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**Alternative Art Education:  
A Feminist Teaching Experiment with College Students**

**Heather M. Veltman**

**A Thesis**

**in**

**The Department**

**of**

**Art Education**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Alternative Art Education: A Feminist Teaching Experiment with College Students**

**Heather M. Veltman**

This thesis is based primarily on a teaching experiment with college students ranging in age between seventeen and twenty three years old. The course, entitled “Women’s Perspectives in Drawing: the Self Portrait,” was taught in an alternative humanistic program at Dawson College’s New School, in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Over the fifteen week semester, the students were introduced to women artists, issues related to the representation of women in art history and drawing and painting techniques.

Although the curriculum was carefully designed to create an open learning atmosphere inspired from feminist pedagogy, student resistance was an overarching issue that permeated each class. Resistance to feminism, and resistance in general, were due to student age-group, the ‘alternative’ culture of the New School, and stereotypical ideas about art being ‘an easy credit’. Points of contention were related to power struggles over shared grading, coming to class on-time and outright refusal to do coursework. While the process was disheartening at times, accrued self-confidence in art-making skills allowed students to open up to new information and to feminism. Thus, the initial goal of reconsidering stereotypes about women was achieved.

These challenges led the author to theorize hypotheses about more successful conditions for a course on women in the arts. It appeared that a studio setting (with easels and a sink) in combination with participant's more mature age-group and required knowledge of either art or feminism would create a more conducive atmosphere for discussion and art-making. The operational implications of these suppositions resulted in a second workshop entitled "Women's Body Image Art Workshop." This class was tested out with successful results at Concordia University in March 2002. Each participant discussed stereotypes with enthusiasm, did auto-biographical artwork related to the theme woman/self and expressed a high level of satisfaction in the overall experience.

I am bombarded yet I stand  
I have been standing all my life in the  
direct path of a battery of signals  
the most accurately transmitted most  
untranslatable language in the universe  
I am a galactic cloud so deep so involuted  
that a light wave could take 15  
years to travel through me And has  
taken I am an instrument in the shape  
of a woman trying to translate pulsations  
into images for the relief of the body  
and the reconstruction of the mind.

*Planetarium*, Adrienne Rich (1984)

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## **1. Introduction**

During the winter semester of 1999, I created and carried out a teaching project entitled “Women’s Perspectives in Drawing: the Self Portrait.” This course was designed for college students ranging in age between seventeen and twenty three years old, enrolled at Dawson College’s New School in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Over the fifteen week semester, I introduced students to women artists, contemporary feminist art criticism and issues related to the representation of women in art history. Through reading, writing and class discussions, I aimed at leading students to recognize negative cultural stereotypes about women and to develop a critical distance in relation to these messages. It was my idea that by focusing on self-portraits through the art-making component of the course, students could explore personal issues of identity and possibly develop ways of representing ‘self’ that would resist or critique traditional stereotypes of women. By allowing students to become more conscious of their choices and values, I sought to encourage them to imagine/discover/dream their ‘reality.’

In order to pursue these goals, I upheld an open learning atmosphere, where students would feel safe to explore personal notions of identity in their art. I researched and experimented with feminist pedagogy, aiming to break down the power relations inherent in the teacher-student hierarchy. Although I had some successes, I also encountered difficulties in relation to student’s attitudes, such as apathy and resistance to feminist ideas. These challenges led me to do research into student resistance and to theorize practical solutions to problems that I encountered in teaching non-mainstream

material to college students, specifically in an ‘alternative’ humanistic CEGEP<sup>1</sup> program at Dawson’s New School.

To fully explain my endeavor in a chronological manner, I have broken down this research project into the components of description, analysis, reflection and conclusion. I begin with a description of my personal motivations and the feminist theoretical issues that were an incentive to teach a course on women in the arts. I describe the setting where “Women’s Perspectives in Drawing-the Self-Portrait” took place as well as it’s participants at Dawson College’s New School in Montreal. I then compare the initial plan and goals of the course with the actual course as it turned out in reality. I continue with analysis from a feminist theoretical perspective to understand the key issue of resistance to feminism and general resistance which occurred in “Women’s Perspectives in Drawing: the Self-Portrait.” I then turn to reflections on the overall teaching experiment resulting in hypotheses and operational implications which are tested out in a second teaching project at Concordia University, entitled “Women’s Body Image Art Workshop,” which took place in March 2002. The strengths and weaknesses of the two courses are analyzed and compared. I conclude with further reflections on teaching non-mainstream material in the hope of improving my teaching practice and suggesting ideas to other activist teachers.

It is for these reasons that I chose action research as my methodology for “Women’s Perspectives in Drawing-the Self Portrait” and later for “Women’s Body

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<sup>1</sup> CEGEP: Collège d’Enseignement Général et Professionnel (College of General and Professional Education). This is usually a two year college program leading to university studies or a three year technical program leading to the job market. After eleven years of schooling, students in Québec are on average seventeen or eighteen years old on entering CEGEP.

Image Art Workshop.” In agreement with Bogdan and Biklen (1992), I saw action research as a systematic means to collect “information that is designed to bring about social change” (p. 215) as well as a way to understand and improve my teaching practice (May, 1993, Bressler, 1994). According to May, “action research begs our questions and possibilities [and] makes us responsible for what we believe and do” (p. 124). Over the fifteen-weeks at Dawson and the three hours at Concordia, I carefully documented class progress, discussions and issues in my journal, and took photographs of student artwork. I have used this material for research and my reflections at the time of the workshops have served as the basis for deeper inquiry. By focusing energy on my teaching experiments, I aim at refining my teaching methods and pedagogy to adequately teach about women and the arts. Finally, action research has enabled me to access interesting insights that could be useful for other art educators involved in activist teaching as “the deep understanding of one setting can facilitate understanding of others, not by the principle of generalization, but by transferability” (Bressler, 1993, p. 33). In this way, the sharing of knowledge becomes a means to improve the practice of teaching art.

## 2. Personal Motivations and Goals

The motivation to create and teach a course on women in the arts developed out of my life-long reflections about what it means to be a girl growing up, and a woman struggling to actualize herself through education, in the context of a patriarchal society. Many important events (and lack of them) occurred within my own family, influencing my development as a girl and motivating my research topics as a woman. My father, a sociology professor in university, often told me as a child that I could succeed in any area I wished *even though* I was a girl. Although he meant to encourage me, this nevertheless communicated a certain lack in being a girl and a feeling of mistrust about the world. “Don’t let anybody tell you that you can’t do or be something *just* because you are a girl,” he would say.

There is little doubt in my mind that my father had good intentions toward me the first time he warned me about the choices involved in being a girl. In 1969, when I was three years old, he told me: “You must be careful because you are both pretty and intelligent. Pretty girls are ‘a dime a dozen’ but intelligent girls are few. It is important to be intelligent.” Within the ripe imagination of a three year old, the images of dimes and dozens, things I knew nothing about stood in my mind to be pondered many times. Although it took me another twenty years to decipher what had exactly been expressed in my father’s comment, I must have sensed, as children often do, that the foreboding information was to be collected in memory for future reference. At the time, however, I remember feeling vaguely confused about what I did understand: “not supposed to be beautiful.” I, like other girls, had been praised for being beautiful, cute, funny, etc. and I

enjoyed being the center of lavish attention. In fact, I had received a lot of this attention from my father himself, rendering his message about girls and women even more paradoxical.

