. There are collections in the Provincial Archives and also in the Glenbow Museum and various other small archives and museums, but they're not well organized nor easy to access.

Last year, during a talk about writing women's history, someone said, "Do you know what happened to us last week? Someone came in and said they'd just cleaned out their cellar and thrown out ten years of records from *Branching Out*." (*Branching Out* was a magazine published in the 1970s and early 1980s.) We realized the records of the Alberta women's movement were disappearing. In keeping with this realization, this session addresses the more general topic of women's archives. Nancy Adamson, who's here from Toronto where she is a sexual harassment officer at the University of Toronto, will describe the Canadian Women's Movement Archives — how it got going and for what purposes. Then, Sheila Dunphy, representing the Northern Alberta Women's Archives Project, will describe the work she has been doing over the past summer and the next stages in that project.







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## Returning to the Source — Women's Archives

Nancy Adamson

I'm from the Canadian Women's Movement Archives/les archives canadiennes de mouvement des femmes, located in Toronto. The archives started in 1977 when a women's newspaper called *The Other Woman* ceased publication. A woman who'd been on the collective, essentially the editor of that publication, realized they had a lot of important material about the women's movement as a result of exchanges with a lot of other periodicals. In addition, they had all their own collective minutes, correspondence, etc. She decided she should keep this collection, not just as a collection, but keep it growing, and that gave her the idea of starting a women's archives.

In 1979, we decided to incorporate and become a non-profit charitable organization so we could get grants and donations. We got a grant to open the archives to the public in 1980. We found an office space and we've been in existence ever since.

I want to talk a bit about what we collect, because we are not an ordinary archives. We define archival material really broadly, not just minutes and correspondence of organizations but also posters, buttons, any kind of publications, newsletters, newspapers, magazines and reports. We have a small library of books by and about Canadian women, and we think all this material constitutes the archival material of the Canadian women's movement. We usually tell people, if you thought it was worth saving, we'd probably be interested in it.

We decided we had to define very carefully what it is we collect, so we collect material from the contemporary (that is 1960 to the present) Canadian women's movement. We define women's movement broadly, but we focus mostly on organizations that have had or have as one of their primary aims the improvement of women's social, political and economic status. We try to be very clear about what it is we are collecting, so when people use us they know what we've got, and so we can build a strong collection in a certain area.

There have been times when it's been hard to stick to our parameters. We were offered the Women's Christian Temperance Union records. They were held in Toronto and included national,



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regional and local records for Canada. A number of us are historians, and we were very tempted, but it wasn't appropriate for our collection, so we referred them to the National Archives. More recently, Louise McKinney's grandson called us. (Louise was one of the women in the Person's Case.) He told us, "I have my grandmother's stuff, and my kids aren't interested. Do you want it? I don't have room for it any more." We met with him, and in fact he had some interesting material, so we did take it from him. But it's not material appropriate for us so we contacted both the Provincial Archives in Alberta and the Glenbow and it's on its way now to the Glenbow.

It's hard sometimes, but we feel very strongly it's important to define carefully what we are doing and make sure material ends up in an appropriate place. Not only do we pass on old material, we are also trying to avoid centralizing everything in Toronto. We will take material from anywhere across the country if the alternative is a garbage can, but many women feel strongly that their material, if it's generated in a particular area, should remain there. We support that perspective, and encourage women to think about where they would like their material to go. There are provincial archives, university archives and local archives that are quite happy to take material. There is a women's archives group now in Vancouver. There's the project here. Women can make choices about where their material will go. In Cape Breton, there's a women's archives that has been started. In Montreal, there's a lesbian archives that's started. There are independent archives being established across the country.

We encourage women if they feel it's important to keep their material locally to make sure it's kept in a place that will value it for what it is and make it available to researchers. Lots of feminists don't feel comfortable putting their material in traditional archives; they are not certain it will be valued. They are also concerned about confidentiality, particularly if it is certain kinds of material — such as early abortion material where people were doing referral, as names may be included. Lesbian organizations are also very reluctant to deposit their material, both because they're not sure it will be kept or made available, and also because of the issue of names.

Groups from coast to coast have decided to deposit their records with the Canadian Women's Movement Archives. By photocopying material and letting people know what we have, we make our holding accessible to those who can't get to Toronto. It's very important to us that this material be accessible. When people come through Toronto, we make an effort to open the archives on the weekends or in the evening. We want the material to be used — that's the most important thing to us.

That's probably enough about our collection policy. What I want to talk about now is a very important project we are doing: microfiching Canadian women's periodicals. We define women's periodicals to include newsletters as well as newspapers, magazines and scholarly journals. We received two small grants to enable us to do this work. We've had to restrict access to early newspapers from the late '60s and early '70s, because they crumble when you use them, and copies are too rare to let that happen. So we are microfiching our collection.

We are trying to get a complete run of each periodical before we send it off to be



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microfiched, and that's proving to be quite a challenge. What I did before coming here was to go through our Alberta periodicals and list our missing issues. There will be some titles, for example *Branching Out*, which will not be on the list because we do have a complete run of *Branching Out*. There may be other titles that are not on our list simply because we don't have any issues in our collection and we don't know they exist. If you know of places or if in your basement you have a hoard of publications (I also brought the list from Saskatchewan — since you are neighbours I thought people might also have some of those) please loan them to us. We'll gladly return them and pay any postage costs involved. We would appreciate any help you can give us. We are also contacting libraries and the Women's Resource Centre here at the University of Alberta in an attempt to locate some of these.

I'm surprised at how often we get back negative responses: "Oh, no we don't have any of those." Many organizations, for example the Alberta Status of Women Action Committee, don't have complete runs of their own publication. So even if you just have one or two issues, those might be very important. Loan them to us, donate them to the organization that published them, donate them to a public library or university library. They are really valuable parts of our history.

One thing we might do at the Women's Archives, because we do have a wonderful collection of periodicals and are starting to get a lot of duplicates, is start sending duplicates of Alberta periodicals back here either to the Women's Resource Centre or some other place you might think appropriate. This will make these issues available.

Once periodical runs are microfiched we are going to sell these to various resource centres across the country, so it will be an important way of keeping the Women's Archives in Toronto going and also making all this material available. I think it's a really exciting project.

We just got funding from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council for a two-year project to put together a book that will list sources for the history of the contemporary Canadian women's movement. These will be sources in public archives, in independent archives and records that are still held by organizations. At the moment it's very hard to know what's available. Sometimes we've had graduate students come to the archives and say, "I really wanted to do something but my professor said there's nothing available; you can't do a Masters thesis or an honours thesis or Ph.D on that topic because there aren't any records." That's just not true — there are lots of records out there not only of big organizations like the National Action Committee on the Status of Women and the government Status of Women — but records of small grassroots women's organizations. We want to make them available so people can do research.



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One thing we might do at the Women's Archives, because we do have a wonderful collection of periodicals and are starting to get a lot of donations, is start sending duplicates of Alberta periodicals back here either to the Women's Resources Centre or some other place you might think appropriate. This will make them more available.

Once periodicals are microfilmed we are going to sell these to various libraries across the country so it will be an important way of keeping the Women's Archives in Toronto going and also making all this material available. I think it's really exciting project.

Next going to be from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for a two-year project to put together a book that will list sources for the history of the contemporary Canadian women's movement. There will be sources in public archives, independent archives and records that are held by organizations. At the moment it's very hard to know what's available. Sometimes we've had graduate students come to the archives and say, "I really wanted to do something but my project and there's nothing available, you can't do a master's thesis or an honours thesis or PhD on this topic because there are no 'any records'." That's not true — there are lots of records out there, not only of big organizations like the National Action Committee on the Status of Women and the government's *Women of Women* — but records of small grassroots women's organizations. We want to make them available so people can do research.



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## Northern Alberta Women's Archive Project: An Overview

Sheila Dunphy

THE NORTHERN Alberta Women's Archive Project Committee was formed in the winter of 1989. Members of the committee are Pat Leginsky, Chrystia Chomiak, Cathy Bray, Susan Jackel, Francis Swyripa, Nanci Langford, Mair Smith, Michelle Henry and Sheila Dunphy. Noreen Bell, an Alberta Status of Women Action Committee representative, joined the committee in June of 1989. The project was funded by a Summer Employment/Experience Development grant from the federal government.

The goal of the project is to make women aware of the importance of personal material as a representation of how they have lived their lives. Sources of historical information have tended to focus on elite individuals or organizations of the past. Because of this, many men and women have been invisible in history books. It is important we acknowledge prominent people and their deeds, but it is also important to recover history of less celebrated individuals of the past, who have also contributed to our society. There has been little documentation of women's history; therefore, the focus of this project has been on women and on recovering "herstory".

Researching women of the past is very difficult when there is so little information available dealing specifically with their experiences. Most of recorded history has been interpreted and written by men. Consequently, women's stories have been distorted or omitted entirely because a few voices have been speaking for all people. In *Women of Ideas*, Dale Spender refers to this problem of patriarchal bias in history:

"The simple answer to my question — why didn't I know about all the women of the past who have protested about male power — is that patriarchy doesn't like it. These women and their ideas constitute a political threat and they are censored. By this means women are "kept in the dark", with the result that every generation must begin virtually at the beginning, and start again to forge the meanings of women's



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existence in a patriarchal world, so that in Catherine Stimpson's terms, every 50 years women have to reinvent the wheel."

The Northern Alberta Women's Archive Project Committee wants to educate the women's community about the need for preservation of their archival material, so they may preserve herstory and record it from their own perspective. This is crucial, so that Alberta women will not have to reinvent their history every 50 years.

What then, is archival material? It is any personal material collected over the course of a lifetime, that represents involvement in the community and/or the everyday world. It does not have to be formal material, but anything that represents an individual herstory, such as photographs, journals, letters, minutes from meetings, publications or any personal research. Artifactual material could include T-shirts, earrings, banners or any type of physical material.

The celebration of the *Person's Case* at the University of Alberta is a wonderful example of the importance of archival material. I worked a volunteer shift at the exhibit October 18, 1989. Exactly 60 years previous to that day, through the efforts of five Alberta women, women won the right to be eligible to sit in the Canadian Senate. Seeing Nellie McClung's teacup and Louise McKinney's eyeglasses made this political event more personal. Reading about these women was interesting, but seeing an article of clothing or a photograph allowed entrance into the personal realm, giving a sense of how they lived and what they valued. Seeing the tea stain in the cup brought life to Nellie's story. Her history included extensive writing and publishing, but the cup displayed her personal preference for tea. The point is this: it is not the antiquity of the material but how that material *connects* us to the past.

What do we, as women, save? Do we think about the future and what value our material will have for generations to come? Are we conscious of what we discard and what we keep? These are issues that need to be considered if we want our herstory to be presented from a women's perspective. Our material, be it a T-shirt or a set of minutes, will allow future generations to experience a part of our lives and understand what was significant to us during our lifetimes. Archival material lets us go back in time and understand what personal and political issues were prevalent. It enables us to look at the society of that time period, through a female lens. We are the only ones who can preserve our herstory.

### Project Results

Most of the work I did this summer involved designing a questionnaire and establishing contacts. Talking to the women raised several issues around how women have worked collectively in the past. A recurring theme in the interviews related to the politics of a consensus model and need to share power and responsibility. Women I spoke to suggested it is how we organize change that is important, regardless of what issue we are dealing with. In order to do this, women need to be educated on how to



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strategize, so they can work effectively for change.

The senior archivist at the Provincial Archives of Alberta contacted five of the seven women I referred to him. All these women were willing to examine their material with a possibility of depositing it.

#### Future Goals of the Project

My personal goals include continuing to work on this project within my Women's Studies degree. As well, the Provincial Museum needs to be contacted with regard to cataloguing artifactual material in a way that will be sensitive to women's lives. Funding and other resources need to be pursued in order that the project can continue. More staff positions should be made available so more women can be interviewed. Ethnic women, elderly women and rural women are examples of groups that could be contacted to reach a more diverse sampling of women. A connection needs to be made with the Canadian Women's Movement Archive in Toronto.

In summary, what we are trying to do with this Alberta-based project is continue what other women have attempted to do in other places and at other times. As Spender wrote:

"We are by no means the first generation of women who have faced the necessity and tasted the joy of reconstructing our own past, of piecing together our traditions in order to invest our present with symbolism and meaning. This was a task Mary Beard set herself in 1946 in *Woman as Force in History*, and before her, in 1928 Virginia Woolf had recreated women's traditions in order to explain herself in *A Room of One's Own*. In the nineteenth century, Matilda Joselyn Gage wrote about women's strength, women's power in the past, so that the present could be more meaningful and the future more promising, and before her Margaret Fuller had written *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) for the same reasons. All of these women had predecessors.

"Women's past is at least as rich as men's; that we do not know about it, that we encounter only interruptions and silence when we seek it, is part of our oppression. Unless and until we can reconstruct our past, draw on it, and transmit it to the next generation, our oppression persists."



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## The Economic Role of Weavers in North Sumatra

Sandra Niessen

MY RESEARCH for the past ten years has focused on textiles produced by the Batak women of North Sumatra, Indonesia. I want to share with you interesting data on the socio-economic role of textile production I have gathered, albeit in an unsystematic fashion, through the years. I hope to make this a more important theme of my research in the future.

This paper has been informed and inspired, in large part, by a recent International Development Research Centre (IDRC) publication entitled *Artisans in Economic Development* edited by Elwood A. Pye. Artisans and crafts have been largely neglected by development workers, while Pye's work reveals for South and South East Asia that:

"In trade, the Indian data show that, during 1978-79, earnings from artisan exports were greater than the total of all foreign aid receipts. These products now represent 16% of India's total trade and 13% of Nepal's."

and

"An analysis of the data from 23 industries has led to some interesting conclusions. Families involved in craft production are not only above the poverty line, but also have incomes over the national household average."

However, the book also goes on to reveal that there is very little data on craft, and what is available is poor and inconsistent. Furthermore, there is a crisis in the artisan sector, because markets are decreasing and industrial goods are encroaching. Government programs must be put in place to



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ensure this means of livelihood for people and the continued existence of the skills these people possess. An insufficient number of young people are entering the trade.

When discussing handmade textiles anywhere in Indonesia, one is inevitably discussing WOMEN'S WORK. Textile production — unless it is machinally done — is quintessentially a woman's task in this society, which clearly demarcates male and female tasks. That weaving is so essentially woman's work, is nicely illustrated in the Batak area by the word "ulos". Ulos has three meanings: hand-woven textile product; marriageable woman; and rice-land given at marriage.

The latter two categories are alluded to with the words "ulos na so ra buruk", meaning the "textile which does not wear out". There is a well-developed philosophical matrix in the Batak thought-world which connects these three elements with the theme of fertility in particular. I do not have time to expand on this philosophical connection (see *Niessen 1985*). Rather, I wish to point out that women, textiles and rice-land are also joined in an economics matrix. I will illustrate this connection, and then go on to discuss some further economic aspects of textile production.

Women perform the bulk of the work done in Batak society. As mothers, wives and daughters, they look after the home and maintain the families. They prepare food and look after children. Furthermore, women are active farmers and spend long hours in the rice-fields, particularly at planting, weeding and harvesting times. In between times, they weave.

It used to be that weaving was a woman's way of providing clothing for her family, but this has not been the case for many decades. Machine-made goods have replaced the sober hand-woven textiles because they are cheaper. However, Batak women continue to weave cloth for ritual purposes and for tourists. Almost invariably, they are plugged into the commercial market network. This weaving activity is probably best described today as "craft production" and provides a critical supplement to family income.

I will give a few examples of circumstances in which women weave:

1) In the Silindung Valley, where weaving is a popular activity, one will often see weavers working on the front balconies of their homes. A weaver I spoke to in one community had lost her parents in a traffic accident. She was a young teenager. After the tragedy she ceased going to school and began to earn her keep as a weaver.

2) Also in the Silindung Valley, my research assistant, Linda, was a weaver of about 25 years of age. By local standards, she should have been married but she was reluctant to do so because she felt obliged to look after her aging parents. She spent long hours every day at her loom. She did not finish high school so this was the only means available to her to earn money to help her parents.

3) Linda's mother is a third example of a Silindung Valley weaver. Her husband is ailing and is of no



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assistance to her in earning an income. This leaves her to work the rice-fields and bring up her numerous children. She has always supplemented the family income by weaving. Now that Linda weaves, her job is to wind the warp and the weft and look after the marketing of the finished cloths.

4) Linda's neighbour is Nai Ganda. Her husband was the youngest son and was required therefore, by local custom, to remain in the village and look after the ancestral house. They also have more than five children and the husband can find no work. Nai Ganda works the fields with him and operates a textile stall in the market. Her specialty is making ikat yarn for other weavers and selling their finished products in her stall. She is also an expert weaver.

5) Another neighbour married a man who had no land. They are very poor. She weaves the entire day, from morning till night. When it is dark, she weaves by the light of a flickering oil lamp. This is virtually their only source of income. They cultivate rented land, but much of the harvest is used to pay that rent.

6) In the next village, a weaver is a young widow with two children. After her husband died, she rented out her rice-land and turned to her weaving full-time. Now she is supporting her parents as well.

7) In yet another village, an old widow who is too frail to work in the fields relies entirely on weaving to support herself. She has one child, but this child has many dependents and is too poor to support her.

These are just a few examples, but they reveal how critical is cloth production for the well-being, or perhaps better said, the survival, of many families. They reveal, in addition, the dependence of women on this source of income. I often wonder what would become of these people if they did not have a textile market. Their market arises from their ritual life. Ritual events are celebrated by cloth-giving and ritual attire is worn on these occasions. These people are their own market.

Rice agriculture is tied in with this association of women and cloth production, in that weaving is most prevalent where rice-land is not sufficient for a family's needs, and conversely, least relied upon where agricultural land is productive and fertile. Furthermore, weaving takes place when work is not being done on the land. The "weaving season" as it were, occurs between the busy times of the "agricultural season". Weaving provides a steady, weekly source of income, while rice farming provides a large resource only once a year. Weaving alleviates the feast-famine cycle that rice farming usually implies, especially where rice-land is not sufficient to go around. There is always famine just before the harvest and this is the height of the "weaving season".

I would like now to discuss the extent of weaving as a resource. What kind of income, in concrete terms, does it provide?

In a word, a small one. Weavers in the Silindung Valley try to finish one textile a week



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for the market. The profit they earn from the cloth is sufficient to buy the materials to make another cloth in the coming week, and frequently to supply enough groceries to eat during that week. I am not referring to a royal diet, but rather a few eggs, some vegetables and some fish in addition to rice. Generally, the income is not sufficient to buy meat.

The complete economic picture of textile production requires a more complete set of data on family income and costs than I have collected. This is a task for the future. But the gist of even the available data is that life is difficult, even with the income from weaving. When the rice runs out and has to be bought, i.e. when it is most expensive because demand is highest, weaving is often the only source of income a family has.

But the weaving market is also full of uncertainties:

1) The weaver has no guarantee she will be able to sell her cloth on market day. I have seen weavers desperately trying to unload a textile so they would be able to eat. If they are unsuccessful, they do not have the means to purchase the material from which to weave another textile. Often, in this desperate situation, they will sell their cloths for far below the market price.

2) I have mentioned that factories have encroached on the terrain of the weaver. This encroachment is ongoing. There are now even factories which produce ritual cloths—and there are weavers who continue to make the same types of cloths on hand looms. They are competing with factory produce and the results show in the haggard appearance of the weavers and in the sloppy appearance of their products. Even young children are then recruited in the labour to try to get ahead in the game. It is a very sad situation, and a waste of weaving talent and skill.

3) Cotton and dyes are imported and weavers are not protected against fluctuations in foreign currency and frequent devaluations in their own currency. In the Silindung Valley, for instance, the weavers use a fine cotton from Japan. With the rise in the Japanese yen in recent years, weavers have been pinched severely.

4) Credit is an important safeguard against a downward spiral of poverty. Most weavers have what they call a "supplier" who regularly buys their textile from them and from whom they obtain yarn. Often this supplier will provide them with the price of a textile before it is finished, or give them raw materials on credit, to be paid for after the cloth is woven. Weavers often become deeply indebted to their suppliers.

It will come as no surprise, therefore, that weavers have a low social status. They suffer from the paradox or irony that their poverty keeps them weaving to make ends meet, but also keeps the quality of their goods low. The weavers supply an impoverished market and usually cannot afford a quality textile of



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their own manufacture for themselves. If the market was better, they could weave better cloths. But if they were richer, they would probably cease weaving altogether.

These circumstances spell doom for weaving and weavers in North Sumatra. Mothers encourage their daughters to educate themselves rather than take up weaving. Only then will they have a chance to break the cycle of poverty. My assistant, Linda, regrets not having finished high school. She is fated to walk in the economic treadmill of the weaver for the rest of her life.

In the Batak area of North Sumatra, the weaving efforts of women constitute a buffer zone between poverty and abject destitution. Only a protected, expanded and improved market can improve the lot of these weavers.

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## **Women's Studies in General Library Collections or A Feminist Apologia for the Library of Congress**

Hope Olson

WOMEN'S STUDIES and feminist scholarship are dynamic, revolutionary, advocacy-based, interdisciplinary, innovative and empowering. Therein lies the problem. The problem, that is, of incorporating books and other materials on women's studies into the general library collection. Why is it a problem? And if it is, why do we do it? To answer these questions I will first explain the environment for organization of women's studies materials in a general library collection. Then I will explore the ramifications of that environment.