It is not my intention here to portray my father as a thoughtless male-chauvinist but to point to socio-political issues and stereotypes about women that were transmitted through the canons of education, representing 'intelligent women' as 'few'. Womanless versions of history and stereotypes of women present distortions that become apparent even in simple conversations between an educated, white, middle-class man and his baby daughter. Although no doubt more overt in the 1960s, my father's comment about pretty girls being 'a dime a dozen' reflects an ideology about women and the complex relationship between beauty, intelligence, womanhood and success that is still relevant today. As a result, limiting definitions of femininity and lack of recognition of women's achievements in history affected my understanding of myself as a developing child. I use my personal examples as illustrations of the detrimental effects of stereotypes and to demonstrate the relevance of using education for change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Later on as I was growing up in the 1970s, I felt intensely frustrated by boys in elementary school who often sneered that "boys are better than girls" because there were no great women writers, thinkers or artists. "Name a woman Picasso!" they would say. When asked to explain the reasons behind a womanless history, my father responded: "Well, there were no great women that we know of because women stayed at home with children and did not work." Already perplexed by gender inequality, I felt embarrassed and silenced by the confirmation that there "were no great women." This exacerbated my



fear about some unspeakable female flaw related to intellectual inferiority that precluded greatness. I was determined not to become one of the 'dime a dozen' which seemed shallow and cheap. But how could I prove that I was 'as good as' a boy if there were so 'few intelligent women' to emulate, too few great women capable of demarking themselves, shining their light into the textbooks of history. My sense of identity and self-confidence as a young woman able to succeed and to be recognized in 'a man's world' was aversely affected. Deep down it seemed unfair to 'have to be' a woman and I really would have preferred to be a boy.

Eventually, in the 1980s, I grew into my female body and the conflict I experienced about this caused me a great deal personal suffering as a teenager. Invested in being an 'intelligent' woman, I avidly read articles and books that discussed social injustice in the world of patriarchy. I felt overwhelmed by the knowledge I gained and powerless to effect change. My sentiments about the 'unfairness' of the world were aggravated. As a result, I became frozen into apathy as a way of protecting myself from the pain I felt about discrimination, violence against women, rape, etc. In the 1990s, I struggled through my university years reading the 'great texts' at the Liberal Arts College at Concordia University, arguing about womanless canons of education and generally feeling resentful.

The turning point occurred in my third year in the Fine Arts Department at Concordia University when I enrolled in Marion Wagschal's feminist art course entitled "Women's Perspectives in Painting." This course helped me understand how historiography excluded women, how the canon of art history reflected and reproduced

stereotypes of women, as well as issues related to power. In learning about women artists I discovered role models of successful women artists to follow and felt liberated from the shame of a womanless history. Most importantly, it opened up some room inside of me to invent and dream about myself through my art, in a way that made womanhood feel worthwhile and powerful. I no longer felt that I had to achieve some impossible art world standards of success (that had appeared to me as practically unattainable for women). Instead I could concentrate on making art out of the meanings of my life.

In this light, art education was an important step in the development of my subjectivity and provided me with tools to understand, survive, resist and in some ways move beyond issues of patriarchal oppression. It helped me out of a state of apathy and despair, by offering me, on the one hand, means to analyze, dissect, and change my vision of 'woman' and to make art inspired from my female experiences, personal and collective, as well as being inspired by feminist artists of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

So it is through my own lived experience in this gendered body, ranging over three and a half decades within a patriarchal context that I have experienced both alienation and empowerment within the various levels of the educational system. Although some things have changed, especially in universities such as Concordia that have developed women's studies programs and courses, there is still a need for a more inclusive and less separatist approach to teaching about women. My personal experience has led me to believe that it is still unsure that girls and women will learn about 'great' women artists in the 'regular' programs, or appreciate the relationship between lack of knowledge about foremothers and social/political/economic recognition of women in the

present and future. By learning about 'the way things are', by understanding how and why things got that way, women can be liberated from the isolation of their personal experiences of oppression (or perhaps recognize them as such for the first time) and begin to understand the political and historical context of this oppression. Through a process of naming that takes place within education more steps can be made toward empowerment and change, as opposed to feeling stuck as I did in disillusion, apathy, anger and shame. The validation of female experiences, cutting across class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation is crucial to this process, and one of the ways this can be achieved is through art-making.<sup>2</sup>

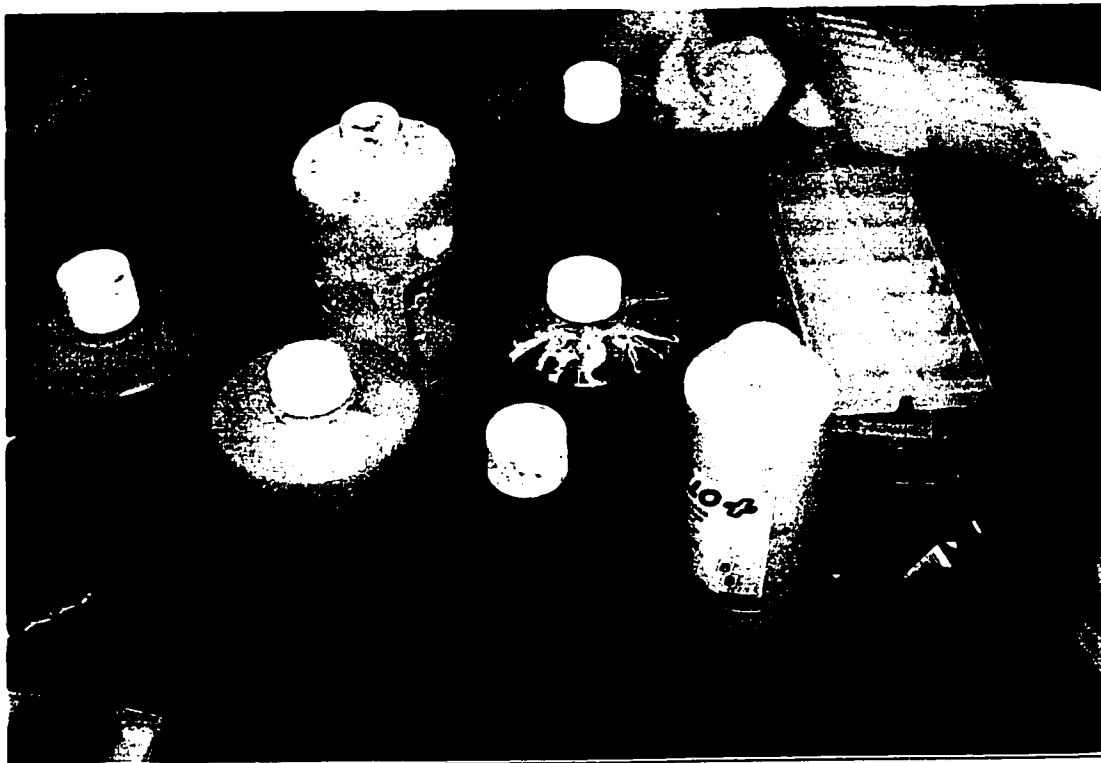
For all these reasons, I was inspired to follow in Professor Marion Wagschal's footsteps in creating an art course that would combine art and feminism. I called this course "Women's Perspectives in Drawing: the Self-Portrait." It was my idea that this course would be a way for women to understand or recognize oppression and act in response to it, if they so wished in their art-making practice. I felt that it was pertinent to explore stereotypes of women in art, gaze and spectatorship and to use a pedagogy that created a safe milieu for women to investigate issues that might be very personal, conflictual and imbued with differing emotions.