The first thing to know about organizing any library collection is that it is a highly standardized function. Rules for description of materials, lists of subject headings and schemes for classifying are largely uniform throughout North America. This standardization enables co-operation amongst libraries by allowing the sharing of library cataloguing through immense automated databases called bibliographic utilities. Instead of cataloguing each book at each library, most libraries of any size get most of their cataloguing from utilities. And in North America, most of these catalogue records come from the Library of Congress (LC). Such standardization is a positive thing for three reasons. It is economical, obviating the necessity for much duplication of work. It is efficient, getting books on the shelves faster than if each one had to be catalogued from scratch. And it offers library users some consistency from one library catalogue to another.

The disadvantage of standardization as it is actually used is in the flawed nature of the standards. For women's studies and feminist scholarship the main problems occur in subject analysis: the subject headings which appear in the catalogue and the classification by which materials are arranged on the shelves.

The subject headings used by most major academic and public libraries are the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH). This list of headings was originally developed for use by the



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Library of Congress, but has evolved into an international tool. LCSH is built on precedent. If LC does not have a book on a given topic there will be no subject heading for it. Hence, LCSH roughly reflects LC's collection — it is not a comprehensive reflection of all knowledge. The use of precedent can be an advantage for women's studies because once something is published it can theoretically demand attention from LC. However, LC is neither always, nor immediately responsive.

The Library of Congress was originally established to serve Congress. It then evolved into a national library of the United States and has since become an international source of cataloguing expertise and catalogue records. In recent years it has become more responsive, acknowledging its pre-eminent role. LC often takes great pains to establish subject headings which use vocabulary acceptable to people concerned with the topic. Using current vocabulary presents a problem in the area of women's studies. Ellen Gay Detlefson has noted that women's studies terminology is both fluid and imprecise. For example, professions such as librarianship, nursing, teaching and social work have been referred to as: "feminized professions", "female-dominated professions", "traditionally female professions" or "semi-professions", or even "ghettoized professions". LC has its work cut out for it to determine which term is the most widely used now and will be in years to come. It does, however, add and change terms on a continuing basis, recently providing us with headings for "Feminist theology", "Feminist psychology" and "Nonsexist language".

Notwithstanding LC's good intentions, LCSH remains an inadequate tool for describing women's studies materials. There are three basic reasons for this inadequacy. First LCSH is basically patriarchal in nature. Second, it does not handle interdisciplinary materials well. Third, feminist research moves outside traditional structure of knowledge and culture which LCSH reflects.

To illustrate first the patriarchal nature of LCSH I can offer two pairs of examples, both of which are based on sexist assumptions. From the "male-as-normative view of humanity" comes the heading "Man (Theology)". This heading, of course, covers "the theology of mankind". A narrower term in the list is "Woman (Theology)" pertaining, of course, to the theology of only one sex. Another example uses an apparently reverse assumption. The heading "Contraception" can be taken to refer to female contraception as there is no heading specifying "female", but there is a heading for "Male contraception". The assumption is that contraception is woman's responsibility.

LCSH also fails to deal adequately with women's studies' interdisciplinary aspect. For example, Patricia J. Thompson's use of classical mythology to interpret home economics as a profession from a feminist perspective in *Home Economics and Feminism: the Hestian Synthesis* is indescribable in the library catalogue. LCSH offers no way to link even two of the three aspects of the topic: home economics, Greek mythology and feminist approach. Cataloguing from the National Library of Canada resorts to the headings: "Feminism" (too general), "Home economics" (too general), "Hestia (Greek deity)" (misleading, it is not actually about Hestia), and "Women — Social conditions" (does not apply). In another instance, Debra Shogan's book, *Care and Moral Motivation* links "ethics, gender analysis and moral



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education". Again, LCSH can deal with each aspect only individually.

The third reason for the inadequacy of LCSH is the very nature of feminist theory and research. There are no headings to describe the personal as political, no headings to describe women's non-traditional career paths (or career paths at all), no headings to describe the writing of the body or the self. A specific example is the difficulty in giving subject access to Catherine Keller's *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism and Self*. Headings such as "Self", "Women — Psychology" and "Interpersonal relations" are general and superficial for this book described by Charlene Spretnak as an "examination of men's focus on autonomy and women's focus on relatedness".

The failure of subject headings to give adequate access to women's studies materials is of great concern, particularly in an automated library catalogue which is generally agreed to foster searching by subject. The other approach to finding material by subject is browsing the shelves. Here materials in a general academic collection are usually arranged according to the Library of Congress Classification scheme. Some smaller academic libraries and most public libraries use the Dewey Decimal Classification. I will concentrate on the LC Classification as being most familiar to me, but most shortcomings in terms of women's studies apply equally to both.

LC Classification, like LCSH, is based on precedent. (This factor is the major difference between LC and Dewey, the latter being Melville Dewey's hierarchical view of all knowledge.) Patriarchy has had the same influence on LC Classification as on LCSH, but the terminology in the classification schedules is more blatantly sexist. For example, in the literary classes, books on literature about women form a group under "Treatment of special classes" along with capitalists and financiers, hermits and lawyers. Critiques of films about women come under "Other special topics" after werewolves and westerns. A more telling juxtaposition occurs in the Criminology section under "The criminal type".

#### Criminology

##### Criminal anthropology

HV	The criminal type
6045	General works
6046	<b>The delinquent women</b>
6047	The born or instinctive criminal
6049	The habitual criminal. Recidivist
6051	The occasional criminal
6053	The criminal by passion
6054	Other

Although the sexism of the classification schedules is of great concern and is indicative of the patriarchal roots of the system, what is even more important is to recognize what LC Classification



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(or Dewey) does to women's studies materials. It scatters them. Women and feminism are allotted a section of the schedules from HQ 1101 to HQ 2030.7. However, the majority of women's studies materials are not classified there. One study by Susan Searing of a library at the University of Wisconsin which actively collects women's studies materials showed only 21.5 per cent classified in the women and feminism section. Others are integrated into the classification, and hence the shelves, for the traditional disciplines to which they are related. Since a book can only sit in one place on the shelves it receives a classification number which normally reflects only one aspect of its subject. Hence *Home Economics and Feminism: the Hestian Synthesis* sits with other books on home economics as a profession. *Care and Moral Motivation* is shelved in the ethics section with other books on sympathy, compassion and caring.

In addition to scattering the materials, LC Classification is also sometimes too general for women's studies topics (and it is a more specialized scheme than Dewey). Hence books on career path, value of unpaid work and positive action for change in women's employment are all found in HD 6053 without further differentiation.

After this overview of the standards for subject headings and classification to which women's studies materials fall victim in a general library collection you may be utterly appalled and you may wonder what patriarchal conspiracy has perpetrated this disaster. Here I must intervene and offer you the irrefutable advantages, in spite of imperfect standards, of the present situation.

There are three basic advantages to inclusion of women's studies materials in a general library collection. The first is that it uses systems which are already developed, which are in full operation, and which have institutional support and mechanisms for their maintenance and improvement. In effect, these systems have all of the economy and efficiency of established standards.

The second advantage is what Susan Searing calls "serendipitous consciousness-raising":

"One can imagine a pooh-pooher of "women's lib" stumbling upon an interesting feminist book while off in the stacks on another errand. If such materials are accessible only in special collections, serendipitous consciousness-raising can never occur. While an integrated collection provides no guarantee that browsers will be exposed to women's studies materials (and indeed, may place barriers in the paths of those intentionally seeking such works), at least it does not close off the avenues of chance enlightenment."

The third, and most ideologically important advantage is the integration of women's studies materials into the general collection. Integration legitimizes women's studies and the feminist approach. One would not want to find a feminist criticism of Elizabeth Barrett Browning or Elaine



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Showalter's *Alternative Alcott* anywhere other than providing balance to the traditional saccharine treatment of these women authors. And we would all be irate to have Birgit Brock-Utne's *Feminist Perspectives on Peace and Peace Education* excluded from the section holding other books on world peace. That is where it justly belongs.

These arguments for an integrated collection cannot, however, be proffered without examining the barriers to which Searing referred. They are, predictably, three in number. The first is the reverse of the advantage of integration: scattering. The general library collection does not allow the user to find the place on the shelves where all women's studies materials are gathered because there is no such place.

The second liability is that the tools of standardization are not adapted to dealing with women's studies materials. Exceptions cannot be made while maintaining the advantages of efficiency and economy and application of the standards is not always enlightened. Of 70 titles catalogued by LC which I sampled, I changed subject headings and/or classification on 31 of them while still following LC's own practice. Efficiency and economy would have seen those 31 catalogue records put into the catalogue without reassessment by a subject specialist.

The third disadvantage is that researchers who want to find material on women's studies must be more sophisticated library users than those working in traditional areas. They must overcome the sexism of the subject heading and the scattering of the classification.

Is the location of women's studies materials in general library collections a good thing or a bad thing? There are practical pros and cons, but the real issue is the integration of women's studies with knowledge as defined by patriarchy. The real question are as follows. Should women's studies be part of existing culture or create a culture of its own? Should it look outward to enlighten the benighted or inward to satisfy the feminist soul?

My answer is that women's studies must do both, hence libraries need to do both. They must offer support to women seeking feminist consciousness, to women creating feminist knowledge where nothing stood before. However, libraries must also leave women's studies strewn about the stacks for the "serendipitous consciousness-raising" of blinkered academics (and others). Just as women's studies strives to redefine the literary canon, revive goddess religion and reexamine paradigms in all disciplines — so libraries must revise the standards used to organize knowledge.



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## **Patriarchy in Library Systems: Are Women at Home in the Stacks?**

Melody Burton

FIRST A few words about organization. It's always a good idea to mention why libraries exist, to shed some light on our organizational heritage. The concept of "free libraries" or public libraries is one based on democratic principles. Every individual should have equal access to information for the purpose of self-improvement. Who could argue with this goal? And because of this goal, libraries have been considered "good" institutions.

Libraries are depositories of books (and a whole lot of other material, but we'll stick to books to keep the discussion less muddled). And libraries arrange books by subject, so books on the same topic will be in the same part of the library. Like material gets lumped together.

This is a very common activity and you do it all the time. You organize things — your record collection, your bureau drawers. You do this so you can find things when you need them. And you organize to "make-sense" of your environment. The order arrangement you select makes sense to you. And if it gets messed up, you might say "things are out of order" or "I can't find anything". You know what it looks like when "things are in their proper place". It makes sense to you. Do you file your classical albums with your jazz CDs and your Top 40 cassettes? If you did, your music collection would be "out of order" and it wouldn't "make sense" to you any more. You wouldn't be able to find what you were looking for quickly.

"Putting things in order" is something women have done for many centuries. When you visit friends' homes, clothing stores, libraries or banks, you expect things will be "in order" and although you aren't familiar with the arrangement, you trust it makes sense to the people who have to use it.

But ordering things isn't as easy as it looks. And there are cultural biases. For example, if you enter a grocery store anywhere in North America, you expect to locate the item you want without reading every label in the store. For example, you won't look for canned peas in the frozen food section or in the paper products aisle. How do you know to look in the canned goods section? With a glance, you distinguish the canned fruit section from the canned vegetables section. Why do grocers arrange



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their stores so similarly? Are there standards or rules? Who told you the rules? What do you think grocery stores look like in Mozambique?

Do you know where the tomato paste is in grocery stores here? No one knows where the tomato paste is, so it's shelved in two sections. Libraries don't have the luxury of stocking books in two places. Libraries exist to share books. By sharing this resource, everyone has a fair and equal opportunity to read, to learn and to know.

We arrange books by subject or discipline in the library. And this used to be an easy pursuit. To illustrate my point, pretend all subjects are colour-coded. All the black books go together and all the yellow books go somewhere else. Orange books sit next to red books. Soon the library collection looks like the colour spectrum starting with one colour and running through the whole rainbow. It's a pretty sight. If you're looking for a blue book, you can tell immediately if you're in the right section. You can even tell if you're getting close.

Then scholars begin publishing books in two colours, then in three colours and librarians start to look panic-stricken. As they study each new shipment of books, they decide the best solution to this development is to determine which colour best characterizes the book. Is it mostly red or mostly blue? If it's mostly red, it's shelved in the red section. This works for awhile, but everyone agrees it's a compromise. Everyone agrees if a book is red and blue, it belongs in both the red section and blue sections.

One day all the books arrive in paisley and flowered jackets. It's impossible to determine a predominant colour. No one stripe is more visible than another. Now the librarians look desperate. One book can't physically be located in two or more places in the library. Where will it go? (I'm telling you all this so you'll know librarians have colourful, political stripes and a sense of humour.)

Today our panelists are going to "make sense" of libraries by discussing the differences between two kinds of libraries. The impact of our subject arrangement will be examined in the present context. How unwieldy is the arrangement? Why doesn't it work any more? And what can be done about it? Why are feminists perpetuating this system? Or are they?

### Reference Services

I spend about a third of my working week at a reference desk at the University of Alberta's Humanities and Social Sciences Library. When undergraduate women tell me they are women's studies students and need help using the library, I take a deep breath.

One of the unfair things about women's studies, is that to do research, you must be a sophisticated library user. It is easily one of the most difficult subject areas within interdisciplinary studies. And interdisciplinary studies are far more difficult than single discipline studies.

The barriers facing these women are immediate. A common question might be, "Where is the women's studies section?" An exact, but misleading response would be HQ 1101 through to HQ



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1900. Estimates indicate that less than 25 per cent of women's material falls into the category of "feminism" and "women" divided geographically. Within a universal knowledge collection, women's materials are scattered throughout the library. To locate them takes many steps and much time and effort.

What is particularly disheartening for students is to learn that new words (gender-free, non-sexist language) they are learning in their women's studies classes cannot be transported into their research process. Instead it is a handicap. Immediately students have to translate their terminology so it will fit into the language utilized by indexers and bibliographers. And the language of indexers and bibliographers is discipline-specific.

Because the library is arranged by discipline, and because women's studies is interdisciplinary, these students have to be able to think in ways that sister and brother disciplines may have categorized their topics. For example, if a student is searching for articles on abortion, to do a comprehensive search, she would have to spend hours in the reference section. Extensive endurance is required as well as critical thinking skills. Here's why...

Looking up material on abortion leads the researcher in several directions. If I was helping any other student I would ask, "From what perspective are you writing the paper?" If the student replied political science, psychology or social welfare, I could suggest exact sources to consult. And these sources would identify the topic from the desired perspective, quickly and conveniently offering a selection of relevant of articles for the student.

For a women's studies student there is no exact source to consult except, perhaps, *Women's Studies Abstracts*, which is a difficult and incomprehensive reference tool at best. So the student must use a discipline-specific index. "Which one?" she asks me. "Probably most of them," I tell her. Instead of directing the student to a specific area, and eliminating whole sections of the library, I have opened more doors for her. And this is a mixed blessing. It isn't even possible to split off humanities from the social sciences. The student may require philosophical or historical articles to complete her paper as well as sociological and psychological ones.

So after consulting several varied indexes, the diligent student has compiled a lengthy bibliography, because there are many entries under "abortion" in each. Having completed the leg work, she begins the head work. It's impossible to read all the items on her list, so she must decide which articles are worth pursuing. This point of decision is critical and the student must make several evaluations based on titles and abstracts (if abstracts are included).

Unfortunately, the titles are in discipline-specific languages other than her own. She must switch gears from sociological terminology to history-ese. Few titles sound familiar to her or use the words she has become accustomed to hearing from her women's studies professor. She picks titles that sound best and is relieved to learn the library has 75 per cent of the articles she has identified. She begins to read...

The translation process is not complete; it will continue throughout the texts she is



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reading. To write her paper, she will translate (as best she can because some of it still doesn't fit) her findings back into her new-found feminist terminology. This is her first paper and she cannot imagine how difficult her final year in women's studies will be when she has to write a 40-page research paper. How long will it take her to research it? If it requires historical background, philosophical analysis and sociological context... She becomes angry. Why doesn't her friend in English have the same problem?

Her friend in English does have the same problem. Well sort of... The *MLA Bibliography* is broken down by language, then chronologically and alphabetically by author. This arrangement is preferred by a researcher studying a single author — the author is the subject. For anyone doing what we mean by subject or thematic, or even comparative research, it's a nightmare. In 1982, the Modern Languages Association added a subject volume to the bibliography. This means that subject access is now available, but the researcher must flip back and forth to each entry — it could be listed under any author. (There is no section for feminist literary theory.) But at least one reference tool provides the student with a comprehensive source at least for the last seven years.

New developments to accommodate interdisciplinary study have been introduced. Computer searching of database files of print indexes are a huge improvement. Well, sort of... The *MLA Bibliography* goes back to 1966, meaning that subject access is available retrospectively. But these computer services have a fee attached to them. The cost is borne by the student, not the library.

Again our women's studies student isn't so fortunate. There is no women's studies database (well there was, but it ceased). A CD-ROM product like Sociofile is available and it allows the student to search by "feminist studies" or "gender studies". This is a great improvement, but the CD-ROM indexes sociological journals only. Fortunately, core women's studies journals are included. To have a computer search done presents all the same problems all over again for this student: the databases are divided by discipline; she would have to request that several searches be conducted on several different systems. The cost involved would be many times that of her feminist literary theory friend.

(Incidentally, the first advances in database searching came in the fields of business, medicine and science. The humanities have lagged behind. The nature of humanities research isn't beyond the capabilities of these technologies by any means, but humanities research differs from scientific research significantly and there has been little support from vendors to add extensive humanities back files to their databases.)

A student requiring Canadian content or a humanities perspective will have to look elsewhere. The *Canadian Periodicals Index* is one place to search, another is the jointly produced University of Alberta-Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women's *Canadian Women's Periodicals Index*. There are several humanities sources, but each would have to be searched individually.

But how many hurdles has our women's studies student jumped? The standard reference strategy of searching periodical indexes has presented the student with many barriers. She has developed several creative search strategies to overcome them. Fortunately, there are some short-cuts,



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namely bibliographies that have compiled a selection of feminist articles on a particular topic in one convenient volume. But bibliographies are flawed too. Because women's studies is booming in the publishing arena, bibliographies are always out of date, carrying yesterday's news. The student must supplement even the most comprehensive bibliography with a least a few well chosen periodical searches. Perhaps the bibliography of feminist articles on the student's topic hasn't been published yet or perhaps it isn't available at the library. Then the student must rely upon discipline-specific bibliographies to identify relevant articles.

I never downplay the effectiveness (and non-effectiveness) of words in the research process. It is, after all, a communication process. Librarians, scholars, students and indexers are all using words to categorize like things together and unfortunately, or fortunately depending upon your viewpoint, most of these words won't be the same. And they probably won't be the same as the ones Hope has outlined. There is yet another vocabulary to learn at each juncture. What is "women" in one index is "females (human)" in another. And the vocabularies change over time, but the printed word remains the same. No one is "correcting" language found in turn of the century indexes and bibliographies. "Feminism" is a new word and a new category of scholarship. But what words were women called in the 19th century? Under what categories would you find material about women? To trace the categories, to list the names and the labels attached to women's literature is an exercise guaranteed to infuriate even the most patient and forgiving researcher.

Although the vocabularies seem to change before you can master them, the dominant language doesn't change fast enough. Bell Hooks, author of *Ain't I a Woman*, has written a new book titled *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. According to the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., Bell Hooks isn't a woman or a feminist first, she's Bell Hooks first. She is the subject of her book — what does this mean? That she speaks for no one but herself? And she is a black woman second. Thirdly, the book is about feminism in the U.S. Her book has been classified in the "Afro-American women" section. I doubt Bell Hooks would be surprised to learn this. What does this categorization tell young feminists? Where would Bell Hooks like her book to be shelved in the library? Perhaps she is pleased it isn't mixed in with her white American sisters.

One of my favourite examples of categories is one found in the Human Relations Area File, a huge anthropology microfiche set. It contains files of cultures around the world. It also provides subject access. The phrase "same sex marriages" is contained within a particular category. It's the last category after "real marriages" and "common-law marriages", and it includes marriages to gods, marriages to dead persons, marriages to trees and marriages to persons of the same sex. This says something about categories and naming them. It's also given me some appreciation of the category "other".



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I never downplay the effectiveness (and non-effectiveness) of words in the research process. It's after all a communication process. Librarians, scholars, students and editors are all using words to categorize like things together and apart, to categorize, or to categorize, depending upon your viewpoint, most of these words won't be the same. And they probably won't be the same as the categories has outlined. There is yet another vocabulary to learn at each juncture. What is "woman" in one index is "female (human)" in another. And the vocabularies change a certain, but the ground word remains the same. The one is "connecting" language found in turn of the century index and bibliographies. "Feminist" is a new word and a new category of scholarship. But what words were women called in the 19th century? Under what categories would we find material about women? To trace the categories to list the names and the labels attached to women's literature is an exercise guaranteed to infuriate even the most patient and tolerant researcher.

Although the vocabulary seems to change before you can master them, the domain of language doesn't change that much. Bell Hooks, author of *Woman's Love, Woman's Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1989), says in the introduction to her book, *Black Woman: A Book of Essays* (New York: Bantam, 1989), "what does this mean? That she speaks for no one but herself. And she is a black woman, second. Thirdly, the book is about feminism in the U.S. Her book has been classified in the 'African-American women' section. I doubt Bell Hooks would be surprised to learn this. What does this categorization tell young feminists? Where would Bell Hooks have her book in the library? Perhaps she is pleased it isn't mixed in with her white American sisters.