In preparation for the teaching, I did research into the domains of education, feminist art education, and feminist pedagogy in order to formulate my standpoint. The

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<sup>2</sup> Although admittedly problematic, I will be focusing solely on gender without addressing issues of race and class in this paper, thereby charting my course of action as I understood it at the time. I will return to a discussion of this topic in chapter 4, Reflections, in the section "Criticism of Women's Perspectives" page 101.

following section is a summary of the important issues that served as theoretical foundation for the course I later developed.



### **3. Theoretical Foundation for the Study**

#### **Education and Feminism**

##### **Issues in Education**

Since the 1960s, the foundations of education have been critically examined with the aim of improving the experiences of learners. In particular, educators have questioned the epistemological categories of educational experience, such as theoretical/educational foundations; curriculum development; pedagogy/educational psychology; and the social, historical, and comparative contexts of formal education (Nemiroff, 1992, p.3). Inquiry into education has specifically queried long-term effects on students, teachers and society at large. More recently within post-modernism, many thinkers including Friere and Giroux have explored the problems of meaning, interpretation and the legitimization of knowledge (Nicholson, 1989, p. 197). Instead of what is worth knowing, the question becomes 'who can be knower and what can be known?' Who decides what knowledge is appropriate for whom and why? (Jackson, 1997, p. 466). Who is the unacknowledged 'we' in my father's statement: "no great women in history that *we* know of."

Although education has traditionally purported itself to be "universal and gender neutral" (Garber, 1992, p. 213), a relationship can be developed between white, middle-class male canons of achievement upheld through educational structures and the socio-economic dominance of this group (Walsh, 1990, Silvers, 1990).

Karen Warren (1989) asks:

Classics for whom? Art by whom and for whom? Art and philosophy can no longer masquerade as 'just art' or 'just philosophy' but need to be marked as Western philosophy, or dominant Western philosophy, or philosophy as authored by White heterosexual bourgeois men of the Western world. (p.46)

Therefore, practices of historical marginalization reflect a 'hidden curriculum' whose "unstated norms, values, and beliefs [are] embedded in and transmitted to students" through structural silences (Nemiroff, 1992, p.63). These omissions are partly justified by historical contexts ("women were at home with children") but do not look further into the connection between tenacious stereotypes of women and contemporary struggles for inclusion. As a result, the exclusion of the non-white, non-middle-class, and non-male from canons of education continues to be relational to virtual exclusion from the spheres of power (Jackson, 1997, p. 466). In the words of Ken Osborne (1988):

There can be no doubt that existing curricula are biased, both in what they include and in what they omit...It is clear that schools have been intended to serve as instruments of the dominant ideology, playing their part in reproducing the social order and maintaining the cultural hegemony. (p. 23)

Hence, in examining the patriarchal context that devalues women's work and cultural contribution, it appears urgent to reevaluate what is considered important knowledge and what the effects of this knowledge is, who it serves and what the underlying ideology is. As Adrienne Rich (1979) asks:

How does a woman gain a sense of her *self* in a system-in this case, patriarchal capitalism-which devalues work done by women, denies the importance and uniqueness of female experience, and is physically violent toward women? (p. 239)

What Rich calls 'self' is a central question for women in a context where 'woman' and 'woman's body' are exposed to pervasive stereotypes that replicate limiting subject positions and expectations of femininity. Investigation into these issues reveals the importance of raising the consciousnesses and self-confidences of women with the goal of using education to effect positive social change. Thus, in combination with a critical examination of the male-bias within educational curriculum, other factors such as sexism in language, non-verbal behavior, and teaching approaches need review to counteract the "cumulative negative impact on women's self-esteem and capacity to achieve" (Rosser, 1989. p. 42). According to Rich (1979), there are two choices for educators:

To lend our weight to the forces that indoctrinate women to passivity, self-depreciation, and a sense of powerlessness...or to consider what we have to work against, as well as with, in ourselves, in our students, in the content of the curriculum, in the structure of the institution, in society at large. (p. 240)

This view is particularly interesting because it suggests that education is not only about subject matter (womanless or woman-full) but also about the nature of institutionalized patriarchal education, on the one hand, and the complexities within individuals that derive from unequal power relations, for both students and teachers, on the other. In an effort to use education to empower women, Garber and Gaudelius (1992) say that:

feminism aims not only at changing the lot of women but aims at changing the evaluative, political, and social structures of the world, moving individuals from positions as objects that are passively acted upon within a system, to *subjects who knowingly act in relation to the system*. (italics added) (p. 12)

Therefore, a feminist perspective on education would include an in-depth comprehension of the context of patriarchy and its effect on women and men in their daily interactions with each other. Through a process of naming, a connection can be made between personal experiences of discrimination and a social and historical context of oppression.

Education can become a powerful tool to both understand reality and to work to change it. Thus, participation in the construction of meaning can allow individuals to transform their social conditions (Hart, 1991, p.156). This is why the feminist challenge to what could be called ‘malestream’ curriculum (Coffey, Delamont, 2000) is to “revision and rewrite the future” (Warren, 1989, p. 46). Women can reclaim the subversive ‘I’ that defies conventions, as the “imagination becomes a force for remaking the present” (Garber and Gaudelius, 1992, p.16). However, Gaudelius cautions, “this may present an ongoing challenge, one that may never be resolved” (1998, p. 177).

It can easily be construed that within the present patriarchal establishment, the use of art education for social change is a position that is contested particularly by modernists and by defenders of the status quo. Alternatively, within a feminist perspective, the status quo is itself identified as political position that is exclusionary and needing revision. In this aim, art education can contribute to the overall project of inclusivity through creative explorations of subjectivity in art-making and by exposing the silences and stereotypes of women in the canons of art, art history and art education. The following chapter presents a theoretical foundation for the study of women in the arts and expounds the pertinence of teaching art in ways that do not continue to exclude or misrepresent women.