One of my favorite examples of categories is one found in the Human Relations Area File (a huge anthropology database). It contrasts the cultures around the world. It is a guide to researchers. The phrase "same sex marriage" is contained within a particular category. It's the last category after "real marriage" and "consensual marriage" and it includes marriages to gods, marriages to dead persons, marriages to men and marriages to persons of the same sex. This says something about categories and naming them. It also gives me some appreciation of the category "other."



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## More than a Special Collection

Pat Leginsky

YES, THERE is an alternative to an integrated collection — a special collection where materials for, by and about women are gathered in one place. A special collection of women studies materials allows for ready access and comfortable browsing. It communicates to users, "Yes, there is material for women."

Special collections are often criticized for limiting serendipitous learning — all because there is no long walk to the stairs, and we all know that somewhere along that route we will be overcome by that biology book that provides cosmic insight into THE SOLUTION TO THE CHOICE DEBATE. Okay, sure, once in a blue moon you may stumble over a cart with that special book on it, but really, is this adequate reason not to fund a special collection?

Another common critique of special collections is that when we put all women's studies material together, researchers are spoon-fed and don't have to develop research skills. Oh really! Special collections are generally smaller but still require researchers to go through indexes, databases and bibliographies to access material on their chosen topic. You as a researcher may not have to spend as much time digging to find what you want, nonetheless you do have to dig. (Special collections are not instant-serve or telepathic, at least not to my knowledge.)

So what does a special collection look like? Let me use the Women's Resource Centre (WRC) as an example. First of all, we are located in a house in Old Garneau just east of the University of Alberta campus. The main floor of the house is where most of the materials are located. The collection consists of books, journals, newsletters, government documents, background research papers and ephemera.

So do we house everything that was ever written for, by and about women? NO! The floor would fall in. Our collection has slowly evolved since 1981 to underpin the courses offered by the Women's Program. Holdings cover such topics as feminist theory and ethics, feminist psychology, women and work, health issues and spirituality. Our offprints are grouped by topic area. We have a large number of journals and newsletters. Our collection includes many special materials that large libraries



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do not hold.

How do we decide which materials to buy? We seek recommendations from instructors, volunteers and staff. Requests from course participants are invited. The librarian responsible for Women's Studies is a major source of input. Common Woman Books is our main source for buying books and offers valuable advice. We keep a running list of books we want to buy and as money permits, we go shopping.

Let's pretend you've come to the WRC and want to gather information about the effects of free trade on women. Where would you start?

One of the staff would greet you as you enter and ask if she could help you. You'd talk about your topic and then learn how to do a computer search of our holdings.

Four years ago the Women's Program and Resource Centre received a grant from the Secretary of State, Women's Program to create a computerized database of our holdings. At first glance, such a task may look straightforward — simply input all the titles — but there is a lot more to it than that. Without going into detail, one of the major pieces of that work was the creation of a thesaurus which uses woman-focussed, feminist and accessible language. For example: rather than using the term wife beating, our thesaurus uses woman battery; rather than job segregation we use feminized professions. Terms used in common parlance by indexers and researchers are often too broad and imprecise. Standard terminology is commonly sexist, gender stereotyped and lacks feminist terms. In the thesaurus we try to overcome these problems. The structure of the thesaurus determines the descriptive terms used to access the material...in efforts to reflect feminism in our work as researchers.

Back to our search for material: as each item appears on the screen, a number of descriptors also appear to help you decide whether or not you want to look at that item. Once you've got a list of items to look for, you are given a quick tour of the Resource Centre. The books are arranged using a modified Dewey decimal system and the offprints are numbered and shelved in boxes.

To search the journals and periodicals, the Canadian Women's Periodical Index is available. This index is produced and published in-house in collaboration with the Women's Research Centre.

With any research project, you will want to spend time going through the material to winnow out that which best relates to your topic. Work space is available on both floors of the house.

To this point I have described the Women's Resource Centre as a special collection, but I want to briefly outline its additional features, because it is more than a special collection.

In essence, "the house", as it is affectionately called, has an energy unlike other centres. An energy that welcomes you. The ambience of working in a beautiful, safe setting surrounded by other women is unique. The conference room upstairs is available for women's groups to meet. The kitchen table has supported many a lengthy discussion about feminism. The bulletin board at the entrance is an artful array of happenings across the city, the province and the country. Upcoming dances, poetry



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readings, conferences and names of women who want to connect with like-minded women are all posted for public review. The pamphlet rack offers information about services available to women. Referrals and information about specific professionals and self-help groups are also available. Many community activities are facilitated through the Resource Centre. Projects of one sort or another are constantly underway.

The Women's Resource Centre is open to everyone, and I invite each one of you to come by and spend some time browsing through our material.



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for public review. The pamphlet also offers information about services available to women. Materials  
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by and spend some time browsing through our material.



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## The Role of Educated Urban Women in the Modernization of China

Leslie Ann Crawford

*"How sad is it to be a woman?  
Nothing on earth is held so cheap.  
Boys leaning at the door  
Like Gods fallen out of heaven  
Their hearts brave the Four Oceans  
The wind and dust of a thousand miles.  
No one is glad when a girl is born:  
By her the family sets no store"*

Fu Hsuan, 13th Century Poetess

*"I think women themselves think they are weak and they don't compete with men. My mother gave me an education to be a kind woman. She hopes me to do something that other people like. Sometimes, inside, I really feel weak. I don't want my colleagues to know I'm weak. I think it's sad that many women are as sad as me."*

Computer Engineer, 1989

IN 1976 the Chinese government re-initiated the four modernizations movement, which was to redirect China's domestic and foreign policies toward the goal of modernizing industry, agriculture, science and technology, and national defence. Science and technology are seen as pivotal to the movement, and thousands of Chinese students — mostly male — have been sent abroad to access Western scientific and technical techniques in order to bring about China's modernization.

In 1978, Deng Xiaoping, China's foremost leader, addressed the Opening Ceremony of a National Conference on Science by saying:



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"Never before have the whole Party and people been so interested in science and technology and given them so much attention. Vast numbers of scientists and technicians, workers, and peasants, and army men are actively participating in the movement for scientific experiment. Young people are becoming interested in science and eager to study it. The entire nation is setting out with tremendous enthusiasm on the march towards the modernization of our science and technology. Splendid prospects lie before us."

For women, the splendid prospects awaiting them is their liberation through the realization of the "four modernizations". The development of science and technology is to be the harbinger of change for women even though they, themselves, are not qualified enough to be able to "participate" in bringing about the change. As former General Secretary of the Communist Party, Hu Yaobang, said in the following address to the Gansu Provincial Women's Congress in 1985:

"My dear female compatriots, you want true equality with men. But without education and scientific-technological knowledge and skills, how are you to do so? You lack the qualifications." (*Chinese Sociology and Anthropology*, 1987: 32)

Through interviews held with Chinese women and men who had come from various urban centres around China to study in Beijing, I hope to show there is a pattern which serves to discourage women from entering the fields of science and technology. This is first accomplished through socialization and the internalization of sex-stereotypic attitudes in both sexes. As one female informant said:

"Women are responsible for developing the stereotypes of sex roles because they keep telling him or her what he or she should be able to do, what kind of man or woman you expect them to become. And also in terms of helping choosing a future career for the children. Considerable difference between the boys and girls. Mothers do this more than father because they're with the children more. Mothers influence their children much more obviously when they are under ten or when they are small because during that period they need really a lot of tender care, physical care really. When they reach a certain stage, they will look for



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an ideal image to be. Mother is not the ideal image. I am not the image for my son. Because when he sees me I am always busy in the kitchen, washing — washing the floor. When he thinks of his father he is full of admiration. Oh, my daddy is studying for his Ph.D. He is studying until midnight. He is busy. He's typing all the time. I've got the mop!"

A concern among women which seems to arise rather frequently is that because they have been taught to serve, they lack confidence.

"I don't have a lot of self-confidence. I think I'm not intelligent enough and I feel that I achieve because of hard work. I think I work very hard. I was taught to be modest and not to have confidence. I agree that boys seem to have more confidence. Although they are not as good as men they are confident that they will be."

The mother is not being used as a scapegoat here. Mothers, as a rule, will generally teach their children, males or females, to embrace the values attached to the society within which they live. One female at Beijing University said:

"Women did not create femininity. Society tells them. As a female you should do this and you should do that. And you are inferior to men and to boys. And when the girl was a baby this was how she was educated and she had subconsciously this idea of what she should do and what she shouldn't do. She should help her mother clean the house, wash dishes and sew. All these things occupy many energies of girls."

It is apparent that women are aware of the fact that society places a higher value on males than on females. As one woman said:

"I think that both women and men are conscious of their own position within society, especially in China. For example, men say they always know that they are superior to women and women also know that people think that women are not as strong as men, not as good as them."

These concepts of male superiority versus female inferiority are further substantiated by remarks made by both Chinese males and females in reference to the difficulties of highly educated



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women finding marriage partners.

"If you are a woman and you are unfortunate to have a Ph.D no man would marry you. He would say to the Ph.D: How dare I ask you to do the household chores for me. If you don't do it, I have to do it. It hurts my pride as a male. You would rather have an ordinary woman looking after you. You don't really expect her to do all the household chores but you need that gentle, pretty figure around. You feel this in the home. Then, instead of that, you have a really capable woman, really intelligent, really bright, and you feel a bit scared. Then when you say something, you ask whether you said something right or wrong, maybe she will criticize you, try to judge you. The male works outside during the day. There's a lot of tension. When he comes home, he needs to relax but with that Ph.D there, he can never relax."

*female respondent*

"If I were single, I would not marry a woman more educated than me. In our society, many people say that the young men want to marry a wife, not an expert."

*male respondent*

"He didn't believe that I could pass the examination. He really didn't want me to go to university. In fact, before the examination I had some trouble with my teeth and asked him to stay home from his business trip, because I said that I needed him but he went away."

*female respondent*

Alison Jaggar, in her book *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (1988: 316), says:

"In contemporary society men are defined as active, women as passive; men are intellectual, women are intuitive; men are unexpressive, women emotional; men are strong, women weak; men are dominant, women submissive, etc.; ad nauseam. To the extent that men and women conform to these definitions, they are bound to be alienated from each other, holding incompatible views of the world."



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The following represents some of the attitudes held by female respondents concerning how they perceive differences between men and women:

"Men are better at math."

"The women are better at languages."

"Girls are better at memorizing. Boys are better at figuring out things."

"Women have no ability to manage."

"They say girls are better at memorizing."

"I do admit that I think women are weaker physically."

"I think girls are more careful. Girls are naturally more obedient."

"The girls, generally speaking, work harder than the boys."

"Girls are more hardworking. The boys know how to do the important things well."

"In primary school and high school females usually got higher marks than males. Maybe the females' intelligence developed a little later. They are good at studying and remembering, boys at doing something. If you go out at midnight — boys and girls together — most of the boys can find the way back. I never found the road back."

In comparison, the following attitudes were verbalized by the male respondents:

"Physiologically and biologically women are actually good at memorizing things while men are more aggressive and apt to think and analyze much better than women. This is true, more or less true."

"Women are not good at reasoning. They are good at memorizing things."



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"What I want to reason is that men were endowed with aggressiveness and this is true."

"I think according to psychologists the development of the brain of the woman goes on in a very new way."

"I think men are stronger than women in character."

"Usually there are more emotional women than men."

"A woman is emotional. If she meets with some difficult situations she may cry, i.e. not getting a promotion, salary raise, housing."

"The wife can cry and the man, the husband, must encourage her and other people in the family and continue to do a lot of things to overcome the difficulties. I think this is true of many families."

"Women are much weaker than men."

"Women are better at learning languages. I think it's from nature. Girl infants talk more than boy infants."

"I don't expect most women to have logical thinking ability."

"Men like to create things — not just remember some things."

"According to science reports, the men's right brain is bigger than the left, but the right brain is for creating something. In fact, in the world, many scientists are men not female."

"The woman is sometimes narrow-minded, am I right?"

This separation of male/female attributes must surely be reflected in how females and males answered a question dealing with which professions men could perform more capably than women. Just as men did, women saw themselves as being capable nurses, language teachers and doctors. The reverse is true for the men with respect to their being capable language teachers and nurses. The two



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sexes see males as being more capable than females in engineering, science, mathematics, business management, agriculture, technical work, factory work, factory management and negotiation. Most of these professions hold high status within the modernization movement.

Let us draw a comparison between the nursing profession in China and that of science and engineering. Firstly, nursing in China, as well as in other patriarchal societies, is a female dominated profession. Men tend to think that women are suited to this kind of work because they are "naturally" patient and caring. They do not see themselves as possessing these kinds of qualities.

"Men are suited for all kinds of work. Women are only suited for teaching and nursing."

*male respondent*

"Men have the same ability as women to be nurses, I think. But they are reluctant to do that. They think it's female work so they're reluctant to do it. Boring and unimportant work."

*female respondent*

At present in China, "there is a shortage of nurses, so the nurses in the hospitals are overworked. The Ministry of Public Health stipulates that a nurse should take care of five patients. But one nurse at the hospital must take care of 40 patients on the day shift and up to 70 on the night shift. Some parents do not understand and respect nurses. Some of them even throw diapers at nurses when they find damp diapers on their children. Some dare not complain against doctors but take it out on the nurses. With extremely hard work and little respect from society, nurses are apt to be dejected and their health deteriorates quickly." (*China Daily*, September 5, 1987: 3)

Is it any wonder then that males would think females are more suited for this type of work?

There is an interesting comparison to be made between nursing as it exists in present day China and how Eva Gamarnikow explains how nursing was defined when it was established in Britain during the 19th century.

"Nursing was seen as emotional rather than instrumental and so nurses were defined by their moral qualities: patience, humility, self-abnegation, neatness, cleanliness, punctuality, cheerfulness, kindness, tenderness and honesty rather than by their professional skills. Around the turn of the century, explicit links were made between nursing and mothering and between nursing and women's domestic work. The



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good nurse was considered to have the same qualities as a good wife and mother." (Jaggar, 1984: 325)

That the nurse is seen as possessing these same attributes in China is evident in the following statements.

"Boys just want a beautiful nurse. 1. Beautiful 2. Beautiful 3. Beautiful They want a beautiful, young, soft woman to take care of him and his children. Quite a lot have this opinion."

*female respondent*

"Yes, boys in Shanghai choose their future wife and several girls are very welcoming. And a nurse is one of the kind. And the girls who work in the kindergarten is also one. I think this is a fact that boys like girls who are nurses because they think the nurse can take care of them very well and they will arrange all the housework very well and when the boys come home after work they will feel that everything is ok, so they want nurses to become their wife. Another reason is that I think the nurses' personality has something inwards going because their work needs this kind of personality. They can't always quarrel with the patient. So, I think this is a fact."

*male respondent*

In his speech at the National Conference on Education on April 22, 1978, Deng Xiaoping said:

"The key to the four modernizations is the modernization of science and technology. Without science and technology, it is impossible to build modern agriculture, modern industry, or modern national defense. Without the rapid development of science and technology, there can be no rapid development of the economy." (Deng, 1987: 41)

The key sex in China's modernization drive is, of course, male. This is greatly due to the fact that science and technology are defined in masculine terms, and as a result, are looked upon as being superior and that which is superior commands more intelligence.

This is reflected in the following:



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"Good engineers, they need to use their brains to reason and to be a good nurse, they have to be patient."

*male respondent*

"You need to be more intelligent to be an engineer."

*female respondent*

"More boys are in natural science because they are said to be more clever."

*female respondent*

"In natural science I think women are less capable than men to become a scientist. First the females around me don't like the pure science research work. Maybe it's psychological."

*male respondent*

"Among the 49,000 scientists from 122 different research institutes under the Chinese Academy of Sciences, there are 17,000 women or 34 per cent of the total. The senior women scientists account for 18 per cent of the 7,000 senior scientists. But in the leading body of the academy, the 60 women working in leading positions account for only seven per cent of the whole " (Yang, 1987: 1).

In 1982, women made up 16.5 per cent of the total enrollment at Qing Hua, the best science and engineering university in China.

"In 1982, of the 72 graduate students sent to the United States by the China University for Science and Technology, only three were women." (Hooper, 1984: 320).

Of the 39 new Chinese students enrolled at the University of Alberta in the fall of 1986, only nine were female, and none of them were enrolled in science or engineering. This is not favourable to women considering that "72 per cent of the students enrolled in higher education in China in 1984 were in the field of engineering and natural science, and only 20 per cent were in liberal arts and five per cent in foreign languages". (Liu, 1987: 129)

Obviously women are not being welcomed equally into scientific and technical fields



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which bring more respect and better financial rewards. A male respondent says:

"To be honest, I want to become a feminist. But in the present situation maybe more males getting a high position can make our country richer, richer quickly. Because, you know, Chinese male students, generally speaking, can do more difficult work."

A female respondent refutes the above by saying:

"Men are not more intelligent than women. They are given more chances. Men are more interested in science and technology. They are encouraged to do so, but women are not encouraged to choose science and technology as their occupation."

The ghettoization of women is significant in that it allows the patriarchs to remain in control. As one woman says:

"Some of the jobs, they only want men. It's convenient to have them. It's a man's world. Why let women?"

Other ways in which Chinese women are kept out of the forefront of the modernization movement are in terms of discrimination in University entrance examinations, and being difficult to place in jobs following graduation due to their future roles as housekeepers and mothers -- roles which essentially prevent them from being able to reach powerful positions in society so as to be able to effect social change. (For more information concerning these difficulties, please consult the thesis entitled *Do Chinese Women Hold up Half the Sky?* which will soon be available in the Education Library at the University of Alberta.)

It is evident that more Chinese males have access to education in the fields of science and technology. As a result, there are more Chinese males studying in these fields in Western Universities. And naturally, it is Western science and technology which is seen as the key to the modernization of China. At the University of Alberta, of 39 new graduate Chinese students who were enrolled on campus in September of 1988, only nine were women. Two of these women were enrolled in Mathematics, one was enrolled in Applied Sciences and Medicine, one in Medicine, one in Library Science, one in Education, and one in Foods and Nutrition. It is not known which faculty the remaining two women were registered in. Of the 30 Chinese men, three were in Civil Engineering, two were in Electrical Engineering, three were in Mechanical Engineering, two were in Mining, Metallurgy and



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Petroleum Engineering, three were in Mathematics, two were in Physics, one was in Genetics, one was in Pathology, one was in Zoology, one was in Statistics and Applied Probability, three were in Economics, five were in Computing Science, two were in Geology and one was in Law.

The fact that there are so many more Chinese males studying abroad in fields that have not been traditionally open to women poses two problems that may further serve to oppress the women of China. One is that when these students return to China, they may be offered promotions, which would give them even more authority in the workplace than women. Secondly, perhaps hidden assumptions within modernity itself have to be questioned. Is it not possible that there could be values attached to Western science and technology itself that are detrimental to women – as well as to humankind – as a whole? A new body of literature has been developing written by female scientists, as well as male political writers in the West, which seeks to show that science and technology is under the control of a male elite, and therefore, its underlying values must be questioned.

Deng Xiaoping at the 12th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in August, 1982 said the following:

“We will unswervingly follow a policy of opening to the outside world and actively increase exchanges with foreign countries on the basis of mutual equality and benefit. At the same time we will keep a clear head, firmly resist corrosion by decadent ideas from abroad, and never permit the bourgeois way of life to spread to our country.” (Hayhoe, 1984: 206)

If Chinese students studying abroad have anything to do with this at all, therein lies the implication that they have highly developed abilities for critical thought, an intense interest in learning more about intellectual culture, and possess a deep knowledge of their own culture and traditions. From my experience of living and teaching in China, and through my interaction with Chinese students studying abroad, I would venture to say that this is not the case, and further it would appear that Western universities and funding agencies do not see it as their responsibility to offer opportunities for Chinese students to look at Western science and technology through critical eyes. Also, very few Chinese students are being sent abroad to study in the Human Sciences to acquire the critical skills for assessing the social and cultural implications of Westernization in a Chinese context. Therefore, because China is neglecting what is considered by some to be a very important area, the West is looked upon to take responsibility.

The importance of co-operation between China and Western countries becomes very evident when one discusses environmental issues. Chinese students who come to study in the West are very quick to say that China's policy is economic growth first with attention to the environment second. It has been discovered that the chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) used in the West to manufacture refrigerators,



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electronics, aerosol sprays and other goods are primarily responsible for eroding the atmospheric ozone layer protecting the earth from harmful ultraviolet radiation. Unless Western countries co-operate with China in terms of providing more international aid to support alternatives to the use of CFCs, "China will continue to quickly expand the use of the harmful chemicals" (Tyson, 1989: 2). Refrigerators are major pollutants, and the refrigerator is just now becoming accessible to a population of over one billion. "China produced 7.4 million refrigerators last year, 84 per cent more than in 1987 and 133 times more than in 1981, the statistical bureau says." (Tyson, 1989: 2).

It is obvious that Chinese women have a long way to go before they actually hold up "half the sky" and truly become equal partners with men under the Chinese constitution. The painfully apparent question which is left to be asked is: Will there be a four modernizations at all? China has a number of problems with which it must struggle. Firstly, there is the question of population. Presently every fifth person in the world today is Chinese. Of these, 80 per cent live in the Chinese countryside which has become once again bound in tradition. As a result, there is evidence of females being sold in marriage, kept out of school to work on the land, and since the initiation of the one-child policy in 1981, there has been a re-emergence of female infanticide. This has become problematic enough that in 1988, the Chinese government initiated a new policy in which a rural couple could have a second child if the first one was a girl. Seventy per cent of the 200 million illiterates in China are women; most of them are from the countryside.