### **Issues in Art Education**

Art, like many other disciplines, presents a vision of history that is practically womanless (Collins, 1995, p. 74). A simple glance into an authoritative art historical text such as Janson’s (1986) *History of Art* suffices to demonstrate that Western art history is clearly dominated by white western male artists. Nevertheless, art history (and by



extension art education) has long presented an opposing view, insisting on the universal and sexless nature art (Garber 1992, p. 213). Under the guises of formalism or aestheticism, art was claimed to be a purely *visual* experience, unrelated to its socio-political context (Schmahman, 1998, p. 17). Particularly within modernism, art was characterized as the non-social or even the pre-social mystical vision of the individual artist (Pollock, 1993, p.11). Although women were not entirely absent from modernist practice, they were marginalized from the “institutional discourse of the culture industry” (Deepwell, 1994, p. 14). This was in part due to the representation of the masterful artist as “male and virile” (Schmahmann, 1998, p.16). Within the patriarchal context, art making has privileged male dominance.

What makes art different than other fields, however, is that art history is populated by innumerable paintings of female nudes, authored by male artists. The traditional art historical representation of the artist as male and of the object of viewing as female reflects what Hélène Cixous (1986) called “Western phallogentric logical structure of binary oppositions” where women are placed in the “position of object as compared to the subject.” (Garber and Gaudelius, 1992, p.13). To demonstrate this notion of an oppositional framework at work within western culture, Cixous defined the following contrasting categories:

Where is she?  
Activity/passivity  
Sun/Moon  
Culture/Nature  
Day/Night  
Father/Mother  
Head/Heart  
Intelligible/Palpable  
Logos/Pathos

Form, convex, step, advance, semen, progress  
Matter, concave, ground-where steps are taken, holding-and dumping-ground.  
Man  
Woman (1986, p. 86)

Thus, in addition to the perception of men and women as unequal opposites is the unequal power relationship in art, signified (in general) by the visibility of female sexuality and invisibility of male sexuality, where again the male is portrayed as active and the female as passive. According to Mathews (1991):

[The] genre of the female nude originates in antiquity, but its modern format of a passively seductive woman's body laid out across the canvas was popularized by Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538). From Titian to Ingres to Tom Wesselman and David Salle, the convention of the nude as used by males remains largely unchanged in its objectification of women, whatever other meanings may be present in the work. (p. 416)

Contemporary art and media images traditionally display women as willing objects of male sexual scrutiny and desire. "Rather than being inhabited by a consciousness, these bodies become vessels to be inhabited by male desire....female sexuality is only represented in male terms" (Mathews, 1991, 416).

In connection with the understanding of the artist as male and the object of viewing as female is Laura Mulvey's notion of the 'male gaze' (which built upon John Berger's earlier reflections on the gaze) to explain the mechanism by which the gaze provided visual/erotic pleasure to the viewer. According to her, orchestrated looking is achieved by obfuscating the workings of the medium and eliminating signs of the production process (Mulvey, 1984, p. 363). Traces of decision-making, cropping, positioning, etc. are obliterated so as to create a semblance of *nature* or reality. The viewer then participates with the image without distractions (hence the 'pure' visual experience). In this way, direct voyeuristic and fetishistic scrutiny is solicited, especially

when a female nude is in view. Norman Bryson (1994) applies this argument to the history of art:

This tendency toward eliminating signs of process is pronounced in the Western art-making tradition, and it results in works that encourage a “synchronistic instant of viewing...[through] an infinitely extended Gaze of the image as pure idea.” (p.94)

The woman’s eroticized passivity permits “unimpeded access to the female body” which thereby invites male voyeurism (Nelson, 1995, p.103). In the case of the female nude, the responsibility for the choice of subject matter or type of pose is displaced from the artist onto the sexual nature model. A stereotypical message about female sexual submissiveness and narcissistic enjoyment in being observed in the nude is insinuated. In contrast, the motivations or gender of the artist are not explicitly stated.

Concurrently, Mulvey argues that spectatorship in art is skewed because of the binary oppositions that mark women as passive/body/beauty/sex while men are portrayed as active/mind/hero/power (1984, p. 366). By being defined as beauty/body/image, Mulvey believes that there is little room for the female spectatorship. In her view, women are compelled to move back and forth between the male gaze and self-projections into the female body/object of viewing. For Mulvey then, the viewing of art is alienating for women due to the uncomfortable alternation between active/subject and passive/object. This argument illustrates stereotypes of women that can be seen in both the subject matter of art and in the intended viewers of art, leaving little room for women to experience art in other terms.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> I have included Mulvey’s argument here to give an indication of the issues that appeared central at the time I developed “Women’s Perspectives.” I have since shifted my position and have included an analysis of the issue of gaze in Chapter 4, Reflections, Criticism of “Women’s Perspectives” page 101.

It becomes clear then that representations of white women's<sup>4</sup> bodies have served to reinforce cultural stereotypes about women's nature and roles (directly connected with body and image) and to construct an idealized 'femininity' as an essential element of women's identities and lives that, in turn, interferes with 'greatness.' The 'other' is marked and defined through art (and education), teaching both men and women to look at the world through the eyes of men. In relation to this, Marcha Pointon (1990) says:

The female nude functions, not as a category with clear parameters but as a form of rhetoric. It is the way the body functions in the *grammar of representation*, invoking *ideologies of the body* [italics added] and its economy, that is significant rather than its erotic power as estimated by any particular viewer, or its pose, or the extent of its covering. (p.14)

Thus, the repetition of stereotypes feminine passivity, sexual availability and ideal beauty in art can be connected to women's lived reality physically, psychologically and culturally. Many feminists such as Desjardins (1989) see a direct correlation between "negative or violent representations of the female body and a social reality in which *real* women are at least discriminated against and at worst physically and sexually assaulted" (p. 67). In a culture where women fear walking alone on the streets at night, the consequences of equating femininity with passivity reinforces the idea of women's powerlessness and potential as victims. According to Carroll (1990): "Recurring negative images found in art and film (and other places), supply or reinforce paradigm scenarios that shape emotional responses of men to women in real life" (p. 352). Furthermore, the

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that white male artists in the western canon of art history have focused most of their attention on white western women as representatives of an idealized femininity. Therefore, my use of the word 'woman' in the text does not stand for *all* female kind but focuses on typical stereotyping of white women in art. These stereotypes have been applied to women of colour as well but with the additional stereotypes of race.

persistent sexualization of women in art and media images perpetuates a one-dimensional representation whose underlying misogyny is reminiscent of motivations for rape. In an article entitled “Ladies Shot and Painted,” Mary Ann Caws (1985) asks:

How might we desire to function so as not to be implied in the incorporation and embodiment of the desire of another, when our body is interrogated, subjected to the act of painting as to the act of love, but without choosing our partner? (p. 270)

Christine Gledhill (1997) suggests viewers ask themselves the following questions in relation to representations of women in art:

What reality? (women as passive? as sexual? as victims?)

Whose reality?