In the cities there is high unemployment, youth dissatisfaction and a feeling of bitterness towards the Party elite in China and the privileges which they are able to hand down to their children. The fact that party cadres are mostly from worker-peasant backgrounds also presents a problem in terms of the implementation of scientific and technical techniques which the Chinese male -- more specifically -- has been sent abroad to acquire. Although the government keeps reiterating that scientists and engineers are "key" to China's modernization, these same people receive low pay and have to endure low living conditions. As well, many of them upon returning to their work units have not been assigned positions in accordance with their abilities and achievements, and have not been given the authority to implement new ideas. And as one of my informants said in a hushed voice:

"Without political reform there will be no four modernizations."



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## Configurations of Network Discourse: Lebanese Muslim Women in the City of Calgary

Parin A. Dossa

SERIOUS STUDY of immigrant women living in the West is still in its infancy. Interest shown in this group of women has been sparked by feminist thought and women's liberation movements, which have deep roots in the western tradition. Feminist thought is grounded on the premise that women have been oppressed for centuries in all parts of the world (for example: *O'Brien 1981; Zak and Moots 1983*). Women's oppression is perceived to be neither accidental nor natural. Feminist writers have shown that the creation of a complex of institutionalized social values and cultural attitudes have placed severe limitations on the role and status of women in society. Among the themes developed to explicate the secondary status of women is that of "women's proper sphere".

Originally conceived to have its probable roots in women's reproductive and nurturing roles, the notion of women's sphere has gained force in the century following the industrial revolution. It is argued that with the rise of the industrial capitalistic system, women became increasingly confined to the domestic sphere, which became a lesser sphere as opposed to "the enlarging terrain appropriated by men and dominated by them" (*Smith 1984:4*).

This point has been explicated with reference to women and their environmental/social sphere. *Wekerle et al. (1980)*, for example, contend that existing environments discriminate against women, resulting in alienation, powerlessness and dependency. In other words, women's sphere is conceived to be confining as well as confined to women.

Empirical data on immigrant women in the west has been conceptualized in terms of confined social space, leading to a problem-oriented approach. Immigrant women are described as facing numerous problems such as foreign language, job discrimination, strange customs and isolation (*Anderson and Lynam 1987; Ng 1982; 1981; Ng and Gupta 1981; Nagata 1969*). Such a focus precludes consideration of new perspectives and insights gained by immigrant women as they deal with differences between the cultures of the home (non-western) and host (western) countries.



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As a test case to examine how immigrant women activate and sustain social space in their new homeland, I have selected one activity which forms an integral part of the life of Lebanese Muslim women in Calgary, namely: network discourse. The term network refers to personal and close-knit links women have established through contacts of kin and peer group.

The purpose of this study is, first of all, to show that a seemingly unstructured form of women's networks has wide implications, as it enables these women to interpret and define reality in their own terms. The experiential content of network discourse reveals that Lebanese women negotiate their environment, rather than remain passive participants of various situations that confront them in their country of adoption. Secondly, networks create a distance from daily life, defined commonly in terms of house and workplace. From this distance, Lebanese women redefine and recreate another order of reality — a self-contained world. Here, women interpret events in their lives within a shared constellation of symbols, a medium of communication which is relatively their own. In this way, in what appears to be private and personal situations, women partake in the forces that are transforming their lives as well as those of their families.

#### Characteristics of the Study Population

In spite of the fact that immigrant women occupy a low status in the labour force in Canada<sup>1</sup>, Lebanese women (in Calgary) do not consider this a major issue<sup>2</sup>. Family and kin form the pivot of their lives. This can be explained partly by the fact that most Lebanese Muslims in Calgary come from villages in the Bekaa valley. Informants explained that during their time, there was only elementary education available and in keeping with their tradition, women were specifically encouraged to stay at home where they were socialized into the traditional role of nurturers. Figure A provides the characteristics of the study population.

#### Methodology

As networks form an integral part of life of Lebanese women in Calgary, collection of data was informed by the following questions. How do personal networks operate in an urban setting where formalized and public institutions have a strong impact? In what way is network discourse affected by the interaction of two cultural traditions? What bearing does network discourse have on the changing role of Lebanese women? Primarily, the information was collected through personal interviews and participation in network gatherings. The total number of women involved were 15, out of which six were interviewed twice. Three women had their husbands with them and the latter participated actively in conversations. All interviews took place in Lebanese households and the format was conversational as opposed to formal and structured questionnaires. Each interview lasted 1.5 to



**Figure A**

Number of Respondents = 15

Age Group	25-35 (6)	36-46 (5)	47-57 (4)
<b>OCCUPATION</b>			
Housewife	3	1	0
Cook	0	2	2
Seamstress	1	0	0
Cleaner	2	2	2
<b>MARITAL STATUS</b>			
Married	8	3	1
Single	1	0	0
Widow	0	0	2
<b>EDUCATION</b>			
Lower Elementary	4	4	4
Upper Elementary	2	1	0
<b>PLACE OF RESIDENCE</b>			
S.W.	4	5	3
S.E.	2	0	1
<b>PERIOD OF MIGRATION INTO CANADA</b>			
1950-1960	0	1	2
1961-1971	3	3	2
1972-1986	3	1	0
<b>NUMBER OF CHILDREN</b>			
6-5	3	2	4
5-4	2	2	1
3-2	1	0	0



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two hours. In addition, I was able to attend five network gatherings where I was invited casually, like other women in the network. During the time I was in the field (a period of nine months in 1987), I also had opportunity to follow up life crisis events: a birth, a wedding and a death. These events were brought up in network discourse. On a number of occasions, I attended Friday prayers which take place in the mosque at 12 noon. In keeping with Lebanese tradition of gender segregation observed in the mosque, I was obliged to remain in the female section. During this time, I was able to obtain further insights into how women raise pertinent subjects in the course of what appears to be informal conversation. These subjects, forming a central part of network discourse, are discussed below.

### Characteristics of Social Networks

My study of Lebanese women in Calgary shows that the social relationships of women have their focus and grounding in the networks. These networks, like much of Lebanese social life, are generated from kin alliances and friendships, formulated in the country of origin. Network associations of women are quite distinct from the more public, highly differentiated and formalized sphere where men have greater involvement within the economy, communal life and the mosque. For Lebanese women the public and formal institutions seemed tangential. Family and kin form their way of life. Contrary to an assumed premise of the isolation of the housewife in Canada and the degradation of housework, Lebanese women do not consider themselves to be "isolated"; neither do they regard their domestic life as unimportant. Most of these Lebanese women have a "second" automobile or access to a family car. The second automobile has shortened the distance between Lebanese households within a specific locality. A sizable number of Lebanese Muslims live in the southwest, a place where the mosque is also located. A Lebanese household, rather than existing in isolation among neighbours who may be "strangers"<sup>3</sup>, is connected to several other households. This connection is primarily effected through networks of women.

There are a number of characteristics which are of special interest. The networks do not exist a priori, but are created by women through contacts of kin and peer group. These networks are comprised exclusively of women, among whom the most common form of communication is through informal visits. The nature of this network "discourse"<sup>4</sup> is considered to be casual; none of the women I talked to indicated that any specific "problems" are raised; rather the subject matter of the discourse is randomly brought up. Informants related that even getting together was rarely planned. As network ties are close-knit and informal, a woman would phone a friend or kin and visit; another woman (sometimes the number can be two or more) within the same locality may be asked to join the gathering. The time spent ranges from one to two hours and the number of women who meet could be two to five. As visits are not planned, the meetings have a wide range: once a week to once in two months. Contact is also maintained on a continual basis by means of telephone or informal gatherings like a birthday party or a



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wedding. Explicitly, network visits are thought of as a means of sitting and talking over a cup of coffee. However, the subject matter raised in the course of conversations, in fact, relate to pertinent issues which concern women and their families. The more I studied the content of network discourse the greater was my conviction that the existential and historical implications of network discourse are far-reaching, for they determine the process of negotiation of life in Canada, where women play a key role.

### Network Discourse: Reconstruction of Social Reality

#### *The Issue of the Elderly Population*

Lebanese people in Calgary are acutely aware of problems facing the aged in Canada. Abandonment and isolation are perceived to be two major factors affecting the plight of elders and, as traditional homemakers, Lebanese women are acutely aware of their responsibility in caring for elderly parents and in-laws. The experience of isolation can best be understood in relation to life in Lebanon. In their natal country, Lebanese households were "full of people", as visiting was part of daily life. The social interaction in the house was extended into the "street" (neighbourhood). An informant stated:

"Even if you looked out of the window, you would see people in action: a man may be washing his car and chatting away with the people around him; a woman may be going to the market; a child may be playing in the street. Whoever may be the people outside, they formed part of your life. I knew them and they knew me. Here, in Calgary, you look out of the window, there is not a soul. Even if you catch a glimpse of someone, the person would be a stranger."

Given the fact that an increasing number of Lebanese women have taken up salaried jobs, they are confronted with the dilemma of choosing between an occupation and housework. Women's networks provide a forum where this dilemma is subject to narrative discourse. This concern, and other issues which are talked about, is not subject to rational deliberations; neither does it form a topic of extended discussion. Rather inadvertently, in the course of a conversation, a subject is related, involving an act of "racounter"<sup>5</sup>.

For example, Mariyum decided to take up salaried work outside home. As she had to leave her infirm mother-in-law at home, she could not help but feel uneasy. Mariyum would tell and retell her "story" to the women she knew in her network. Each time she conversed, she would set into motion a process of interaction which led to the development of different perspectives. Other women in the network made practical suggestions to the effect that: Mariyum could look for a job with an afternoon or evening shift so at least her children (aged 13, 15 and 16) could be home with her mother-in-law part



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of the time; and she could talk to her Lebanese neighbour (a couple of blocks away) and ask if she could help in an emergency situation and sometimes pay a short visit in the daytime. When Mariyum started exploring these possibilities, a fresh option came to light. She explained that in her own way she had accepted the fact that things have to change and that she does not always have to be in a situation where there is no room for compromise.

Mariyum's situation may be regarded as part of a necessary process whereby individuals utilizing the resources of their culture seek to establish a solution to issues which confront them in daily life. By talking to people who understand her affectively, Mariyum is first of all attempting to narrate her situation. In the process, she attempts to put into wider perspective an empirical reality of incompatible demands: to work outside home as well as take care of her infirm mother-in-law. It was Wittgenstein who said that the meaning of human existence is itself narrative. Paul Ricoeur (1984:22) explicates this point as follows:

"On the contrary, narration preserves the meaning that is behind us so that we can have meaning before us. There is always more order in what we narrate than in what we have actually lived."

By narrating her story, Mariyum is essentially exploring the creative possibility of accommodating the emerging role of working wife into that of the traditional one of nurturer. To the extent that she can combine both roles, Mariyum attempts to establish her own identity and a sense of selfhood in an environment which is challenging and even harsh for women who attempt to combine outside work with family responsibilities. As Mariyum herself explained:

"I do not ever wish to leave aside my responsibilities as a wife and a mother. As a wife, I feel responsible to look after my mother-in-law. My home and my family form the heart of my being. At the same time, I would also like to work. After all, working is also helping my family."

#### *Concerns Related to Raising of Children*

A common topic of network discourse relates to raising of children. Wafa, in the course of a conversation, brought up the subject of sex education. She related that one day she got a form from school, asking for parental consent for her son to see a sex education film. After talking it over with her husband, Wafa did not give her consent. The reason for denial was that her son (aged 11) was too young to see such a film. The mention of this incident triggered a discourse on the subject of sexuality. Salma stated that, in her children's school, parents were invited to preview the film. Her experience was contradictory. At one level, contrary to her expectations, she was quite impressed by the content of the



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film. She found the step by step approach to the topic quite appealing. She stated that a biological explanation was related to other aspects, giving a broader perspective to the subject of human sexuality. The emerging theme was that there are social, emotional and psychological elements of sexuality, all of which combine to give sexuality, in Salma's words, "a meaning". However, at a second level, Salma expressed concern that there was absolutely no mention of the right or the wrong of sexual behaviour. Zeinub, who also participated in the discourse, expressed a view that even if children are shown a film or two on sex education, they nevertheless obtain a lot of information from friends or alternatively, media.

The content of the above discourse throws into relief the different, and at times conflicting, modes of reality confronting Lebanese women (and men). Lebanese children (and other children in Canada) are exposed to different forms of reality concerning human sexuality. Judging from the experiential content of Wafa and her network, there are: the informative and formal content presented in the school; the fragmentary and sometimes distorted pictures emerging within peer groups and media; and the informal and at times situational context prevalent at home.

Wafa's refusal to give consent in the school form was based on the conviction that her son was not ready. Here, there is a discrepancy between her perception of the situation and the school's conviction about the readiness of the child. In bringing up the subject, Wafa is able to share the experiences of her friends and in the process discovers varying dimensions. Salma's experience brings into relief the contradictory nature of sex education: sex education can be informative but is devoid of moral judgment. Beyond this, Wafa's access to the experiences of her friends made her realize that whatever is taught to children at home can be contradicted by peer groups or mass media. This, no doubt, leads to the emergence of creative tension: "Can I or can I not give information on sex to my children?"

It is through this form of self-questioning, arising in network discourse, that Wafa can reaffirm in her own mind what she had known all along: namely, that sexuality, and linked with it the raising of children, are both complex and have very many subtle shades. It is through experiential (not conceptual) understanding of the way in which her friends view the situation that Wafa acquires reassurance of the stance she and her husband have adopted: "We will take the situation as it comes. I do not think that there is any simple answer." In taking this stance, Wafa in her own way has realized the dynamics of ambiguities at work, revealed most poignantly in the issue of sexuality.

Women, by means of sharing experiential knowledge with friends in the network, attempt to achieve reassurance in the solutions adopted with regards to the realities of life affecting them and their families.

### Concluding Remarks

Women's networks (especially, neighbourhood and kin) have formed an integral part of the female experience in all societies. However, the presence of these networks have received scant



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attention in research and consequently have remained "invisible", like other women's activities such as childbearing, child-rearing and homemaking. The networks of Lebanese women may be perceived as a creation of social space where women speak with women, though in this case the interaction is limited to ingroup relations. A distinct feature of the network discourse is that networks do not exist a priori. Rather they are created by women, partly in reaction to the situation in urban Canada where neighbours can be strangers, and partly out of need to create a platform where women can share common concerns. Networks capture the lived realities of everyday life of Lebanese women, and by so doing enable them to redefine and reconstruct their lives with a measure of control and negotiation of their social environment.

Notes:

1. For a summary of the studies on immigrant women in the labour force in Canada, refer to Anderson, J & J Lynam, *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, (19:2, 1987).
2. Unless otherwise stated, the term Lebanese women refers to Muslim women from the Bekaa valley in Lebanon. In order to maintain the anonymity of my informants, names have been changed.
3. My fieldwork among other immigrants show that women initially find it hard to accept the fact that neighbours can be strangers, which may be the case in urban centres in Canada.
4. The term "discourse" refers to an act through which fragmentary and empirical events of daily life are reconstructed within a wider context.
5. The act of "racounter" entails telling and retelling of an event in different contexts. In this way, events in the lives of women are comprehended at a deeper level. For a broader meaning of this term, refer to Ricoeur (1984), *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*, (Kearney R. eds.)

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## **Trials and Tribulations of Feminist Research: The Person's Case in Alberta**

Cathy Cavanagh, Diana Chown, Susan Jackel, Nanci Langford and Randi Warne

THIS SESSION is about the Person's Case and the collaborative research that has gone into the 60th anniversary of the Person's Case and events that took place on the University of Alberta campus.

We will start with introductions. Each of us represents one of the famous five women:

I'm Cathy Cavanagh and I'm representing Irene Parlby.

I'm Diana Chown and I'm representing Henrietta Muir Edwards.

I'm Susan Jackel and I've been working on Emily Murphy.

I'm Randi Warne and I'm representing Nellie McClung.

I'm Nanci Langford and I represent Louise McKinney.

*Susan:* Our goals of doing this presentation are to describe the genesis of a project we have been working on, and to describe the process we have experienced as a group of five working on a project that involves a historical re-construction and a re-interpretation of five women. We have not only examined objectively, but re-created subjectively the co-operation, interplay and personal relationships that we discovered among these five women. This will be partly a process exploration and re-enactment in front of you.

First, we thought we would start by explaining how the project got started. Since Nellie was with us last night, we decided over lunch that I got to be Emily for you today and take a few minutes to describe how it all got going. Which is simply, as it was in the Person's Case, an individual realizing that an opportunity was there before us. Knowing that it usually takes about a year to make things happen, and that celebrations or commemorative events are springboards for further action, I sent a memo. Specifically, I sent a memo to these four women on October 18, 1988 saying, "One year from today will be the 60th Anniversary of the Person's Case and we ought to do something."



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Arising out of that memo came a meeting, and then a series of meetings in which we explored the various ways in which we could commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Person's Case, and as historians we were particularly aware that not much is known about the Person's Case or the five women. Obviously, it had to be an educational project, it had to be something directed towards students, general public, the university community and through them to the media and ultimately the people of Alberta. This is part of the history of Alberta, and it's so little known. We knew we were going to be presenting biographical material. It was not going to be a full-scale conference, symposium or scholarly exploration but beyond that we didn't have any very precise ideas.

Individuals, however, had other ideas. For instance, Diana Chown said, "Oh, I know people in University Collections who would be really interested in this kind of thing." And in a couple of minutes, Diana will give you a more detailed account of how things unfolded. Basically because Diana knew another group of people with interests, resources and capabilities, an application to the University Community Special Projects Fund was made on behalf of Friends of the University Museums and out of that came the exhibit that you've seen over in Rutherford Library South. Now that was a very large scale project. It took a lot of daring and initiative. It's amazing what \$20,000 dollars can do for you. We were thinking in terms of something that would be very cheap and easy to fund; we didn't want big fund-raising projects.

Diana didn't think so small.

For our one day forum, we didn't want to spend a lot of time raising money so we made two funding applications, one to the Centre for Constitutional Studies for \$600 and one to the Women's Secretariat for \$600 and we got both. So, there were two little bits of money but that was enough to pay for the coffee, brochure printing, travel expenses and honoraria for women coming as guests.

Of course none of us were looking for that kind of honorarium, we wanted our rewards in other ways and we certainly got them many times over. It's these other rewards that we want to talk about in the second part of this session — the sense of working together and finding out about each other's women and how each one had contributed to the other.

For instance, during the summer Diana went to Victoria and rooted around in the Archives and found copies of letters Emily Murphy had written to Nellie McClung. She brought these letters back to me, and I have been able to use them in various ways. Time and time again, this is how we do our research. We stumble across things and share them with each other.

Today we'll talk about how this last year has gone, and how we have slowly evolved the format and the content of last Wednesday's Person's Case session. Particularly we can talk about what we didn't get to do last Wednesday. We had a three-part program planned — short biographies followed by some discussion of the focus of the activism of our famous five and then we were going to talk about the process, the collaboration and the interaction. This later part didn't happen. So, it is our privilege today to talk about our process.



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*Randi:* The really interesting part of this process is how much we've been able to identify with the various women and take on the kinds of tasks they would have exhibited. I don't know whether there is a natural resonance, but it was tremendously empowering to know that if we were coming up against road blocks or we had too many demands on our time, Emily probably had 12 committees and Nellie was probably travelling the country giving speeches.

In this whole event it was really fascinating how we bounced off one another. We are in different places in our careers and we are in different places with the specificity of our interests, but we've been able to help one another across the boundaries. For example, I've just completed a doctoral dissertation within the past two years. Sue completed hers some time ago. So I have come to Sue with, "How do you survive these kinds of things when you are just starting your career?"

What was also interesting was the way in which we didn't have to plan the collaborative process; it simply happened because of our love of the work. We were so taken up with what our goal was that there wasn't any of the kind of competitiveness or back-biting or my-way stuff that happens, even in feminist groups. What I came away with after all the meetings, committees, research and long hours was more energy than I went in with. That is really a bizarre thing.

*Nanci:* I probably consider myself to be the younger, junior member of the five and that is no reference to aging. For me, working on this project has been a wonderful apprenticeship because I am learning as I'm doing. I'm not only learning about the challenges of historical research, which I would like to talk about in a second, but I'm also learning from other women about some of the challenges they have faced in their work. It helps me understand what it means to do women's history and how to share our work and have a whole that is greater than the sum of the parts. And I think that is what has been emerging.

For me, the real challenge in researching Louise McKinney was the fact that there was practically nothing available in the traditional sources on her. There is a very slim folder on her life at the legislature. It is probably the skinniest MLA file we have, and at the Provincial Archives there is a very tiny bit of material on her. For me it was a process of discovering by doing where to look for things, and overcoming some of the very real barriers to finding material that is simply not there. You have to be very creative about it. In that process, Randi helped me tremendously in terms of accessing things through the United Church. I knew she was involved in the United Church but I didn't know where to begin to look for sources. Cathy was very good with me in terms of suggesting other possible routes.

I think we face such incredible challenges in trying to reconstruct women's history. You have to be so persistent and creative. It's also a process of sharing the resources. I know that I felt good when I was able to contribute to the project. I spent a significant amount of time last year reading everything I could on the Person's Case because I felt ignorant and wanted to know what we were aiming this project towards. I was able to contribute when I said, "Hey, I know where we can find that material on the Person's Case."



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*Audience:* I think you should share why you would do this one with such a skinny portfolio. I mean, who would take that job on?

*Nanci:* Well, I got her by default. Diana and I were both told that the two women who were left were Louise McKinney and Henrietta Muir Edwards. I thought, "Gee whiz, Louise McKinney, how nice. Who is this woman? I don't know anything about this woman, nothing at all."