According to whom? (p. 346)

Finally, the modernist understanding of the ‘purely visual’ claims that art is sexless and ‘simply’ reflects reality, a reality that would be unrelated to the social context in which art operates. Inversely, it suggests that stereotypes are based on types that are in-born characteristics. It is a point of view that refutes the notion that art participates in the construction of gender definitions that are questionable or subject to change. Conveniently, this argument both denies and upholds white male privilege.

**Figure 1** Student at work in “Women’s Perspectives in Drawing-the Self-Portrait”



In light of the above discussion, the art historical conceptions of art, artist and viewer revolve around a masculine art making/viewing paradigm, which is far from passive, innocent, nor devoid of power relations. In gross terms, 'Art' can be seen as art *by men apparently intended for male enjoyment*. It can no longer be mystified as the solitary vision of an individual artist or the singular interpretation of a viewer, untouched by society. Instead, the making and viewing art can be seen as social and ideological activities that engage the viewers into the gaze of the artist, who defines subject matter, through 'the look'. For women this look is oppressive and inhibits the development of a strong concept of self. Traditional representations of women in art are not artistic mirrors of 'real' women (or celebrations of female beauty) but depictions of the power to project male-defined fantasies about female sexuality. Women's experience of their bodies as such is reified. Consequently, art history partakes in a visual continuum with contemporary media and pornographic images that are bound up with issues of male ownership of female sexuality. It can be argued that the female nude in representational practice reflects the "symbolic violence" inflicted on women meant to reinforce patriarchal hegemony (Hall, 1997, p. 259).

### **Stereotypes and Representations of Women**

It has been contended above that the hierarchical nature of schools, curriculum content, classroom environments, teacher/student interactions, and canons all participate in upholding stereotypes about women which serve to undermine credibility. These distortions become rationalized to justify discrimination, which has a direct impact on physical, psychological and socio-economic realities of the marginalized. But what are

the stereotypes of women and how are they defined? An interesting example of the perception stereotypes can be seen in Hilary Lips' (1988) research with American university students, in her book entitled *Sex and Gender*: "Adjectives stereotypically associated with women and men"

#### *Women*

Affected	Feminine	Prudish
Affectionate	Fickle	Rattlebrained
Appreciative	Flirtatious	Sensitive
Attractive	Frivolous	Sentimental
Charming	Fussy	Softhearted
Complaining	Gentle	Sophisticated
Dependent	High-strung	Submissive
Dreamy	Meek	Talkative
Emotional	Mild	Weak
Excitable	Nagging	Whiny

#### *Men*

Adventurous	Disorderly	Realistic
Aggressive	Dominant	Robust
Ambitious	Enterprising	Self-confident
Assertive	Forceful	Severe
Autocratic	Handsome	Stable
Boastful	Independent	Steady
Coarse	Jolly	Stern
Confident	Logical	Strong
Courageous	Loud	Tough
Cruel	Masculine	Unemotional
Daring	Rational	Unexcitable (p.4)

This table illustrates most simply how men and women are stereotyped. The words chosen to describe men reflect and perpetuate qualities valued for success in the world: "aggressive, confident, courageous, daring, enterprising, independent, logical, strong, and tough." Power is infused in words like: "autocratic, dominant, cruel, severe, stern, forceful, and unemotional" and communicates apprehension about (or subjugation to) the masculine-associated. In contrast, some words used to describe the female stereotype

have positive connotations but are not traditionally associated with success: “affectionate, appreciative, excitable, gentle, sensitive, sentimental, and softhearted.” Other words like: “affected, fickle, frivolous, fussy, complaining, dependent, high-strung, submissive, meek, weak, nagging, and whiny” have negative connotations and are antonyms of strength and power. According to Lips, the most highly valued male-stereotyped traits formed a ‘competency’ cluster, while the most highly valued female-stereotyped traits formed a ‘warmth-expressiveness’ cluster (p. 5).

A simple exercise with adjectives demonstrates common knowledge and familiarity with the polarization of men and women into different and opposing stereotypes, which stigmatize and reinforce power positions. Within a hierarchy of ways of being and possible definitions of self, the social limitations of gender as expressed through stereotypes can be seen as “a means to regulate and organize women and men in different locations and value systems” (Grosz, 1988, p. 100). Yvonne Gaudelius argues that “within a construction of oppositions, women, and all who are in some way different, become objectified and reduced to a set of externally defined characteristics and then are written as the ‘other’” (1998, p. 176). These characteristics take the form of stereotypes that are deemed ‘natural’ (in-born). For women, being described as ‘weak’ or ‘rattlebrained’ interferes with an understanding of women as ‘forceful’ or ‘logical’, if these qualities are structured according to a male-female oppositional framework. Christine Gledhill (1997) calls this ‘ideological domination,’ whereby “the social relations of domination and oppression appear *natural* and so mystify the ‘real’ conditions of existence” (p. 348).



Cultural representations therefore serve not only to indicate acceptable female behavior, roles and economic positions but to limit them. According to Foucault representations are not only related power, but are the result of it and serve to *reinforce* pre-existing power positions (Gledhill, 1997, p. 348). Thus through a practice of essentializing, reducing and naturalizing difference is fixed through stereotypes (Hall, 1997, p. 258) which play an important role in maintaining the status quo of socio-economic relations within patriarchy. Kate Linker (1984) argues:

Since the fabrication of reality depends on repetition to fix or stabilize meanings, most texts within cultural circulation serve to confirm and reduplicate subject positions. Over time these positions acquire the status of identities...Hence the forms of discourse are at once forms of definition, means of limitation, and modes of power. (p. 392)

In sum, the 'fabrication of reality' creates an artificial situation where women are valued for their 'natural' inclinations toward interpersonal roles related to 'feelings and expressiveness', which are less financially lucrative: mother, teacher, nurse, secretary, (Martin, 1990, p. 29). Men, particularly white and middle-class, are valued for their 'natural' attributes of 'competency', which apparently justifies the financial rewards of power positions. In this sense, the absence of women within canons of education "because they were at home with children," points to the "repetition to fix and stabilize meanings" and serves to "reduplicate subject positions which maintain the cultural hegemony of patriarchy" (Hall, 1997, p.258). By omitting or silencing the cultural contributions of the 'other', under the guises of a lack of greatness that is precluded from the stereotype of womanhood, education can be an important force in the perpetuation of oppression. Whether explicitly recognized or not, this is achieved through diminishing the self-confidence, self-knowledge and power of the 'other' (p. 225).