I think the important thing for me in the process was to go beyond the surface. I thought, "Okay., this woman was Mrs. WCTU (Women's Christian Temperance Union), that is probably the thing that stands out." As I started to go beyond appearances and ask what she has meant historically and socially in terms of our interpretation in the '80s, I began to appreciate who this person really was and what she did and how she used every opportunity she had to further the equality of women to pursue social justice. I became more and more aware of how exciting a choice, rather non-choice, I had made. It opened up a whole new world of understanding about uncovering women's experience.

*Diana:* I was just going to go back a bit and mention, besides the collaboration amongst ourselves, how this project became a much more expanded circle, particularly with the exhibition, because I went to Helen Collinson, curator of the University Archives and Collections, when I started to work on Henrietta Muir Edwards.

I got in touch with Henrietta's grandchildren, whom Helen Collinson had tracked down, and they sent me pictures of her paintings and painted china that she exhibited in the 1893 Chicago Worlds Fair. I didn't know anything about this part of her because she is commonly identified as the woman who headed the Laws Committee of the National Council of Women for 30 years. And so it just popped into my mind, having had a bit of museum background, how wonderful it would be for female students on campus to have access to more of the breadth of these women's lives. Once we start really reading, they suddenly became flesh and blood and we started identifying with them. I thought, "Wouldn't it be fun if we could have an exhibition!"

I immediately thought not of having it in a space where people have to go and find it, but somewhere in the middle where no one could possibly get away with not seeing it. So, I went to Helen and she, like so many others when we introduced the project, said, "Ah, yes!"

Helen immediately thought of The Friends of the University of Alberta Museums, which supports an enormous number of artifacts, from fine art to scientific, in the University Collections. They are sort of in limbo because the Greenhouse gallery closed down and the new collections building isn't built. She was able to sell the idea of an exhibition to them quite quickly and it was wonderful. It was through them that we applied for the grant and the circle got larger and larger and then we thought how wonderful it would be to have a moving image, like a movie or a video. Susan got hold of a film about the Person's Case, quite a competent film, which we all viewed and critiqued.



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*Susan:* The film had been produced for the 50th anniversary of the Person's Case in 1979. It was partly funded by Alberta Culture and was very much an Alberta project. We all looked at it and we thought, "It's not bad", but it was 45 minutes long and we couldn't get the rights; we weren't allowed to use it. Because the Alberta Women's Secretariat did not have \$2,000 per year to maintain the rights, they let them lapse. In order to be able to show it in 1989, we would have had to pay not simply \$2,000 but \$10,000 — the back payment of all the due payments on rights. Of course it was ridiculous to think of paying \$10,000 in order to show this movie five times during a two-week period.

*Diana:* But we got hooked on the idea of having a film as part of the presentation. So, somehow we managed to bring Barbara Evans, a local filmmaker, into the circle. We had lunch with her a few times and she produced the video which you have probably seen that is part of this exhibition. It is interesting to note that, except for Irene Parlby who had an English accent, each of us doing the research on the famous five women also spoke their voices on the video. That was really quite a wonderful experience. The circle continued to get larger and larger. It involved women, including about 50 students, who worked as docents. It has just been a wonderful extension.

*Cathy:* As far as the project itself goes, I remember getting involved in the spring. I had just finished my first year of course work for a Ph.D and it had been a pretty gruelling year. I was thinking about whether or not I should do this biography on my own and discontinue the Ph.D. I was exploring options for myself -- I felt I was being shut down -- until I got an invitation to join this project.

I thought, "Okay. I'll go to the meeting and we'll see." Working with these women, and on this project in particular, has given me a renewed enthusiasm for the subject matter and caused me to continue with the Ph.D. So, it really has meant a great deal to me. It was the support I got from all these women -- connecting with women who were excited about the same things I was and not having to begin back at the flood in order to talk about what I wanted to talk about, but start where the issues were. It was that kind of feeling connected that I found really exciting. It helped make me think about Irene Parlby's participation in the Person's Case -- how it might have been possible for one woman to write a memo and make a major change to the Senate. That can happen. I think that is a pretty empowering idea.

*Randi:* I would like to pick up on what you were saying about not having to start back at the flood. Any of us who are engaged in doing feminist research knows how fragmented the material is and how you become a specialist in an intensely focused area. Even though we are all engaged in women's studies in a broad sense, to actually find people who have read the same books is rare, at least with those of us who are dealing with these characters which have been consigned to a rather unpopular bourgeoisie hell in the scholarship, and we are re-investigating them as important contributory figures to our history.

One of the most exciting things for me has been to live that most central part of my life



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collaboratively and in community, where we read the same books. It is not a private world, but it is our special world where we can go and share a vision, an energy that is a lot more than the driest dust that you think scholarship has been. These are real people's lives and they are our lives too, and that is one of the best parts of all these connections.

*Susan:* I would like to pick up on something Cathy said because it has just occurred to me that in a way we are two sides of a situation — in that you are part of a department, a history department, where it's assumed you will be doing history but you're doing women's history which isn't particularly valued in that department. You're not aware of having a lot of people you can go to and just drop in on and say, "I'm working through this problem..." I'm on the other side of that particular coin where I am in close collaboration with a lot of people doing women's studies and I feel as if I'm in touch with people who know what feminist work is and what women's studies work is. I mean, for one thing my office is right next door to Winnie Tonn who co-ordinates Women's Studies at the University of Alberta, but I have been connected with feminist research in a variety of fields because I am in an interdisciplinary program. It is okay for me to know something about politics, economics, and literature, so I don't have that problem. I have trouble feeling connected to the particular field I have chosen for research which is history. I'm not in the history department.

*Cathy:* That's not a disadvantage.

*Susan:* Alright, but if somebody says to me, "What do you do?" they are waiting for me to state some kind of clear label. I say that my publications and research are in the area of women's history but I'm not in a history department. I always have to do that second stage. I have trouble maintaining a clear view of myself as a feminist historian. I seem to be more broad-based and therefore, less likely to be kept to some kind of disciplined research agenda. I'm not sure whether it is always clear cut whether you're in a department or out of a department. Probably people who are in the women's studies area feel that tension all the time, between trying to cover the whole range of feminist scholarship and maintaining this very specific research focus - where at the end of the day there is going to be a book or an article, something that can be out there to be judged.

I have toyed for years with the idea of doing a biography of Emily Murphy. I really want to do this and I think about it, read a lot of biography, and read a lot of theory about biography. I've written biographical articles for reference books, I know what is involved in writing biography. It is a big project. It is basically five years out of your life by the time you track down all the things you need for a good biography. I know that I will be measured according to the standards of professional achievement in the field of history because biography is seen as a field of history. I will have professional historians reading my biography and it will be reviewed in the *Canadian Historical Review*. I am going to have to do it well



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if I'm going to do it at all. There is no point to throwing something together. We are all aware of having those high standards of thoroughness, of finding all the primary sources, of being up to date with the theoretical approaches and with the methodological rigour. And meantime we are trying to do all kinds of other things, like transform the university. Is there time in our lives to meet all these expectations we set for ourselves?

*Cathy:* Yes, well there was time in these women's lives. One of the things that I think runs through all of these women's lives is the demand that their public life placed on them and their families. One of the interesting themes that runs through the material, particularly private correspondence of Irene Parlby with her friend Violet McNaughton in Saskatchewan, is a pattern of illness that I think is a manifestation of the stress. For example, before she is to give a public speech, she would write to McNaughton, telling her what she is planning to talk about, that she has had "Oh my God another invitation...when are these people going to leave me alone...how can any one person do all of this...everybody thinks you have got to be an expert...and what do you think about this?", and then she would give her speech to the United Farmers or to the National Council.

Another letter Irene wrote to McNaughton, "Well, I gave my speech and then I went home to Alex and I was in bed for three days." I find this a really fascinating element in her life and one I think that is particularly gender-related. It is also specific to her as an individual. And it is that kind of thing that I think traditional historical approaches to the material would simply not allow to be lifted out of the evidence. So, it is bringing your own experience, and a feminist interpretation to the evidence, that raises some of these questions that are gender-related and specific to women's history.

*Diana:* If I had not worked with this group of women, I wouldn't ask some of the questions I do. For instance, Henrietta Muir Edwards worked within the National Council of Women of Canada and her object was to reform laws by lobbying provincial and federal governments for the protection of women and children, not necessarily the equality of women. In the end she comes out not looking radical at all and the National Council of Women, relative to other women, seems to take quite conservative stands. And yet, lately I've been wondering why she worked the way she did.

She came to Alberta when she was 50. She had worked for working women in some capacity in the '70s in Montreal and we don't know very much about it at this point, but she had what was called a Working Girls Association. It was a boarding house, reading rooms, and employment agency for working women. She and her sister did this on their own. They were not part of a group, they just did this work. So, she had all that background and then she came out to Alberta. She had been in Ottawa working on the National Council and she ended up doing some of the same kind of work as the Farm Women. The Farm Women had their own separate organization from men so she ended up taking a more conservative position than they did.



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Sometimes I get upset because in letters to the paper she would go overboard to praise the members of the legislature and the federal government for changes in the law without acknowledging the lobbying that women had done, and yet she needed them. For instance, when she would compile her review of laws of the year, she had to write to the various governments across Canada and get lists of what changes had been made that year. So, she needed them for her work. In 1908 when she wrote *The Legal Status of Canadian Women*, she sent a draft of the book out to lawyers across Canada, so she needed help from those people. So, I began to wonder if maybe this was her strategy. She needed help, she couldn't afford to do the sort of work she decided to do and start making a lot of radical statements. These are the sort of questions that I find really fun to ask.

*Susan:* Following on that, you may remember that when the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* came into being, we had a three-year period where the various provincial legislatures were supposed to examine their laws to see if they came into conflict with the *Charter*. All the provinces were supposed to do audits of their laws. It usually took feminist lawyers to press the attorney general to do a thorough audit.

Henrietta Muir Edwards was doing audits of Canada's laws from the 1890s onwards. She did it systematically for 30 years, she gained such a standing in the field, that legal experts, and especially new attorney generals, would look to her. She became the authority for how the laws in Canada affected women and children. So, I agree that was part of her strategy and a very effective one, especially in Alberta because in addition to doing *The Legal Status of Canadian Women* she also did it for the province of Alberta. When the new Farmers' government came in 1921, she was there ready and waiting with her most recent update of the laws affecting women and children and what needed to be changed. Because she had worked so long with Irene Parlby and the group who were associated with the farmers it was very straightforward for a very progressive agenda of legal reform to take place during the 1920s. Alberta and British Columbia led the country in their reform of laws affecting women and children in the 1920s. But that reflected 20 years of very steady preparation and gaining of confidence, authority and credentials with the authorities.

*Cathy:* It is easy to get the sense that they were never going to quit. Looking through some the material at the Archives, I remember coming across a letter written by Henrietta Muir Edwards to the Premier about some concerns she had with law that needed to be amended so that women would be better off. The date on the letter was December 24, she was a woman in her 70s or 80s.

*Nanci:* I think the letters really tell the story. You can talk about someone being a president of a particular organization for 20 years and imagine by looking at the minutes what they did, the roles they carried out and the resolutions that were passed. But when you look at some of private correspondence you begin to realize what really was going on in terms of strategies, dedication and persistence. For me, just looking



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at a few letters from Louise McKinney to Emily Murphy was insightful. Louise talked about the situation of various individuals in her community and what she was doing to get justice, and then she described writing to government officials, lawyers, attorney generals, lobbying for institutions like Homes for the Mentally Retarded. I began to see the evolution from a very personal experience in the community to incredible levels of social and political action.

*Susan:* I agree none of them thought small. You might start from a personal situation, but they all had a very good view of the total structure. They really could envisage Canada as an entity and they had a good understanding of federal/provincial relations, they had a good understanding of the inter-relations of the economic, legal and educational systems. Again, the things we think we have invented in the 1970s and 1980s in terms of systemic analysis, they understood very, very well. They specialized: one would be a legal expert, one would be an expert with contacts in the media, and another would be especially strong in another field and they would bring all this expertise together.

*Randi:* I think this is what leads us to our refreshed and renewed understanding of what it means to do history, not just women's history, but history itself in an adequate way. We talk about the persistence of these women. If you go to the standard mainstream histories, you get suffrage and temperance, little blips, and a couple of comments on some legal reforms after they have been achieved, in retrospect (Ah, yes, it happened") without any of the acknowledgement of the years and years that went into that fight. I know Nellie McClung fought for the ordination of women in first the Methodist Church and then the United Church of Canada for well over 20 years. Now the United Church can feel very smug because "well, isn't it wonderful we've ordained women for such a length of time", but what went on to achieve that took tremendous effort and tremendous negotiating.

Specialization in different areas, the different kinds of personalities, the different kinds of connections make us understand women's activism in a much more textured and pluralistic way. In other words, I don't think we can simply take one normative feminist stance and then evaluate all these women's actions in relation to that sort of philosophically-generated, theoretical base, although we are always in dialogue with theory and revising it. In order to uncover what real women were doing, warts and all, we have to look at a much broader spectrum. We also have to think about it in terms of how we are, sort of locating in ourselves, as well as uncovering the past.

*Cathy:* One of the things about doing biography is that you get to see this person up close with all the contradictions. As a historian trying to sort out what was going on, what this person really did believe, throws up all kinds of mixed messages. You think, "Did she really think this, and where is the proof?" When you are looking at women in groups, or working in groups, some of that gets levelled out.

I think there are specific challenges to doing biography, but I also think that biography



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has a very important role to play in terms of women's history at this particular time. In the '60s, biography was not the thing to do, history wasn't about individual women — it was about all women. Now historians in women's history seem to be returning to biography as a way of checking some of our assumptions about the way women work and what women do and women's relationship to the power structure. I think biography can answer some of those questions.

*Diana:* Getting back to the connections — just a simple example: when women got the vote in Alberta, a few months later as one might expect, Emily Murphy called a meeting. They set up a provincial law committee and planned what they would do next. Irene Parlby was the vice-chair and Henrietta Muir Edwards was the chair.

*Nanci:* And it was held at Nellie McClung's house.

*Randi:* Susan, you tell this wonderful story about the various committees that these women were all on...

*Susan:* We all have a wealth of wonderful stories. I don't know which wonderful story you're referring to, but I'm thinking in particular of the Women's Organization in Winnipeg.

I was doing research in the Provincial Archives of Manitoba about a variety of women's organizations. There was the Canadian Women's Press Club, Women's Canadian Club, and University Women's Club. There was just about 14 or 15 of these women's organizations all working together and there was the Political Equality League which was, in particular, the organization which focused on getting the vote for women in Manitoba. It was a very effective organization.

It just so happened that the Canadian Women's Club decided they wanted to invite Emmeline Pankhurst, the suffrage leader in England, to come over and talk. It occurred to them that this might be a nice idea. So, the secretary duly noted that this motion was made and passed then went across the street and turned into the president of the political equality league. She said, "Now, we were reliably informed that this other group wants to bring Emmeline Pankhurst and we would like to write a letter of support." Then the president took off her hat and went across the street and became the treasurer of the Canadian Women's Club and said, "We understand that there needs to be some fundraising for the visit of Emmeline Pankhurst and we would like to adopt this as our project." Nellie McClung was the one person who did these three things. It was understood that this was the game and they all enjoyed it tremendously.

What is fun for me as the researcher is to read between the lines. There are these very dry minutes that the secretary proposed, the president proposed, the treasurer proposed. I have to know to go back to the beginning of that year's minutes and find out who occupies all these positions. Low and behold, within the space of a week it's all done and Emmeline Pankhurst comes to Winnipeg. She just



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happens to mention the vote for women while she's there. It is quite delicious to reconstruct this strategy. Among ourselves we fantasize about the meetings that went on because we know what happens in the talk versus what gets translated into the minutes. Unfortunately, we have not kept minutes or tape recordings of what we've done so this is all lost to history.

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## The Politics of Interdisciplinarity

Dr. Kathleen Martindale

IT'S HARD to talk about the politics of interdisciplinarity, with special emphasis on women's studies, without raising fundamental questions about theory and praxis as well as autonomy and integration. Here, I can only hint at them by discussing my teaching experiences in very different interdisciplinary programs in women's studies in Canada and Quebec, before making a claim that what we need most of all in women's studies is not some more workable, more legitimate interdisciplinarity, but rather an "antidisciplinarity", if we want to make a genuinely feminist revolution in and outside the academy.

Before I can suggest that interdisciplinarity is a hopelessly muddled concept and that an interdisciplinary approach to women's studies doesn't go far enough, I must briefly offer my eight years of teaching experience at one unnamed Canadian university's interdisciplinary program and three years of experience at yet another major institution as evidence for the prosecution/persecution. In my opinion, neither of these approaches to women's studies works. By "works" I mean promotes education for critical consciousness by engaging students and teachers to the maximum in the tasks of social transformation. No doubt such critical education does happen, in women's studies classrooms more than any others in our universities as they are presently run, but it happens almost in spite of the structure. While it may be argued that the main reason interdisciplinary women's studies programs don't work is financial rather than pedagogical, it seems to me that the problems are intimately linked. Women's studies is women's work and as such it's invisible and undervalued. In the reactionary '80s, the energies of women's studies personnel have been expended merely on holding onto reforms, and so radical ongoing critique of the disciplinary structures we have inherited has not been taking place.

The interdisciplinary women's studies program at the first university has all the liabilities of the others there, and then some: a tenured faculty that, by and large, doesn't publish in feminist or women's studies and hasn't kept up with the burgeoning literature; a large part-time and teaching assistant army which teaches most tutorials and new courses, publishes in women's studies and is conversant with the literature, but has no say in the course design, administration or staffing of the



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courses, and is not regarded as academically serious by the tenured faculty. In its unsuccessful application for the chair in women's studies, the university produced a long monograph about the program which said nothing about the aims, objectives or methodologies of women's studies, but included as potential faculty within the program only full-timers, most of whom are not feminists, do not do feminist research and are not familiar with the development of women's studies.

As in most other places, the first university tried to sell its women's studies program to administrators as something that could be run almost for free: tenured and full-time faculty who were willing to be included in the monograph could be said to teach "women's studies" when they taught courses on African history, or sociology of the family, or medieval music, perhaps because they gave a few lectures on women. In any case, no one was checking and these faculty members were already on staff. Part-timers and teaching assistants, who bore most of the burden of leading tutorials and were actively engaged in teaching core courses in women's studies, could be paid peanuts and the university didn't have to make financial commitments to them. They could be hired weeks or even days before term began, and while they were eager for work of any kind, they were especially keen to teach in women's studies. Some were there for years, had Ph.D.'s and published more than the tenured faculty, but they were rarely allowed to direct or design courses and in order to stay employed, many worked double a "full-time" load. Women's studies resembled what is now called the "mommy track" of the academy. What university could resist such a bargain? After all, while enrollments had plummeted in most areas of the humanities and social sciences, enrollments in women's studies were skyrocketing and these new programs cost next to nothing.

The penurious conditions under which this and nearly all women's studies programs operate suggest that Virginia Woolf's analysis in *A Room of One's Own* of the relationship between women and poverty — educational style — is still au courant. Moreover, "interdisciplinary" considerations are also used as an excuse to condone huge lecture formats, inappropriate staffing and slipshod course design. In several of the courses I had the misfortune to teach in, the chief lecturers came from different disciplines, did not know each other's disciplines or approaches and never discussed the course's structure or its operation. Weeks spent on fiction and its mythical background would be followed by weeks spent on presentations of basic political theory. Pedagogues might better term this approach "multidisciplinary", but the students just called it bad teaching. (we part-timers did get quite a good work-out filling in the gaps, explaining why the courses were put together this way, and otherwise managing the students' quite legitimate frustration and confusion. As Donna Summer says, "we worked hard for the money", but we weren't treated right. The tenured faculty taught one or two lectures to 300 or 400 students and we tried to clear up the mess in tutorials of 30 or so that met twice a week. Only the bright, enthusiastic and strongly committed students we tend to get in women's studies would put up with this excuse for an education. (because most know why it's happening) and it is therefore doubly tragic that they get short-changed like this.



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Interdisciplinarity had its problems at the second university as well. During my stay, the severe financial strains under which this university operates continued to make the women's studies program marginal. In its 11 years of existence, the women's studies program has never had a full-time principal, or administrative head, and its only full-time faculty member has been appointed only on limited term appointments. The joke around the program is that the most distinguished teacher is "t.b.a."! The program runs courses, in French and English depending on its staff, who are employed in other departments and colleges of the university. By arrangement with the other departments, faculty are allowed to teach a course as part of their regular teaching load. If the other departments will not release a professor from part of her teaching load in her home discipline, her courses disappear from the list of offerings in women's studies.

Since most of the female faculty at this university, as at other institutions of "higher" learning, are untenured or part-time, staffing in women's studies is very unpredictable. As at the first university, untenured and part-time faculty are much more actively engaged in feminist research than tenured faculty, are much in demand to teach and supervise theses, but their lifespan at the university is extremely short. This university rationalizes its operating costs through high turnover of sessional and part-time faculty, and therefore the achievement at least some degree of continuity in its feminist teaching staff is far less possible than at the first university. For the purposes of this research forum, the point of relating these experiences is to suggest that "interdisciplinarity", when it comes to women's studies teaching, is a nice word for making do with less. While many researchers, when speaking of *research* in women's studies, make ambitious claims that women's studies is intrinsically interdisciplinary, I believe it's important for our purposes here to separate research from teaching and euphemism from reality.