## **Art and the Poetics of Oppression: Women and Beauty**

The social construct of gender defines a female identity that is narcissistically bound up with the image of woman, as seen in art. Signified foremost as 'body', women are looked at, by themselves and by others, as objects of beauty. In relation this, women's active participation in the ideal of femininity is most troubling and riven with contradictions. In what could be called the "*poetics* of stereotyping that underlies the *politics*-which is invested with power" (Hall, 1997, p, 263), art and media representations promote an ideal femininity that is culturally fabricated and that appears "stylistically alluring and visually enticing, often using seductive images as a means to persuade and gain consent of the targeted group" (Gledhill, 1997, p. 348). Maureen Sherlock (1992) calls this "culture disguised as nature" which attempts to evade "the history of the body as disciplined and punished, the body subject and subjected, which is produced in institutional contexts and not merely born" (p. 18). Furthermore, since power does not operate solely from above or outside, but rather *through* and *in* women, the active participation of the subject is needed (Foucault, 1980). Therefore, by agreeing to be physical bearers of the 'look', women internalize and participate in a patriarchal vision of 'woman's nature'. Women's ultimate legitimization of the ideological body through consent masks unequal social conditions, as well as the oppressive nature of the stereotype into which they collude, with varying degrees of awareness. Women may believe that their choices about dress or make-up, for example, are made according to free will and may even derive pleasure from the roles that are assigned for them. Nevertheless, their choices and actions reflect a limited set of definitions of femininity that are male defined and imbued with power. Desjardins believes that:

No matter how complex or mediated the relationship, there is a connection between cultural representations of woman/woman's body and not only how political power is distributed among the sexes but also how gender identity is reinforced and perpetuated in that culture. (p. 67)

Women's active participation in cultural stereotypes is an example of what has been called the "identification with oppression" and the "circularity of power" (Hall, 1997, p. 275)

Women's attempts to embody the ideal of femininity demonstrate ample practice in looking through a masculine viewing paradigm. Whether familiar or ignored, representations of a sexually fetishized female body can be profoundly disturbing to the female viewer's sense of self. Analysis of the stereotype of women's beauty illustrates how representations serve to construct reality, by instilling a desire of female perfection that is oppressive. Images of female beauty in art, as well as their underlying ideology, influence the reaction of real men to real women, as well as women to themselves. In an article entitled "Damned Beauty" Laura Cottingham (1994) writes:

Beauty is not only expected of women, it is demanded. ...As a form of aesthetic and commodity value judgment generally and individually applied to women; [beauty] both assists and perpetuates the relegation of women into objects chosen, possessed, and traded by men.... (p. 28)

Art can be seen as having perpetuated ideals of female beauty and served for privileged viewing of all parts of women's bodies. Therefore, in addition to defining stereotypes about women, it can also be argued that art has contributed to women's ambivalent relationship to their bodies. The 'look' or 'male gaze' has been internalized and oppressively follows women everywhere (Berger, 1972, p. 46). At times this look is

offensive, at times it is pleasurable, but it always within a hierarchy of power relations that situates women as 'other'.

Unfortunately, the very notion of female beauty has become an important distinguishing feature of women's concept of self (Lips, 1988, p. 13). Over-identification with the ideological body, and impossible conformity with it, infuses many women with concerns or dissatisfactions that are lived out within daily life. This is apparent in women's attempts to control appearance by the use of make-up, high heels, tight clothing or dieting, for example, or in the more extreme physical operations such as breast implants, liposuction or cosmetic surgery. According to Naomi Wolfe (1991), one tenth of American women and one fifth of female college students suffer from eating disorders such as bulimia or anorexia nervosa (p. 59).

Closer to home, Jennifer Jones (2001) a Canadian researcher, found that one out of four adolescent girls in Ontario exhibited disordered eating attitudes and behaviors (p. 547-552). In this province, 'l'Institut de la Statistique du Québec' (the Québec Institute of Statistics) has recently conducted research revealing that 53% of Québec women want to lose weight even though their current weight is optimum for their health. Most troubling is that the researchers found that 35% of nine year old girls in Québec feel that they are too fat (Lavallée, 2002, p. 5). As Diane Lavallée (2002), president of the 'Conseil du Statut de la Femme' (Council on the Status of Women) points out: "the image of self is a veritable Achilles tendon for many of us [women] and destabilizes us for most of our lives" (p. 5). Furthermore, as fashion trends or expectations of beauty fluctuate according

to historical periods and tastes, the activity of remaining beautiful requires energy that could be used otherwise. Laura Cottingham (1994) adds: “the patriarchal inscription of women into the category ‘beautiful’ coexists with disavowal and inadmission of women from action and from thought” (p. 28). The relegation of woman into a silent image can be directly related to the ‘silence’ of women in the canons of art history.

### **Feminist Teaching of Art: Content, Contexts and Methods**

Although art history and art education have reinforced ideas about women and femininity that have contributed to women’s fragmented sense of identity, many feminists believe that art education can also contribute to change. Laurie Hicks (1992) proposes three steps to changing gender oppression through art education:

Restructuring approaches to the teaching of art

Finding alternative ways of representing women

Working to change ideas/goals of art (p.25)

### **Restructuring Approaches to the Teaching of Art**

In order to restructure the approaches to the teaching of art, it is useful to question how art has been traditionally taught and what innovations can be made to create a more inclusive curriculum. The first step could be an investigation into how art education has uncritically transmitted the canon of art, with its ‘great artists’ and its ‘great artworks’.

There is no doubt that art history is a rich and necessary resource in the teaching and learning about art. However, Kristen Congdon raises an interesting question: “If certain art forms are part of a heritage that should not continue to be ritualized, how should we remember the experiences in an effort to grow beyond the xenophobia and yet not recreate those root values in contemporary cultures?” (1996, p. 12) One answer might be to stress the importance of studying artworks in their social and cultural contexts (Garber, 1996, p. 23) Through a process of naming, students partake in a broader understanding of cultural influences and/or biases that may be implicit in the work. Not only does this situate students in relation to their world but it also helps to recognize sexist imagery within well-known masterpieces. Garber says: “Understanding the social context from which gender issues arise is important to any discussion of art” (1996, p. 25). Although contested by modernists, this shift in emphasis focuses on meaning over form and allows teachers to “free themselves from the grip of a single aesthetic system” (Hart, 157). Congdon argues that “while all traditions are not worthy of re-creation, all traditions are valuable in that they teach us about ourselves” (1996, p. 17). All artworks can then be seen as part of a “cultural narrative to which there are many interpretations” (p. 25).

In regards to the absence of women artists in the canon of art, it is significant to explain to students how and why erasure from history is brought about, so as not to leave girls in the years 2000 wondering: “Why have there been no great women artists?”<sup>5</sup> Congdon believes that it is useful to point out that: “gender and culture can and do influence not only the art product but the art process and the mode of appreciation” (1996,

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<sup>5</sup> This was the title of an important feminist essay by Linda Nochlin (1971). *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists*. In T. B. Hess and E.C. Baker (eds.), *Art and Sexual Politics*, (pp. 1-44), New York: Collier. Originally published in ARTnews, January 1971, p. 22-39 and 67-71.

p. 17). Therefore, it is relevant to indicate foremost that women *did* make artwork throughout history. Examples of women painters, for example, could be Sofonisba Anguissola (1532/35-1625), Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1652/53), Elizabeth Sirani (1638-1665), Marie-Louise-Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun (1755-1842), Rosa Bonheur (1822-1899), Emily Carr (1871-1945), Alice Neel (1900-1984), Helen Frankenthaler (b.1926) to name only a very few. Understanding that gender inhibited art world recognition helps clarify why there are relatively so ‘few’ famous women artists. Also investigations into notions of ‘high’ art are useful in understanding how some art was not acknowledged as important because certain forms were feminine-identified and therefore devalued (Zimmerman, 1990, p.7). As a result, biases toward certain types and themes in art and artifacts such as quilt-making, sewing, floral painting, etc were colored by the paradigm of gender (Garber, 1996, p. 25). In sum, by better understanding gender discrimination and by looking at artworks, “students come to understand how their valuing, biases and associations are gendered” (p. 26). By acknowledging the existence of stereotypes in art, students (and teachers) can sharpen their critical analysis skills by acknowledging the importance of making explicit the deeply imbedded values and ideas that continue to make art the privileged domain of male artists, both past and present.