At neither of the universities was the concept of interdisciplinarity ever broached as a formal subject for discussion or review by learning development offices, academic committees or programmes, or conference organizers. It seems simply to have been assumed that everyone knew what interdisciplinarity was and that this utopian goal had been achieved. Oddly enough, each of us part-timers who had been educated elsewhere and had to learn to teach these impossible courses by doing them, probably went through the same initial confusion and despair that our women's studies students did. I believe that each of us essentially went through this ordeal alone. We may have complained to each other over coffee, schedules permitting, but no one formally enlightened us about what we would need to teach the students about all the different methodologies and subject matters in order to get them from where they were originally to where we expected them to be by the end of the term. Talk about the blind leading the blind!

The hit or miss quality of instruction and course design at both universities was mirrored in what could be called the "cafeteria" approach of the whole interdisciplinary women's studies programs there. Students took the required courses in women's studies and then they did their others in the usual non- or anti-feminist disciplines. What's wrong with this picture? By comparison with the



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programs previously described, the interdisciplinary women's studies program at the University of Calgary, where I teach now, is highly structured. Moreover, it is more genuinely interdisciplinary as opposed to multidisciplinary because of the educational vision of the founders of the faculty, who placed the program in a faculty which is uniquely and fully dedicated to interdisciplinary studies. Housed as it is in a faculty which offers, along with women's studies, ten other interdisciplinary majors (all of which require the taking of other interdisciplinary courses such as heritage, world areas and contemporary knowledges and skills) the program exists in a friendly environment where women's studies cannot be easily dismissed as faddish or frivolous and therefore written out of the calendar when the women seconded from sociology or English leave the university. As many U.S. women's studies analysts have remarked, continuity and security of our programs demands autonomy in staffing and hard, not soft, money to fund them.

Because women's studies at the University of Calgary has financial and structural autonomy, the program is certainly less in danger of disappearing or of being neutralized than many others in Canada and the U.S., but other problems with the very concept of interdisciplinarity remain. In effect, each interdisciplinary program has come to function like a department, as a little turf unto itself. You may call me the "co-ordinator" rather than the "director" of women's studies, but I still function like the head of a department. Also, our arrangement at the University of Calgary begs a question about "inter" in interdisciplinary: just what is it that's supposed to be passing through the disciplines? Is it subjects, methodologies, teachers or students? No one seems to know.

Having made the argument for autonomy in women's studies programs, have I not also made the argument that women's studies is a discipline and that it ought to exist ideally in a room of its own? Well, not exactly. I have described a situation which is structurally much more healthy for the continued existence of a women's studies program, but I have said nothing about the relationship of women's studies to the disciplines. That relationship is one I think we ought to re-examine and reject.

In my opinion, women's studies goes beyond mere multidisciplinary or even interdisciplinarity. Women's studies fundamentally rejects the bases on which the traditional disciplines have been structured and maintained. It is, or ought to be, antidisciplinary. While for pragmatic reasons we might have to accept all kinds of compromises to do our work in the patriarchal and capitalist institutions which employ us, that is no reason to allow our thinking (plotting and scheming) about pedagogy to cease. The current divisions into disciplines we have inherited from the boys, some of them ancient Greeks, some merely medieval, yet others late 19th century upper class twits, haven't much to offer us. The fact that all of us were trained in one or more of these disciplines is no excuse, offering at most mental laziness and a bow to convention. While in order to keep our jobs we have to publish in journals that are still in the strangle hold of the disciplines, there is no reason to allow that nonsense to govern what we do in our classrooms.

And indeed, many of us do go beyond interdisciplinarity in our teaching. For example,



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in my course on contemporary issues in feminism, I use texts by Bell Hooks, a feminist theorist whose background is literary; by Cynthia Cockburn, a journalist and social science researcher; by the Isis collective, a group whose backgrounds are varied; by Guberman and Wolfe, academics turned publishers, editors and activists; and Jeffrey Weeks, a gay male cultural critic. The disciplinary baggage these writers carry with them matters far less to my students and me than the fact that their writing explores feminist concerns from varying feminist viewpoints. Feminist critiques of pornography necessarily go beyond the disciplines; at least partially the disciplines' insistence on having their own turf and legitimacy is what makes feminist work illegitimate in their eyes.

If we didn't have to worry about holding on to our jobs and to whatever shreds of academic respectability we have managed to grab, would we really have any truck with the disciplines? Conservative academics who reject the notion that women's studies is a field, because they claim it is parasitical on the other older disciplines, argue that we have no unique subject matter and moreover, that playing fast and loose with the disciplines as we are wont to do confuses students and fails to give them a solid academic training. Instead of taking the usual approach of defending women's studies from these charges, why not consider the possibility that they might be suggestive of our real or ideal practice. That is, do we want the "subject matter" that we have inherited from slave-owning Greek patriarchs? Do we want to give our students the "solid academic training" that produces advertising executives, weapons specialists and management trainees? If we don't, let's consider making a revolution in the academy at least and produce an education for critical consciousness that no longer asks whether it's good enough to mix or match them and instead dispenses with the old disciplines altogether.



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## Interdisciplinarity in the Library

Melody Burton

MY ROLE on this panel is to discuss resource management.

Kathleen and Deb and I are cultural intermediaries. We make our living off of the role we play as deliverers of thought, philosophy and discourse. Some might call us highly paid messengers. Offering a degree, designing a program, teaching a course — these are all examples of intellectual products. From this perspective, women's studies doesn't look very different from any other program. University calendars list intellectual products as offerings, commodities to be purchased by prospective students. The first part of the calendar always tells you how much it costs to enrol in these courses.

I submit this analysis, not to distract the discussion from the philosophy of women's studies and not to dilute the argument that there is something fundamentally different about interdisciplinarity. I submit this as a means of demonstrating there is a dollar value that can (quite easily really) be ascribed to the cultural products we provide. And, in turn, the dollar-value can be used as a means with which women's studies can be compared with other programs.

The dollar value scenario is one that enables us to quantify essentially qualitative services. It's an imperfect measurement, but it does allow us to describe and discuss some of the budgetary difficulties associated with intellectual products and particularly those essential to the administration of a women's studies program. I will focus on those that are peculiar to women's studies.

The intellectual product I'm going to talk about is a book. I don't mean to imply this is the only intellectual product we could slot into some of this discussion, but for ease of argument let's stick to a book. It's also a separate and distinct item that has a unique price tag.

I am in the very fortunate position of having the exact title of Women's Studies Librarian. I recently discovered this administrative recognition is rare. Many of my counterparts at other esteemed Canadian universities — engaged in the exact same activity — cannot claim this title. It has not been acknowledged by their institutions. The most commonly cited reason why women's studies librarians are such a rare species is — and here's the root of my frustration — "there isn't a separate and distinct



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budget for women's studies so we don't need anyone to manage it."

This is not a lot of gibberish. It's absolutely true and accurate. It is uncommon for libraries to allocate funding to an individual to manage a resource that isn't there. But look again. Are there any women's studies books in the library? How did they get there? Who bought them? If there isn't a women's studies slice of the library pie, why not?

Cathy Bray at Athabasca University once told me that all librarians there are women's studies librarians. I like this concept a great deal. It's probably even true at Athabasca University. It is possible, depending upon the staff numbers involved. But unfortunately this is a familiar argument that administrators make to defend their position of not having a women's studies librarian. It frequently sounds like, "All our librarians are sensitive to the needs of women's studies courses offered in their departments. Having a women's studies position is redundant."

But this is where the discussion gets sticky. If women's studies materials or quite simply the representation of women (in books) is spread throughout the disciplines, why is it necessary to have a separate and distinct budget? The History department teaches a History of Women class, the history librarian buys women's history books. The English department teaches Feminist Literary Theory, the English librarian buys books on feminist literary theory. Why isn't this a perfect solution for everyone?

As soon as you have a women's studies professor, you need a women's studies librarian. Why? Because your women's studies professor is doing something different from what your feminist English and history professors are doing. Enter interdisciplinarity. If the above was true we wouldn't have women's studies programs at all. I don't mean to downplay the initiatives that departments have played in offering women's studies courses. They've been essential. And they've provided a home for women's studies and so have their accompanying library budgets. They've supported the purchase of women's studies texts in the absence of a separate and distinct women's studies library budget. But with the emergence of a distinct field or at least a core from which women's studies is centred, it's unlikely that disciplines can support women's studies adequately. Nor should they be expected to.

It's my impression that women's studies has outgrown its discipline roots (wherever that may be...sociology?) If it has become a separate and distinct discipline in its own right with an accompanying body of literature that looks very foreign to the departments from which it emerged, then it's time to split off women's studies and co-ordinate it elsewhere, free of discipline restraints.

OK, let's talk interdisciplinarity and administration.

First, a few words about organizational structures and bureaucracy. A university the size of the University of Alberta is a huge, unwieldy conservative institution. This isn't a criticism. It's a description. An institution this size isn't capable of implementing change overnight. The communication required to inform all concerned that a change has been initiated prevents swift implementation.

This isn't to say universities aren't capable of change, they are. With the rise of any new discipline, programs and departments shift to incorporate new and timely course offerings. Until this



century "science" was a new discipline. And they're doing just fine, thank you very much. Now that women's studies is a recognized and respectable field of endeavour, surely it won't be long before there are Departments of Feminist Studies popping up all over North America. And whole libraries with nothing but feminist materials. Maybe, but unlike our scientific brothers, who very quickly developed a separate and distinct territory to call their own with their own newly coined terminology, women's studies has interdisciplinary roots that bind it very closely with existing disciplines. Even if it were possible to split off from that universal body of knowledge all that is "feminist" or "woman," it's not clear to me that this fits the educational role women's studies wants to play in universities or anywhere.

But let's examine how women's studies fits within university bureaucracy. And I don't mean where it's physically or intellectually located, but where it can be found in the budget. Let's talk bottom line. And let's get out the knives. It's time to slice the library pie. I'm afraid I might sound a little like Ronald Reagan, but this is a useful demonstration because it illustrates two things: it really is hard to slice evenly and fairly; and things are never what they seem.

The problem with budgets, and this is true for any university or corporation, is that there are limits. Limits on the size of the pie, who gets a slice of the pie and guidelines or at least a sense of how the pie is to be sliced. If there isn't an explicit rule about what the funding can be used for, there is an administrative intuition that will immediately recognize when funds are being misspent. Guaranteed.

At this point there are three crucial administrative things going on. All three represent particular barriers for women's studies. They are: 1) perception — what's in women's studies? how do others perceive it? 2) language — how do we articulate our women's studies "vision"? 3) argument — how do we present our vision and argue its viability within an academic environment?

#### Problem 1:

The library pot, historically, is divided by faculty and then sub-divided by discipline or department. Enter women's studies as a new program without new program money, meaning that the pie has not grown. How can the library support this program? How can the library pay a portion of my salary and an annual allocation for purchase of books and periodicals?

It can't. At least it can't without re-slicing the pie and including women's studies in the library pie. This means that, if the re-slicing is done excruciatingly fair, all the other departments, equally, will lose a portion of their annual budget allocation.

#### Problem 2:

Is this fair? What if a department cries "foul"? No it isn't fair. I doubt anyone would argue that women's studies has to get ahead by pushing someone else back. But what do you say to the



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department who has (quite accurately) cried "foul"?

Well, you could re-slice the pie unequally to address past inequities and trends. Maybe Department X is offering fewer courses than it used to, so you cut deeper into its pie. Maybe Department Y had a larger slice of the pie than it ever deserved, so you slice it a little deeper. Combining X and Y, you add women's studies into the library pie.

You can do this, but it won't win you any friends. This is possibly the most political solution and it would require incredible selling to administrators. Even the most diplomatic process and gentle implementation would likely cause hard feelings. It's my guess that a decision to proceed in this manner would be based on internal politics of the day. And it may not be possible to do this in some cases. So, if there are other interdisciplinary programs waiting in the wings, this solution is no solution for them.

### Problem 3:

We need to consider historical precedent. Our own. These are where arguments become critical. How have women's studies administrators articulated their need for funding? My arguments can't be different. Saying what's politically expedient may create additional difficulties in the long-term.

Unfortunately, I think administrators all too often believe a university will support a program fully, and include services which already exist on campus. For example: classroom space, chalk and blackboards. These are annual, ongoing university costs that get rolled into the overall operating budget. What about the library? Isn't it a service just like the computing service which generates grades and the exam schedule? Is it really necessary to identify and add in these costs?

Yes. Why? Well, because these costs are course or program specific. This is where the idea of a book as intellectual property serves a useful purpose. An easy comparison is to consider that a new class in brain surgery is being offered in the med school. To teach the class, students require fully equipped laboratories, including access to some state-of-the-art machinery that isn't currently available on campus. This machine must be specially ordered and purchased before the class can begin. The machine will be an asset to medical students enrolled in other neurology courses, and it is very likely to enhance medical services to the Edmonton and northern Alberta community. The cost of the machine is added into the cost of initiating that brain surgery course. It is easily demonstrated that this additional budget expense is crucial to the course and a universal good.

The same argument can be made for women's studies books and periodicals. In the humanities and in many of the social sciences, (and this is increasingly not the case), it is easy to overlook the resources that students are required to use in pursuit of their degree.

To pass the brain surgery course, med students have to complete three lab experiments using the new equipment. To complete a women's course, students have to write three papers. To write the papers, it is accepted the students will read books and articles. It is universally understood that



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students are not expected to purchase books and periodicals in order to complete their assignments. Everyone knows that other university students, researchers, teaching staff and the community at large will benefit from the inclusion of women's studies texts in the library. Many of these same topics are being dealt with from different perspectives in other departments and programs. Of course you must make the argument that women's studies materials are unique from other materials. We have lots of books in the library. Maybe your students could read some of them? Here's a new engineering text. It was written by a woman. Will it help?

But the argument that really must be made, is that it costs money to support women's studies courses. The historical precedent — to argue that women's studies can be supported with existing resources — is a foolproof way to secure no funding. Administrators are all too happy to comply with this request. Will you put the engineering text on your reading list?

Problem 4:

Is it possible for women's studies to draw on existing resources? Yes, but not without many qualifiers, and this labour-intensive work requires a choreographer, because all have to be in step. Much of what is at the "core" of women's studies will be overlooked. No discipline will or can, without side-stepping their own discipline loyalties, buy what is at the root of women's studies.

Sometimes I call this branch-collecting without knowing where the tree is. And all too often you're collecting branches in discipline-specific forest. Many branches do not an interdisciplinary tree make. If there is a discernible "root" for feminism there is or will be a feminist tree.

By drawing upon existing resources, we jeopardize "root" building or whatever is the core of women's studies.



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## The Politics of Interdisciplinary Women's Studies

Debra Shogan

I WANT to take a slightly different approach to the politics of interdisciplinary women's studies — that is a different approach to the political problems interdisciplinary programs like women studies face in institutions which by and large cannot accommodate or do not respect interdisciplinarity. I want to emphasize the political nature of women's studies itself as informing the political issues which face a women's studies program. I think if we remind ourselves of a well known but sometimes forgotten point that women's studies is foremost political, perhaps we might see more clearly how to deal with the political interaction between a women's studies program and a larger university community and we might be able to make sense of the way in which, why and when women's studies is interdisciplinary. (In the first issue of *Signs*, Catherine Stimpson describes an interdisciplinary approach as exploration of a subject by one person who is skilled in many disciplines, or work undertaken by several people each skilled in one discipline who explore a subject together.)

Women's studies is foremost political because it pays attention to the social construction of power relations with the purposes of changing or transforming these. The self-consciously political nature of women's studies distinguishes the way in which women's studies is interdisciplinary from other interdisciplinary programs. The politics implicit to women's studies informs both our interdisciplinarity and our explicit politics within an institution. (I say self-consciously political because we do know that while other studies are also political, their practitioners do not often admit or recognize the politics.)

In order to get at these observations, I will briefly contrast the interdisciplinarity of leisure studies, to which I have a joint appointment, with the interdisciplinarity of women's studies — with which I have responsibility for a senior seminar.

Leisure studies is the study of a particular cultural and social phenomenon. Quite often focus is on the phenomenon itself without attention paid to why leisure is constructed in the way it is or whose purposes are served by the way it is constructed. When the focus is on the phenomenon itself,



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leisure studies, in my experience, is most often multidisciplinary; that is, questions are independently asked about the phenomenon from the traditional disciplines of psychology, philosophy, sociology, economics and so on.

Leisure studies, or any other studies, in my opinion, are more likely to assume an interdisciplinary approach when a focus is on the interaction of people with a phenomenon and is likely only to happen then when a researcher wishes to understand why there are such widely discrepant experiences of a cultural phenomenon. The disciplines have not often paid attention to questions of power and consequently whether the focus is on a phenomenon or on people engaged with a phenomenon, questions of power also tend to be ignored in understanding particular cultural forms, including leisure. It is when the focus is on a political understanding of the ways in which people engage with a cultural form, that an interdisciplinary approach can be informative.

Unlike leisure studies, women's studies begins with a focus on those whose lives are asymmetrically affected by cultural and social phenomena. Women's studies pays attention to the social construction of power and notices that it is those with power who have constructed academic disciplines and other cultural forms thought to have most value in a culture, and that these disciplines and cultural forms, in turn, contribute to the maintenance of power relations of gender, class and race. Often, in order to come to an understanding of how this occurs in a particular instance, an investigation must be interdisciplinary. But this is not to say that attempting to understand and change the politics of a cultural phenomenon requires that an investigator integrate the disciplines for each question. Sometimes, it is necessary to ask particular questions which do not require the sweep of all disciplines. I personally believe that it is a mistake to claim that women's studies is always and only interdisciplinary — it is interdisciplinary when it suits our political purposes to be so. Our political purposes include transformation of cultural phenomena, including the disciplines, which keep gender and other hierarchies in place. This goal to transform the disciplines makes the very notion of interdisciplinarity a problem for women's studies; that is, if the disciplines themselves contribute to the maintenance of gender and other hierarchies, we must address how it is that disciplines as such can be utilized to transform themselves.

The interdisciplinarity of leisure studies is almost always actually multidisciplinary or, when it is interdisciplinary, this interdisciplinarity serves to keep the unexamined politics of leisure in its place. While we can be frustrated at leisure studies or other studies for being apolitical, it is almost unthinkable that women's studies would be apolitical. Women's studies devoid of activist politics is, as Annette Kolodny reminds us in a recent article, "pedantry and moral abdication". The organization of our materials, our research, our courses, our interaction in the academy, is informed by an activist politics, a goal of which is to transform disciplines, practices and institutions and ultimately dismantle the politically asymmetrical ways in which these are experienced. Consequently, when we assume interdisciplinarity, it is never for the sake of interdisciplinarity or for the sake of research or for the sake of organization (whatever that means). We will likely always have the sorts of organizational problems



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Melody and Kathleen talk about as long as we must fit what we do into a set of categories which are not designed to accommodate us, including sometimes the category of interdisciplinarity.

I am in the mood for some futuristic speculation. (The women in the women's studies seminar for which I am responsible have been projecting what a feminist moral community would be like.) I would like to project what the University of Alberta might be like in 2089.

— In 2089 universities are explicit sites for the contestation of ideas. Although the dynamics of gender, class and race are not dismantled, there has been a shift in consciousness about ways in which knowledge is organized and for what purposes. Those who practise, promote and/or are indifferent to racism, classism, androcentrism and/or misogyny now recognize what could not be seen by many in 1989, that knowledge has been and can be organized to contribute to the maintenance of these power dynamics. Faculties are organized according to their stake in a political future. Each faculty, including the Faculty of Feminism, has units devoted to the understanding of various cultural and cross cultural phenomena; leisure is one of these. In faculties which organize knowledge to maintain social hierarchies, investigations are almost always pursued according to the same traditional disciplines which formed the basis of departments in 1989. In the Faculty of Feminism, cultural phenomena are often, but not always, investigated from as wide a focus as possible; sometimes investigations are transdisciplinary; sometimes they must, given the times, still be interdisciplinary. The library, too, is organized according to this explicit politics. Melody Burton's grand niece is the representative for the Faculty of Feminism. Not only does she have a budget for resources, it is quite clear to her and those who utilize the library how these resources will be catalogued and where these resources can be found.

The University of Alberta in 2089 is surely not a Utopia; some of us would find its explicit conflictual nature much less satisfactory than what we have now. My purpose in making this futuristic projection is to underline that women's studies is anomalous in 1989 because it categorizes knowledge differently than do other studies. This difference is not the difference of interdisciplinarity but the difference of an explicit politics.



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## **Women's Studies Program: Feminist Research and Methodologies (W ST 302, 1989-90)**

Ann Hall

Prerequisite: W ST 300 (or permission of instructor)

### Objectives:

- 1) To acquaint students with the major bibliographic tools in Women's Studies.
- 2) To consider some of the major tendencies underlying research and theoretical projects of traditional disciplines (e.g. positivism, functionalism, modernization theory, psychoanalysis, structuralism, marxism).
- 3) To provide examples of feminist adaptations and critiques of these tendencies.
- 4) To demystify the research process and give students an opportunity to design a research project of their own choosing.

### Brief Outline:

This course will be less about *method* (techniques for gathering evidence) and more about *methodology* (theory and analysis of how research should proceed) and *epistemological issues* (issues about an adequate theory of knowledge or justificatory strategy). One cannot identify the distinctive features of feminist research by focussing on methods, although it is certainly important for you to know, for example, when a questionnaire might be useful, or the differences between observation, participant observation and interactive field work.

What makes research distinctively "feminist" lies in the complex connections between epistemologies, methodologies and research methods. Therefore, you will gain some appreciation of how these connections are formed in traditional disciplines, why they are problematic and what,



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specifically, are the feminist critiques (there are several) of these intersections.

The way into these fairly complex theoretical issues will be through specific subject areas (e.g., violence against women, sexuality, pay equity, sexual harassment) where there is substantial scholarship in both traditional and feminist analytic modes so you can come to appreciate the difference in approach. No doubt, you will also have your own particular areas of interest which you could explore in a similar vein.

When you have completed this course, I would expect that: you are on your way to thinking *critically* as feminists; you have a good understanding of the debates and issues inherent in feminist discussions of epistemology and methodology; and you know where (or to whom) to go for more information, knowledge and specialized methodological training.

#### Texts:

Sandra Harding, ed., *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) (also on reserve).

Alison M. Jaggar and Susan R. Bordo, ed., *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

Additional required readings will either be photocopied (students will be charged \$.05 per page) or made available to photocopy (placed on reserve in Undergraduate Reserve Room in Cameron Library).

#### Requirements:

##### *Class participation (10 per cent)*

Since we will "run" the course as a seminar, it is expected everyone will contribute to class discussions. Opportunities will also be provided for leading discussions.

##### *Research Journal (20 per cent)*

Keep a research journal that briefly outlines the basic ideas of all your assigned readings as well as anything else you read related to the course content. More importantly, outline your *responses* to those ideas. Obviously, you should keep this journal as you go along, as you will find it useful in preparing for class discussions. Hand in your journal at the end of term. (Note: It will not be evaluated per se and you will receive full marks providing it seems complete). Due Friday, April 6.

##### *Short Essay (30 per cent)*

A 2,500 to 3,000 word essay on a topic related to the first half of the course content.



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Together we will develop a list of potential topics. Due Friday, February 16 (no extension possible).

*Major Essay/Project (40 per cent)*

First, it will be necessary to choose a topic, theme or problem. This you will do in conjunction with the instructor. Second, you will need to get started early in the term. Third, you may wish to work with a partner, or at most two others (each participant will receive the same grade). Finally, the essay/project will proceed in stages:

- 1) Brief proposal as to the nature of your "problem" and how you propose to proceed (10 per cent). Due Monday, January 29.
- 2) A brief up-date as to how you are proceeding (5 per cent). Due Monday, March 12.
- 3) Final report of your essay/project — the form and length of which will have been mutually agreed upon (25 per cent). Due on or before Wednesday, April 25 (no extension possible).

Schedule and Readings:

*January 3, 5: Introduction to Course*

Introductions; discussion of course goals and expectations, personal goals and expectations, course requirements (and reevaluation of same).

Reading:

C. Bunch, "Not by Degrees: Feminist Theory and Education", in *Learning Our Way: Essays in Feminist Education*, ed. C. Bunch and S. Pollack (The Crossing Press, 1983), 248-260 (xeroxed).

*January 8 - 12: What is Feminist Scholarship?: An Introduction*

We will examine issues of method, methodology and epistemology, but only in an introductory way, as they relate to feminist scholarship.

Reading:

S. Harding, "Introduction: Is There a Feminist Method?", in *Feminism & Methodology*.

T. de Lauretis, "Feminist Studies/Critical Studies: Issues, Terms and Contexts", in *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* (Indiana University Press, 1986), 1-19 (on reserve).

*January 15 - 19: Patriarchy in the Library: What to Do?*

Melody Burton, Women's Studies librarian at the University of Alberta, will give two sessions (M & W) on the problems (and solutions) for Women's Studies students wishing to gain the most from a library system never designed for cross or interdisciplinary study. On Friday, we will visit two "alternative" libraries if you are not familiar with them already (specifically, St. Stephen's College and the Women's Program and Resource Centre).



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Reading:

To be announced.

*January 22 - 26: Transforming the Academy: An Assessment*

Here we will attempt to assess the impact of feminist scholarship on the traditional (social science and humanities) disciplines. Students will pick one subject area only and read those articles specifically. Since in most cases, there is a 10 to 15-year span between publication of the articles, it is important to examine the differences you notice in the issues discussed in the mid to late '70s and more recently. You may also wish to "interview" a feminist scholar in the area on campus to explore her perceptions of the impact of feminist scholarship on her particular discipline.

Reading:

*History*

J. Kelly-Gadol, "The Social Relations of the Sexes: Methodological Implications", in *Feminism & Methodology* (1976).

L. Gordon, "What's New in Women's History", in *Feminist Studies, Critical Studies*, ed. T. de Lauretis (Indiana University Press, 1986), 21-30 (on reserve).

*Sociology*

M. Millman and R. M. Kanter, "Introduction to Another Voice: Feminist Perspectives on Social Life and Social Science", in *Feminism & Methodology* (1975).

D. Smith, "Women's Perspective as a Radical Critique of Sociology", in *Feminism & Methodology* (1974).

M. A. Hall, "How Should We Theorize Gender in the Context of Sport?", in *Sport, Men and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives*, ed. M. Messner and D. Sabo (Human Kinetics, in press) (xeroxed).

*Anthropology*

C. B. Stack et al., "Review Essay: Anthropology", *Signs* (1: 1, 1975), 147-59 (xeroxed).

H. E. Jacobson, "Speaking From the Shadows: An Introduction to Feminist Thinking in Anthropology", in *The CRIAW Papers/Les Documents de l'ICREF* (CRIAW/ICREF, 1989) (see instructor).

*Psychology*

C. W. Sherif, "Bias in Psychology", in *Feminism & Methodology* (1979).

C. Gilligan, "Woman's Place in Man's Life Cycle", in *Feminism & Methodology* (1979).

H. M. Lips, "Toward a New Science of Human Being and Behavior", in *The Effects of Feminist Approaches on Research Methodologies*, ed. W. Tomm (CIH, 1989), 51-69 (on reserve).

*Economics*

H. I Hartmann, "The Family as the Locus of Gender, Class and Political Struggle: The Example of Housework", in *Feminism & Methodology* (1981).

P. Ciancanelli and B. Berch, "Gender and the GNP", in *Analyzing Gender: A Handbook of Social Science Research*, ed. B.B. Hess and M.M. Ferree (Sage, 1987), 244-66 (on reserve).



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*Law/Jurisprudence*

C. A. MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: Toward Feminist Jurisprudence", in *Feminism & Methodology* (1983).

L. Smith, "What is Feminist Legal Research", in *The Effects of Feminist Approaches on Research Methodologies*, ed. W. Tonn (CIH, 1989), 70-110 (on reserve).

*Philosophy*

C. Pierce, "Review Essay: Philosophy", *Signs* (1: 2, 1975), 487-503 (xeroxed).

M. Hanan, "Feminism, Reason and Philosophical Method", in *The Effects of Feminist Approaches on Research Methodologies*, ed. W. Tonn (CIH, 1989), 31-50 (on reserve).

*Literary Studies*

E. Showalter, "Review Essay: Literary Criticism", *Signs* (1: 2, 1975) 435-60 (xeroxed).

A. B. Dalley, "The Politics of Writing (The) Body: Ecriture Feminine", in *Gender/Body/Knowledge* (1989).

D. Perry, "Procne's Song: The Task of Feminist Literary Criticism", in *Gender/Body/Knowledge* (1989).

*Political Science*

K. Boals, "Review Essay: Political Science", *Signs* (1: 1, 1975), 161-74 (xeroxed).

M. Ackelsberg and I. Diamond, "Gender and Political Life: New Directions in Political Science", in *Analyzing Gender: A Handbook of Social Science Research*, ed. B. B. Hess and M. M. Ferree (Sage, 1987), 504-525 (on reserve).

*Religious Studies*

A. B. Driver, "Review Essay: Religion", *Signs* (2: 2, 1976), 434-49 (xeroxed).

C. P. Christ, "Toward a Paradigm Shift in the Academy and in Religious Studies", in *The Impact of Feminist Research in the Academy*, ed. C. Farnham (Indiana University Press, 1987), 53-76 (xeroxed).

*Art History/Criticism*

G. F. Orenstein, "Review Essay: Art History", *Signs* (1: 2, 1975), 505-25 (xeroxed).

E. O'Neill, "Re(presentation) of Eros: Exploring Female Sexual Agency", in *Gender/Body/Knowledge*.

*January 29 - February 2: Roundtable on Your Work*

We will devote this week to discussing your essays, projects and assignments through group discussion. In addition, we will assess how the course is progressing and what, if any, changes you would like to see.

*February 5 - 16: The Feminization of Epistemology*

Here we want to examine feminist theories of knowledge (epistemology) and more specifically three variants: feminist empiricism, feminism standpoint theories and feminist postmodernism.

Reading:



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### Overview

S. Farganis, "Feminism and the Reconstruction of Social Science", in *Gender/Body/Knowledge*.

M. E. Hawkesworth, "Knowers, Knowing, Known: Feminist Theory and Claims of Truth", *Signs* (14: 3, 1989), 533-557 (xeroxed).

### Feminist Empiricism

M. Eichler, "The Relationship Between Sexist, Non-sexist, Woman-centred and Feminist Research in the Social Sciences", in *Studies in Communication III*, ed. T. McCormack (JAI Press, 1986), 37-74 (xeroxed).

J. M. Vickers, "Memoirs of an Ontological Exile: The Methodological Rebellions of Feminist Research", in *Feminism in Canada*, ed. A. Miles and G. Finn (Black Rose Books, 1982), 27-46 (xeroxed).

### Feminist Standpoint Theories

D. E. Smith, "Women's Perspective as a Radical Critique of Sociology", in *Feminism & Methodology* (review this again).

N. C. M. Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism", in *Feminism & Methodology*.

B. T. Dill, "The Dialectics of Black Womanhood", in *Feminism & Methodology*.

V. Narayan, "The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a Nonwestern Feminist", in *Gender/Body/Knowledge*.

### Feminist Postmodernism

J. Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory", *Signs* (12: 4, 1987), 621-43 (xeroxed).

D. M. Tress, "Comment on Flax's Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory", *Signs* (14: 1, 1988), 196-203 (xeroxed).

### February 19 - 23: Reading Week

### February 26 - March 9: Feminist Reconceptualizations and Reconstructions

We will now examine some specific subject areas where there is substantial scholarship in both traditional and feminist analytic modes so that you can come to appreciate the difference in the approach. It will also be possible for you to explore your own particular area of interest.

#### Reading Suggestions:

Note: We will add to this based on your interests. Students will read in only *one* area.

#### Body/Femininity

S. R. Bordo, "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity: A Feminist Appropriation of Foucault", in *Gender/Body/Knowledge*

#### Sexuality

B. E. Schneider and M. Gould, "Female Sexuality: Looking Back into the Future", in *Analyzing Gender: A Handbook of Social Science Research*, ed. B.B. Hess and M.M. Ferree (Sage, 1987), 120-53 (on reserve).



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M. Dimen, "Power, Sexuality, and Intimacy", in *Gender/Body/Knowledge*.

*Sexual Terrorism (Includes rape, battery, incest, sexual abuse of children, sexual harassment, prostitution, and sexual slavery)*

C. J. Sheffield, "Sexual Terrorism: The Social Control of Women", in *Analyzing Gender: A Handbook of Social Science Research*.

#### Emotion

A. Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology", in *Gender/Body/Knowledge*.

J. C. Toronto, "Women and Caring: What Can Feminists Learn About Morality from Caring?", in *Gender/Body/Knowledge*.

L. S. Arnault, "The Radical Future of a Classic Moral Theory", in *Gender/Body/Knowledge*.

#### Employment/Pay Equity

D. J. Lewis, *Just Give Us the Money: A Discussion of Wage Discrimination and Pay Equity* (Women's Research Centre, 1988) (see instructor).

#### Family

M. Eichler, "Beyond the Sexist Bias in Family Literature", *Families in Canada Today*, 2nd Edition (Gage, 1988) (xeroxed).

#### Leisure/Sport

R. Deem, "Feminism and Leisure Studies: Opening Up New Directions", in *Relative Freedoms: Women and Leisure*, ed. E. Wimbush and M. Talbot (Open University Press, 1988), 5-17 (xeroxed).

M. A. Hall, "The Discourse of Gender and Sport: from Femininity to Feminism", *Sociology of Sport Journal*, (5: 4, 1988), 330-340 (xeroxed).

#### March 12 - 30: Doing Feminist Research

We will now try to put all we have learned thus far into perspective and examine some of the issues inherent in "doing feminist research". We will also look at some specific examples and actual practice (praxis). You will also have an opportunity to discuss your own specific projects.

#### Issues

What we want to examine here is the relationship between feminist epistemologies and methodologies (and methods). Some of the issues we will discuss are: value-neutrality, positivism, objectivity, colonialism, "double-consciousness", standpoints, dualisms, dominant paradigms, praxis and emancipatory research.

#### Reading:

M. A. Hall, "Knowledge and Gender: Epistemological Questions in the Social Analysis of Sport", in *Women and Men: Interdisciplinary Readings on Gender*, ed. G. H. Nemiroff (Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1987), 80-102 (xeroxed).

J. A. Ladner, "Introduction to Tomorrow's Tomorrow: The Black Woman", in *Feminism and Methodology*.



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S. Gorelich, "The Changer and the Changed: Methodological Reflections on Studying Jewish Feminists", in *Gender/Body/Knowledge*.

### *Examples and Practice (Praxis)*

How do we actually go about "doing feminist research". It should be clear by now that there is no *one* kind of feminist research since feminist scholars are hard at work in all the traditional disciplines. There is also, as you have come to understand, significant debate over appropriate epistemologies. The literature is not extensive on how we, as feminists, should conduct our research, and most of what is available is from a social science perspective.

Listed below are several books and articles which we will divide up among us (working in pairs or threes) to assess their usefulness in teaching us how to go about our research.

#### Books:

M. Eichler, *Nonsexist Research Methods: A Practical Guide* (Allen & Unwin, 1988).

G. Bowles and R.D. Klein, *Theories of Women's Studies* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983) chapters 7 - 12.

S. Kirby and K. McKenna, *Experience, Research, Social Change: Methods from the Margins* (Garamond, 1989).

J. Barnsley and D. Ellis, *An Introduction to Action Research* (Women's Research Centre, 1987).

C. A. B. Warren, *Gender Issues in Field Research* (Sage Publications, 1988).

J. M. Nielsen, *Feminist Research Methods* (Westview Press, 1990) This is due out in February and I have not seen it yet.

#### Articles:

J. Acker, K. Barry and J. Esseveld, "Objectivity and Truth: Problems in Doing Feminist Research", *Women's Studies International Forum* (6: 4, 1983), 423-35 (xeroxed).

A. Oakley, "Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms", in *Doing Feminist Research*, ed. H. Roberts (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 30-61 (xeroxed).

S. N. G. Geiger, "Women's Life Histories: Method and Content", *Signs* (11: 2, 1986), 334-51 (xeroxed).

J. Stacey, "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?" *Women's Studies International Forum* (11: 1, 1988), 21-27 (xeroxed).

R. Linton, "Toward a Feminist Research Method", in *Gender/Body/Knowledge*.

P. Teitelbaum, "Feminist Theory and Standardized Testing", in *Gender/Body/Knowledge*.

### *April 2 - 6: Where to Go from Here?*

In this last week, we will try to come to some assessment of what you have learned (specifically in relation to the course objectives as well as your own personal goals). We should also discuss where each of you (especially if you are a Women's Studies major) is heading "research-wise" and specifically in relation to W ST 401 (Senior Project in Women's Studies). Finally, you will evaluate the course once again.



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## **Research and Action (Plenary Session)**

### **Introduction by Janice Williamson**

This year our plenary session is an opportunity to focus on strategies for change from a number of different activist perspectives. We have four guests who will speak about three areas of change.

We'll hear from Noreen Bell and Helen Greaves, who will speak about the Alberta Status of Women Action Committee's Women Against Poverty campaign. Linda Richardson, who is a representative of Alberta's Abortion By Choice, is going to talk about that group since its inception. She will talk about past strategies and analyze how effective they have been. Anne McGrath, current Alberta regional representative on the National Action Committee on the Status of Women executive, will talk about strategies for action in the women's movement, and in particular about three country-wide campaigns.



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## ASWAC's Women Against Poverty Campaign

Noreen Bell and Helen Greaves

*Noreen:* Helen and I are happy to be here as representatives of the Alberta Status of Women Action Committee (ASWAC). We are going to talk about our Women Against Poverty campaign, and I'll start by giving you a little historical reference. In Camrose in November of 1987 the ASWAC membership, during the Annual General Assembly, committed themselves to launching a Women and Poverty campaign, which turned into the Women Against Poverty campaign of this year. The membership recognized the growing impoverishment of women. After that meeting, Donna Bain created a discussion paper on the subject which set out proposals, goals and objectives for the campaign. These were: connection to the grassroots of women; attracting new women; encouraging women to develop new groups associated with ASWAC; and making better connection with the rural world, which we tend to forget. We wanted to develop some strong coalitions with other groups and flex our political muscle, and acquire more media exposure.

Stemming from these goals and objectives were tactics such as *Povertéas*. *Povertéas* were an activity based on the idea of neighbourhood coffee groups, and they went on throughout the campaign. They were small groups of women, much like consciousness raising groups. They culminated in public hearings conducted across the province.

The campaign that was to be started in 1988 didn't begin until 1989. The 1988 portion of the campaign was more individually focussed, with people getting together at *Povertéas*. In addition, there was a postcard campaign and film nights.

On May 12, 1988, a presentation was made to the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues. This presentation challenged traditional ways of looking at poverty and the existing set of support groups. The response — nothing. This was similar to the lack of response to the Council's 54 recommendations to the government.

At the 1988 ASWAC Assembly the Women Against Poverty mandate was re-emphasized. During that assembly Jean Swanson of the End Legislated Poverty group in Vancouver spoke to



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us and injected a new enthusiasm into the proposed campaign. On the basis of Donna's discussion paper we proceeded.

*Helen:* After the new board was elected at that assembly, the Women Against Poverty Provincial Co-ordinating Committee was founded, consisting of six ASWAC board members — Noreen, Anne McGrath, Jane Haslett from Edmonton, Jackie Preyde from Lethbridge, Marilyn Seelye from Calgary and myself. The Women Against Poverty Co-ordinating Committee represented women across the province, and we met on a number of occasions in Red Deer to plan Women Against Poverty hearings.

This group of women struggled with what we wanted the hearings to be. After several meetings we reached a consensus. We wanted the hearings to break the silence of women's poverty and empower women. I want you to understand what the issues were for the Women Against Poverty Co-ordinating Committee — we didn't want to simply hear women's stories, we also wanted to empower women as we were listening to their stories. That was very important. The strategy we developed was to send people into the various areas of the province to discuss the idea and concept of the hearings, and to involve ASWAC members and members of the community. We wanted local community people to help develop the idea of the hearings. ASWAC was committed to the hearings and we wanted women in the province to participate in the planning.

The first phase of the project was to hire someone on contract using Secretary of State funds. Anne McGrath's comments are really important as to the present situation. The individual we hired, Diane Wazny, went into eight provincial zones as defined by Travel Alberta and spoke to community women and feminists already identified in each of those areas. She reported back to the provincial co-ordinating committee.

Her initial work told us a couple of things. First, it made us aware of women's perceptions of ASWAC over the years. That was very important and extremely stimulating. All these women called themselves feminists. Also, her work gave us an idea of what each community wanted in respect to poverty hearings. With this information, we were able to decide how to structure the hearings. It was important when we entered communities like Fort McMurray, Vermilion and the Crowsnest Pass, that we knew how community people viewed ASWAC and what they wanted from the hearings.

The Women Against Poverty Provincial Co-ordinating Committee decided to hold two different sets of hearings: five rural hearings in the outlying areas (a keynote speaker with a couple of community people on the panel) and two Task Force hearings in the major centres of Alberta. They affectionately became known as the Spring hearings and the Fall hearings. The reason we decided to hold the Spring hearings was that women who were on the land told us, "We want the hearings after we seed and not when we are harvesting." So that's when we decided to do our "research" in rural Alberta.

*Noreen:* The rural hearings took place in the Crowsnest Pass, Lac La Biche, Fairview, Canmore and



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Wetaskiwin. As a board member of ASWAC, I attended two of the rural hearings: Lac La Biche and Wetaskiwin. As Helen mentioned, at each there was a keynote speaker, a moderator and various presenters. The rural hearings reflected rural women's willingness to be recognized and validated in their particular circumstance. They created a forum where women could break the silence surrounding poverty issues affecting them and feel empowered in that process. That came across loudly and clearly.

*Helen:* After the spring hearings the Women Against Poverty core committee decided to refocus the fall urban hearings. These were held in Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Calgary, Red Deer, Edmonton, Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray in September. We decided after the rural hearings to separate the urban hearings into two segments, north and south. In the north, because I was project co-ordinator of ASWAC at the time and in keeping with the wishes of the Women Against Poverty committee, I went to Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie to talk to local women before we started any publicity. A similar job was done in the south by Terri Ann Marco.

I met with community women in Fort McMurray, as well as a couple of feminists. Before publicizing the hearings and finding out about women's poverty in Fort McMurray, it was important to understand that the word "feminist" had certain overtones for local residents. In Grande Prairie we were asked to structure a task force with northern representatives. We obliged. The northern task force consisted of a Grande Prairie representative, local community representatives when possible, and we tried to get a Fort McMurray representative. It was a travelling task force with different people, people from Fort McMurray who eventually went off, Edmonton people and a Grande Prairie person. This type of task force received a good reception in the three areas. I mention this because the Women Against Poverty Co-ordinating Committee showed creativity and sensitivity in recomposing the northern task force in order to meet local community needs.