Finally, another strategy to restructure the approaches art teaching is to deemphasize the canon of art by presenting a variety of artworks by women and men of various races, cultures and classes. Congdon (1996) says:

When teaching about all art, educators should recognize both innovative and cultural traditions. To do otherwise is to continue to create hierarchies which perpetuate the notion of ‘other’—that powerless individual or group of people who are the undervalued outsiders. (p.16)

In searching to include more women, teachers can look to a rich body of recent feminist art historical research to find women artists from the past, contemporary women artists and feminist artists. However, one major difficulty is in deciding who are the women who should be included and how do you acquire images of their work?" Although this question is problematic and requires resourcefulness on the part of the teacher, attempts at inclusivity propose alternate visions of 'art, artist, artwork' that vary from the 'dominant' narrative. In this way, the positive traits of role-models and appreciation for women's achievements can create a more congenial environment for developing the self-confidence of female students (Walsh, 1990, p. 155).

### **Finding Alternative Ways of Representing Women**

As discussed above, the female body in art has long been a site of voyeuristic pleasure, of male fantasy projections of woman and a site of oppressive control. The Feminist Art Movement of the 1970s spurred artists to explore (and reject) the stereotypes of femininity in response to a male dominated art world that represented 'woman' as the negative (and not the alternative) of man. Feminist artists frequently used their own bodies and lives as subject matter for their art to demonstrate the connection between the personal experiences of individual women and the socio-political economic realities of women's oppression as a group. New or unconventional versions of the female body in art "forced into view the underlying erasure of 'woman' from the aesthetic and epistemological structures of western culture" (Irigaray, 1985, p. 78). Thus, by using the body as a site for political struggle, the re-appropriation the female body was a way of asserting an active female subjectivity in opposition to stereotypes of femininity.



Although complex and problematic, many feminist artists hoped to reclaim 'woman' and 'body' outside of patriarchal discourse, and to explore what might escape the 'male gaze.' Artists developed many strategies to reclaim 'woman' from male-defined fantasies as seen in art to place the focus on lived female experience. Some of the strategies of feminist art were (and still are) "resistance, 'talk back' or celebration" (Lippard, 1993, p. 4). This is an example of what Gaudelius (1998) has called the 'construction of meaning' where women seek to reclaim the subversive 'I' by defining themselves as speaking subjects (p. 177) within an overarching goal of transforming social conditions for women (Hicks, 1991, p. 156). However, if viewing pleasure is still located within women's bodies and women's sexuality, "the inevitable recuperation of the female body to the patriarchal spectacle of women" remains (Nead, 1992, p. 68).

### **Working to Change Ideas and Goals of Art**

Elizabeth Garber believes that the goals of art education need reassessment in order to bridge art with the daily lives of individuals, thereby recognizing the connection between the private and public spheres of life. By joining art and life, the socio-cultural functions of art can be validated (Hart, 1991, p. 155). Garber says: "Curriculum building blocks should be sets of issues, themes, or cultural phenomena rather than formal art vocabulary, art styles, or canonical examples of art stripped bare of their cultural contexts" (1992, p. 21).

Thus in-depth analysis of issues of power in art, as seen through representations is a necessary step in changing ideas about women. The understanding of how

representations function to shape positive and/or negative notions of identity and to determine inter-personal or socio-economic realities helps learners break away from limiting ideologies. As seen for example with notions of feminine beauty and the poetics of stereotyping, women can take distance from ingrained doctrines and reevaluate their position. In this way, the viewing/criticizing/making of art can provide opportunities for individuals to grapple with lived contradictions related to subject positions. Therefore, by refusing to frame the identities of viewers, artists or subjects according to traditional codes of art, the impossibility of completely fixing meaning through stereotypes can become a source of empowerment (Hall, 1997, p. 274).

For women this means understanding the difference between unconsciously accepting culturally defined notions about what a woman is (passive, sexual, beautiful, etc.) and consciously expanding the possibilities of what women can be (successful, independent, powerful, etc). It might also mean accepting to negotiate between the contradictions and ambivalences in women's lives. In practical art-making terms, it means validating art that concerns itself with developing the 'voice' of the artist. For teachers, it means giving equal access to the same studio skills for both sexes: use of power tools, making crochet knots, making fiber sculptures, using cement or bending metal (Collins and Sandell, 1984, p. 167). In sum, one of the most important goals is to create a more egalitarian and less elitist model of the artist, one that allows for the artistic expression of many groups to be heard. Consequently, within a goal of gender inclusivity in all art traditions (art appreciation, art-making, art world recognition) the de-emphasis of the canon, in combination with the analysis of artworks in their socio-political contexts, and the presentation of art forms that are more inclusive, students will be not be

as entrenched in malestream curriculum, and can begin to use art for a deeper expression of individuality. Says Garber (1996):

A feminist-based study of artworks, that is considering alternative ways of representing and thinking about women and their lives, usually leads to students making different kinds of artworks, conducting the studio critique in a different manner and altering the goals and purposes pursued both in making art and during the critique. (p. 27)

### **Feminist pedagogy**

In combination with feminist teaching approaches that question the content, contexts, and goals of art, many feminists have researched into pedagogy to find ways of teaching that shift the dynamics of power and powerlessness inherent in the classroom that have been detrimental to women students (Cohee, 1998, p. 3). Instead of framing knowledge within the authority of the teacher, who imposes ideas upon the less qualified 'other', this pedagogy, known as 'feminist pedagogy' sets out to make sure that no voices are left unheard or are silenced (Nicholson, 1989, p. 197). For Renee Sandall (1991):

[Feminist pedagogy is] characterized as democratic and passionate...[it] directly contrasts with the authoritarian banking model and adversarial doubting model in education that foster alienation rather than connection of women. (p. 181)

The goals of feminist pedagogy partake of critical pedagogies and liberation movements as developed by thinkers such as Paolo Friere and Henry Giroux. As such, all power relations are critically examined, including the authority of the teacher (Nicholson, 1989, p. 198). Penny Welch (1994) has proposed that feminist pedagogy is based on three main principles:

To strive for egalitarian relationships in the classroom;