*Noreen:* The Fort McMurray hearing was a very powerful hearing. I would like to briefly describe it. I was fortunate to be a member of the task force, and the experience really brought home to me the difficulties faced by women living in poverty in areas where poverty is not recognized. Fort McMurray is considered a very rich city, but it's very isolated. It almost has a city mentality within a rural environment. The women in Fort McMurray who made presentations at the hearing consistently referred to this lack of acknowledgement and obviously welcomed the opportunity to be heard. We learned that there's a denial that poverty exists. One young mother with two babies who isn't allowed a telephone or car allowance described the lack of acknowledgement of what may happen to a mother with two babies if one of the children becomes ill. This seems to be part of a vast de-incentive program that we heard about many times. One of the most passionate presentations in Fort McMurray was made on behalf of the women of Fort Chipewyan. To be a poor woman is bad enough, but to be a poor native woman is absolutely incomprehensible. It was an extremely emotional hearing and you could tell the sharing that



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went on there was empowering to all in attendance.

*Helen:* I'd like to repeat the comment I made earlier that part of the issue was to break silence and to empower women. This campaign had a major process component to it. All the people who made presentations were allowed to tell the task force exactly what they wanted to in a manner that the local community requested.

Noreen and I, when we prepared our presentation for today, had a concern about being too academic and research-orientated. ASWAC is a proactive political organization lobbying for change in the province. We looked up the word "research" in the dictionary last night, and we found out research is exactly what the Women Against Poverty campaign did. Noreen confirmed that our work fit this forum when she walked in here last night and saw a sign that read, "Research: Just another word for finding out."

We're pleased with what we found out, and very pleased about the manner we chose to find it out. We now have primary resource material from women in the province we can use to lobby the Alberta government for change.

In closing I would like to say my only concern about the campaign was that we didn't spend enough time or care with our sisters who made presentations and our sisters in the communities we called upon to help us. But our time was limited. Anne has talked about burnout in pro-active work. If we could change any part of the Women Against Poverty campaign, we'd want to spend more time with people who helped us, and especially people who made presentations. Noreen touched on only two of many important stories we heard as we found out about women's poverty in Alberta.

On a positive note I want to confirm in a pro-active way what Anne has said to you -- there are many of us out there. We found feminists who were very active in Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray and throughout the rural areas of Alberta. It's important that we listen to each other as we find out more and find out more in good ways. Whether we use the word "research" or words like "finding out", we should be clear when we talk to each other about what we are trying to achieve.



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## ABC's Campaign for Choice

Linda J. Richardson

ABORTION BY CHOICE started in a living room in January 1983, with a small but angry group of Edmonton women who want to actively speak out against the growing pro-life/anti-choice movement in Northern Alberta. Today, the pro-choice voice is heard in schools, in the media, in the streets, in the Legislature and in the Parliament buildings.

How did we get from there to here? Looking back at those early organizational meetings, I'm struck at how clearly we articulated our purpose and goals and how closely our action plans through the years have worked toward achieving those goals.

The initial Statement of Purpose of the group signaled the direction for change: "We will work to ensure that all women have the right to choose whether or not to have an abortion and to ensure that there are safe, adequate, supportive facilities for abortion."

From that Statement of Purpose, we set our goals. Most of our activities and events over the last six years have been linked to those goals. By outlining our major goals and indicating the activities or events associated with each of them, I hope to analyze Abortion By Choice's strategies for effecting change. Throughout my presentation, I will try to evaluate how effective those strategies were and what, if anything, we would have done differently.

*1) We will educate and inform the public about all aspects of the abortion issue and provide objective information about pro-life groups, their tactics, membership and goals.*

Organizationally, we needed recognition and credibility to be seen by both the public and the media as the Edmonton voice for the pro-choice movement. The name we chose not only embodied our purpose; it also mirrored the name of our sister organization in Calgary. This gave us a connection with an established, active, pro-choice group in Alberta. We also felt we needed an organization that had flexibility, permanence and the potential to grow, as well as one that would give



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members protection from liability. We thus incorporated under the *Societies Act* as a non-profit association.

At a very early stage, we saw the need to connect and co-operate with the national pro-choice movement. We first became an affiliate of the Canadian Abortion Rights Action League (CARAL), and later a chapter. Becoming a CARAL Chapter was significant in that it allowed us to access a multitude of resources and a wealth of experience, particularly in lobbying and other political action and it gave us a feeling of sharing in a singular national purpose.

To gain public support, as well as new members and extra funds, we gathered mailing lists from other women's organizations and sent out initial fundraising and membership-gathering letters, issued a news release and held a "think-tank" with other pro-choice individuals and organizations.

We later began to publish a newsletter, appear on talk shows and open-line programs and approach the media — both print and electronic. These publicity activities were focused not only on raising awareness around the issues involved, such as the criminalization of abortion and unequal access, but also on gaining more public support, since we know that pro-choice individuals tend not to be as vocal as those in the anti-choice movement.

A major event in January, 1985 was a visit by Dr. Henry Morgentaler to Edmonton for a sold-out public forum and dinner which raised \$10,000 for his defence fund. Organizing this event took a tremendous amount of energy but it was probably our most successful event, in terms of fundraising and attendance. For the first time, we had to deal with such things as anti-choice protesters, security for Dr. Morgentaler and marshals for crowd control. One individual in the group had the sole responsibility of dealing with the media, which was a major task.

We learned a lot from that event; perhaps most importantly, how to deal with the media. Since that time, we have generally had good relations with them. We have learned to deal with their deadlines, misquotes, pressure tactics to get a story and need to create confrontation or conflict where there may be none.

Much of our efforts over the years have involved providing a balance in the abortion debate and responding to tactics of anti-choice groups. We have tried to be pro-active, for example, sending out a package of pro-choice literature to every public junior high and high school in Edmonton and surrounding areas. This was to answer a need for information on abortion and to counter graphic and one-sided literature and films that seemed to be pervading the schools. It was also a more efficient way of dealing with many information requests we received from students. Other pro-active activities included publishing and distributing our own brochure and having an answering service made available during the week to take calls from media or those seeking information.

However, a lot of our activities have been reactive. To counter the graphic and inaccurate video *The Silent Scream*, we held public viewings of both that video and the U.S. *Planned Parenthood*



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*Response to the Silent Scream.* As part of a CARAL strategy, we also raised funds to provide every member of Parliament with a copy of the *Response* video.

In February last year, we picketed and marched to protest a visit to Edmonton of an "Operation Rescue" proponent. This past summer, the group sponsored rallies and marches to protest the *Daigle* and *Dodd* injunction cases and also the possibility of recriminalizing abortion.

Because of these reactive activities, it has often been difficult to set our own agenda, and that has sometimes resulted in haphazard planning and perhaps an ineffective use of the group's human resources and funds.

2) *We will work to remove abortion from the Criminal Code and we will utilize the political system to achieve our goals.*

Lobbying politicians and others to change the law has always been a primary focus of the group. We have actively lobbied members of Parliament and members of the Legislature and encouraged our members to do so, especially during elections, through letter-writing campaigns, lobbying workshops and sending lobbying how-to kits to members, through CARAL. CARAL has its own lobbyist in Ottawa, but on a local level, I think Abortion By Choice has been least effective in its lobbying strategy. We probably could have done more planning in this regard and focused more attention on letter-writing, encouraging members to visit their members of Parliament and circulating more petitions.

The group has also tried to influence politicians using other vehicles, such as theatre. In 1986, as part of a nation-wide Abortion Tribunals event, Abortion By Choice staged its own production of "Putting the Abortion Law on Trial", with women recounting personal abortion experiences, both positive and negative, in a public setting. It was an effective media attention-grabber but in terms of actually influencing politicians, I'm not so sure it succeeded. Politicians are influenced largely by their parties and by their constituents. It has been difficult to counteract the huge volume of anti-choice mail and in-person lobbying carried out by the large, well-funded and Roman Catholic-backed anti-choice movement.

3) *We will cooperate with and support other pro-choice groups to further our common purpose.*

In October 1986, doctors doing abortion procedures were forced to stop extra-billing their patients. In a province that already had access problems due to delays caused by the therapeutic abortion committee system and hospital quotas, we were facing the worst crisis in access to abortion services since prior to 1969. Abortion By Choice's response to the access crisis was to spearhead the formation of a Coalition for Access to Abortion. This was a coalition of approximately 25 women's



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groups, reproductive rights groups, citizen's action groups and church organizations which mandated the working committee of the Coalition to lobby for improved access to abortion services for Alberta women.

Because of the political impact the Coalition generated, we were able to meet fairly quickly with cabinet ministers and the Alberta Medical Association to press our demands. We also used the Coalition as a network to publicize and help organize events, circulate a petition, share strategies and launch letter-writing campaigns.

I feel the nature and purpose of the Coalition may have been misunderstood by some people, particularly the media. They saw it as an on-going, active group, with the sole goal of establishing a free-standing clinic in Edmonton. That may have been a goal in the eyes of some, but as time went on and attendance at meetings dwindled, we realized the effectiveness of the Coalition was going to be in its size and diversity of membership. It became a very useful tool for lobbying and networking.

4) *We will promote improved services for pregnancy counselling and birth control and we will work for improved clinical abortion facilities.*

Following the Supreme Court of Canada decision in *R.v. Morgentaler et al*, our focus shifted even more towards this goal. We hoped the absence of *Criminal Code* sanctions would liberalize access to abortion. However, in Alberta, government policy required that abortions be done in accredited hospitals and with a second medical opinion; otherwise, doctors would not be paid by the Alberta Health Care Insurance Commission.

In March 1988, an Ad Hoc Committee for Reproductive Health Care Clinics was formed by representatives from Abortion By Choice, the Abortion Caucus, Planned Parenthood, the Alberta Status of Women Action Committee, the Legal Education and Action Fund and other Coalition members to examine ways of challenging that policy, and ultimately, to aim at establishing a non-hospital-based women's reproductive health care centre. Much preliminary work was done in terms of looking at budgets, facilities, equipment, fundraising and incorporating a non-profit organization. The Committee developed a good working relationship with the Registrar of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, who was able to convince the College Council to pass a resolution adding abortion procedures to the list of approved procedures that can be performed in non-hospital, accredited surgical suites. Although this avenue of access to abortion services looked very promising, funding the procedure in surgical suites became an issue with the government and thus far, no doctors seem willing to look at this as an option. With the growing opposition from Operation Rescue-like groups, the Committee felt there wasn't enough support from the medical community to press for a free-standing clinic in Edmonton.

At that point in time and since then, all of Abortion By Choice's efforts have been focused on trying to stop the federal government from recriminalizing abortion. The group has also had to



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reorganize its core steering committee due to a number of retirements of long-time board members. The new core group, revitalized by additional members anxious to take up the struggle, have tried new tactics such as organizing rallies and marches. They are learning to deal effectively with anti-choice heckling and confrontation.

In working to achieve our goals, we assumed that changes in the law and in access would require changes to the attitudes of Canadians and politicians to offset the vocal anti-choice minority. This meant the dissemination of a sound base of pro-choice information. Much of our activities, particularly the educational ones, relied heavily on the use of statistics and Gallup Polls. We also had the benefit of research in such areas as the effects of mandatory motherhood, post-abortion psychological effects and characteristics of the pro-life, pro-family organizations in Canada. There is a wealth of well-written, informative literature and studies relating to abortion which is helpful in countering the plethora of studies with opposite results relied upon by the anti-choice groups.

We thought we had won a major victory in January 1988. However, we are still a long way from achieving equitable access and we may be facing a new and possibly more restrictive law soon. Abortion by Choice has been an effective fundraiser and public education event organizer. It has, I think, been less successful as a lobbyist and mass action strategist, although its effectiveness in this last activity is changing.

We perhaps underestimated the strength and tenacity of anti-choice groups and their recent foray into their own brand of civil disobedience. Responding to these anti-choice tactics has, in many instances, drained the human resources of the group which then has left us less inclined to be proactive.

Perhaps it has been attempting to be too multi-faceted an organization, trying to be too many things to too many people, that has led to some ineffectiveness in achieving some of our goals. We have not, for example, seen noticeable improvement in access to abortion services in Edmonton; however, we were part of the movement that led to the abortion law being struck down in 1988 and we continue to be what we set out to be in that living room in 1983 — that is, a pro-choice voice for this community.



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## NAC: Building National Networks

Anne McGrath

I'M GOING to talk about strategies for action in the feminist movement, and in particular about three country-wide campaigns. I will start by looking at the political context within which we are organizing. Although research is evident in all aspects of our organizing, I'm not going to single it out; I'm sure you'll recognize it from what I say.

In terms of the political context within which we are organizing I think it's fair to say that we are living in a society in Canada and actually in many of the western countries where neo-Conservatism is on the rise. We see it in Thatcher's Britain, with the Reagan/Bush administration in the United States and with Mulroney's government here. The provincial Progressive Conservative governments in Canada are also examples of neo-Conservatism.

There are several manifestations of that rise. One is the decline in support of social programs — both decline in financial support as well as social support for a general idea that social programs are something to be provided to all members of our society. The other indication is the rise of a market-driven economy. Women have not always fared well in market-driven economies. We see this reflected in the Free Trade agreement, the proposed Goods and Services tax and in privatization at all levels of government.

In addition, I want to draw to your attention the emergence of the New Right. The Alberta Federation of Women United For Families (AFWUFF) and R.E.A.L. (Realistic Equal Active for Life) Women are the very extreme right wing groups that exist in the women's field. This New Right phenomenon in North America has manifested itself particularly in an attack against feminism and women (other things as well, but I think this has been a central part of it). The New Right moves politics to the right, and makes right wing thinking and reactionary forms of policy more acceptable. You can see shifts all the way along the political spectrum.

I attended an AFWUFF annual conference last year in Lethbridge. (I fit right in.) It is a group of very politically conscious women. These women are not men in disguise, they are not duped



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by their husbands, they are politically conscious women who have made a choice and their choice is anti-women. Their conference keynote speaker was an American ideologue of the New Right, a man named Gene Antonio, who came from Texas and described us with a phrase that actually defies logic, but his description was "godless lesbian feminist sodomites". Now I know that doesn't fit very well, but he talked about the control we have over government, over society, over the media. He described how godless lesbian feminist sodomites have taken over *Chatelaine* and other instruments of society. There were quite a few women and men at the conference. They all played a fairly active part in discussion of policy. They are not stupid. They have made a choice, and I think that's really important for us to remember when we talk about the New Right and when we talk about AFWUFF.

Tied in to New Right thinking is, of course, the ideology of the family. This ideology is reflected in social policy in some of the Western provinces. We see clear evidence of it here in Alberta. Premier Getty has voiced some of his ideas about the family, in particular the importance of the family as the white male patriarchal form.

The final thing I want to draw your attention to about our political context is explicit signs of government withdrawing from its responsibility for equality. We saw that quite clearly in the last federal budget when a \$2,000,000 cut was made to the Secretary of State, which affects not only women's programs but native groups and multicultural groups, official language spending, and other programs of this sort. The government does not appear to be upholding its commitment to international convention and the drive for equality. The government no longer feels it has the responsibility to be active in trying to create an equal society. It has taken on not a passive role, not a role of working in minor ways for equality, but a very punitive role, very vengeful and very focussed against the women's movement and in particular against NAC. NAC saw its budget cut by 50 per cent by next year in the last federal budget. They want us cut by 50 per cent. Although we may be flattered they see us as that much of a threat, these cuts are going to have a serious impact on our ability to conduct country-wide campaigns.

I also want to mention the role the media is playing in all this right now. Many of the major newspapers have cut women's beats, labour beats and news of this sort. When we look at women's issues the decline of feminism is considered to be the legitimate news.

Let's look also at the changes in the women's movement during this same period of time. We are fighting to retain previously won rights and fighting harder now to hold those gains than we had to fight in the past to get them. This has an impact on how we organize. We have to work harder, with less resources, and are suffering more defeats. Consequently, we — the activists — burn out faster.

We have seen an increase in the number of groups that consider service delivery as their primary role, and less emphasis on advocacy. With the growth of service groups there has also been an increase in the number of groups that feel it is important to dissociate themselves from feminism. I've seen a lot of service groups make the differentiation: we are a women's organization, not a feminist organization.



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We also see a rise in conservative feminism. In conservative feminism the emphasis is access to corporate and government decision-making bodies. They've had some successes. Some will focus on reproductive rights, but downplay the systemic barriers for women and ignore the economic, political and social changes that are necessary.

If we look at the National Action Committee on the Status of Women we see about 580 member groups, representing about four million women. During the past two years we have conducted three country-wide campaigns. (I use the term country-wide because I think national doesn't take into account the whole situation of Quebec and Western Canada.) The purpose was to mobilize large numbers of women, have some impact on government policy and legislation, increase public awareness, increase our level of empowerment and create within us some awareness of our ability to create change.

One of our campaigns followed a fairly divisive Annual General Meeting -- one of the few times we made it to the front page of the Globe and Mail. This was right before the federal election was called. During the federal election we identified four priority areas: Free Trade; violence against women; child care; and reproductive rights. In the "Women Vote Day" campaign we wanted to heighten the gender gap. We knew, for instance, that more women than men were opposed to free trade and wanted some kind of child care system. We knew there was a difference between the way women and men were going to vote and we wanted to heighten that difference and make women's issues a centre of the political agenda. During the "Women Vote Day" campaign we had activities in 30 communities across the country: conferences, rallies, canvassing, special canvassing, all candidates forums. It was an activist campaign and it had some limited success.

The next major undertaking was the "Get the Budget on Track" campaign. It immediately followed the last Annual General Meeting of NAC and also followed the federal budget which had quite a negative impact on women. There was an eastern leg and a western leg of the trip, and we had rallies in places where the train stopped. We came together in Toronto. This strategy was more successful in some places than others, but it took place again across the country in a different location.

Most recently, we organized a "Day of Action on Choice", with conferences, rallies and vigils.

I think what we learned is that all our actions were within the context of organizing on these issues and within the larger movement for change. I think they did give some sense of country-wide action and unity.

Some of the problems we faced in conducting country-wide campaigns were the problems of this country. In NAC, we have the issue of bilingualism, and how we conduct ourselves as a bilingual organization when there are no resources for translation. We have the problem of time zones. This country is very large and it's hard to make a phone call from Vancouver to Newfoundland and get somebody at their office unless you call before noon. Getting leaflets delivered on time across the entire country is troublesome. Then there is a problem of local issues and how they impact on our strategy. One



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community may say, "Well, this a great idea but we want it to focus on this" or "It's a great idea, but we want to do it October 16." And we have the whole organizational structure of a group like NAC, which is a coalition-based organization. We have member groups but the information doesn't always get from the person in the member group to the members of the organization. We operate with 25 women from across the country who meet every two or three months. How do we come to a decision in a meeting and then act on it? So those are some of the kinds of problems we run into when we undertake country-wide campaigns.

The other thing that's significant in terms of how we act is that we have a problem in naming the moment. A term used within a group in Toronto — "National Day of Action on Choice" — immediately following the Chantal Daigle Superior Court decision, fostered spontaneous rallies across the country -- very successful ones. NAC is not necessarily structurally capable of naming that moment and saying, "Let's all act." It happened spontaneously. When we organized a rally October 14 in Calgary, we had 30 people, whereas immediately following the Chantal Daigle decision there were 600 people with half a day's notice. That's a serious problem, and one I don't see how to overcome.

I want to conclude with some strategies for change I think are important here. One of the things is that we have to learn to draw some lines and this relates particularly to what I said about AFWUFF and R.E.A.L. women. There are some people who are most definitely not on our side. We have to identify them and be clear on who they are. The other thing is that we have to analyze and understand the New Right, the hatred and violence it represents against us, and the influence it has on government, media and mainstream groups. We have to make our side of that line as inclusive as possible. As a movement, we are starting to learn that we must come to terms with the divisions that exist among us. In order to exist and succeed, we cannot be a white middle class academic women's movement. We have to be as inclusive as possible. We have to include poor women, working class women, women of colour, immigrant women, women with disabilities. We haven't figured out yet how that is done and there are conflicts that arise when we try. Within NAC we are also struggling to work with differences and have made a fair number of mistakes. We are still working on it.

I think we have to work more and more in coalition, and these coalitions have to include groups like labour, peace, environmental and anti-racist groups. When we work in these coalitions we can't get caught up in organizational issues. If the last coalition we worked in failed, we can't let that stop us from starting a new coalition. We must avoid getting caught up on the organizational issues at the beginning of the coalition and we can't let any previous failures stop us from doing it again.

We also have to maintain ourselves. I'm referring here to the level of burnout that exists and the kind of demoralization I think is very evident, particularly from the last federal election. We have to find ways to maintain ourselves as a movement. To borrow a phrase from the Saskatchewan International Women's Day Committee, what we have to do is build a culture of resistance and recognize we're in this for the long haul. We're not going to win tomorrow and we're not going to win next week.



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We actually are a very large group of people. Somebody asked me once why the Canadian Mental Health Association conference on Women and Mental Health was held the same weekend as the National Action Committee Annual General Meeting. They saw this as an organizational problem in the women's movement. I said the way I look at it, 1200 feminists in Canada were meeting that weekend. We have to learn to recognize our size and diversity as a movement, look after ourselves to make sure we can stay in for the long haul, and develop the kinds of coalitions and relationships that are necessary. We also have to recognize that we do have the ability to change the world.