To try to make all students feel valued as individuals; and

To use the experience of students as learning resources. (p. 156)

Traditionally, students in the classroom have been perceived as passive recipients of a pre-determined and agreed-upon body of masterworks that 'experts' have canonized. Within feminist pedagogy, students are seen as inquirers and are encouraged to partake in the construction of their own education (Sandell, 1991, p. 180). To do this, they are prompted to make personal connections between the subject matter and their personal lives, which are hence validated and recognized as relevant. The self-as-inquirer model empowers students by "using the self as subject, legitimizing an assortment of hitherto unexamined topics and experiences" (p.181). Education can assist in a personal process of self-discovery that brings together theory and practice (Jackson, 1997, p. 458). According to Sandell: "Knowledge that is relevant to the student's own life becomes readily accessible in contrast to the 'distance' created by larger-than-life greatness of geniuses and authorities" (1991, p. 181). In this process, learning becomes more wholistic because students "join emotion to reason and personal experience to knowledge" (Gaskell, 1995, p. 110). This allows for "modes of thinking as a human, imperfect and attainable activity" (Belenky, 1986, p. 25).

Thus, feminist pedagogues look for creative ways to interact with students to foster individual development through group interaction and collaboration. The teacher's role is perceived as the facilitator of knowledge, a co-learner as opposed to the traditional role of 'impartor of knowledge'. Knowledge is seen as fluidly moving in two directions:

from the students to the teacher and back (Dossor, 1990. p.166). This method encourages interaction, collaboration and cooperation (Sandell, 1991, p. 182) and diminishes the prominence of authority. A shift can occur that “de-emphasizes competition, individual performance and self-expression and focuses on social creativity” (Gablik, 1991, p. 23). Gaskell (1995) says: “It is radical to suggest the importance of nurturing as well as independence, community as well as individualism, caring as well as responsibility in the classroom (p. 110). Finally, Elizabeth Ellsworth points out that “all voices are partial, multiple and contradictory and all of us occupy a variety of levels of socially constructed positions of privilege or subordination, including the teacher” (1992, p. 99).

Practical applications of feminist pedagogy that offer alternatives to the traditional mode of education are for example, journal writing, group projects, projects within the community, gathering materials, class presentations, writing personal reflections, peer review and shared evaluations. What differentiates feminist pedagogy from other student-centered pedagogies is what could be called the feminist leitmotiv of inclusivity and the elimination of gender oppression through unequal power relationships. Sandell says that:

Feminist pedagogy seeks to remove oppression inherent in the genderedness of all social relations and consequently of all societal institutions and structures. Feminist pedagogy ultimately seeks a transformation of the academy which can be achieved through classroom interactions that foster empowerment, community, and leadership (p. 182).

Thus, feminist pedagogy allows for feminist thinking to permeate teaching situations that are not necessarily feminist in content. This would provide an opportunity to instill mechanisms for social change without needing institutional support (Warren,

1989, p. 56). Nevertheless, it is most appropriately used in teaching contexts that are feminist or that deal specifically with issues surrounding subjectivity, identity and knowledge, which is what feminist education is ultimately about (Luke & Gore, 1992, p.2). It is in this sense that feminist pedagogy aims for social change through education.

For the student then, a critical stance becomes a tool of empowerment in conjunction with involvement in change. According to Gail Cohee,

Feminist pedagogy evolves from feminist social practice. It is therefore oriented toward social transformation, consciousness-raising, and social activism, that is, the translation of thought into action. (1998, p.3)

Says James (1998): “students are asked to approach learning with a critical mind and an activist outlook, with the epistemological assumption that the material studied is really understood only when it is acted upon” (p. 77). Therefore, the ultimate goal of feminist pedagogy is to move the students toward social action. This pedagogy is a “transformative integrative power that generates increased energy, and creativity for co-creation of the present and future” (Keifer-Boyd, 1998, p. 182).

#### **4. “Women’s Perspectives in Drawing: the Self-Portrait”**

##### **Initial Plan of “Women’s Perspectives” Course**

In January 1999, I undertook to create a course on women in the arts that would integrate the theoretical perspective discussed above and to put my underlying feminist philosophy of art education into action. Thus, the curriculum for “Women’s Perspectives in Drawing-the Self-Portrait” included introducing students to women artists (both modernist and feminist), contemporary feminist art criticism and issues related to the representation of women in art history. Through reading, writing and class discussions, it was my intention to assist students in recognizing negative cultural stereotypes about women and to develop a critical distance in relation to them. I found specific articles that traced the history of the 1970s Feminist Art Movement up to the present. Through reading, students could become familiarized with contemporary feminist concerns for a more inclusive art world, which would bring them into the debate about the male defined art historical tradition of the female nude, what has come to be known as ‘the male gaze’ and the oppressive connection between representations of women and women’s lived reality. To deepen their awareness, I planned to have students write four two-page papers called ‘reaction reports’ and ‘reflections’ on various feminist topics.

By focusing on self-portraits through the art-making component of the course, students could explore personal issues of identity and possibly develop ways of representing ‘self’ that would resist or critique traditional stereotypes of women. Therefore, in becoming more conscious of their choices and values, students might

envision 'reality' and 'self' differently. To achieve this, I upheld an open learning atmosphere, where students would feel safe to explore personal notions of identity in their art. I researched and experimented with feminist pedagogy, aiming to break down the power relations inherent in the teacher-student hierarchy. Consequently, "Women's Perspectives in Drawing-the Self Portrait" was conceived of as a course with three essential goals:

1. Providing role models of women artists
2. Understanding the current patriarchal context that represents femininity in stereotypical ways with a critical emphasis on:
  - a) Women's bodies in art (traditional and feminist)
  - b) The 'male gaze'
  - c) The connection between representations of women and student's 'real life' experiences
3. Exploration of female subjectivity through art-making

To achieve these goals in relation to content, I built my teaching plans around Charlotte Bunch's (1983) model of a feminist classroom:

A-Description (describing what exists)

B-Analysis (analyzing why that reality exists)

C-Vision (determining what should exist)

D-Strategy (how to effect change) (p. 248)



In practical terms of lesson planning for the course, I divided each class into three components:

1-Discussion

2-Art appreciation and response

3-Art-making

Hence, the ‘discussion’ (1) segment of each class was perceived as necessary for ‘description’ (A) and ‘analysis’ (B) of the different aspects of a traditional art education. It was in this segment of each class that I would involve students in reflection about gender oppression in art, stereotypes, women’s bodies in art, and so on. The ‘art appreciation,’ ‘response’(2) and ‘art-making’ (3) components were perceived as integral to ‘vision’ (C) and ‘strategy’ (D) to effect change. By presenting role models of women artists and by suggesting students connect their personal experiences into their art making, vision and change became the goals even if they were not necessarily apparent in the art. I did not expect students to create literal activist artworks, unless this was their desire. Nevertheless, I did expect that contact with issues of female oppression would stimulate reflection on the students’ lived realities, which in turn would solicit interesting insight and art making. With my teaching plan well organized, I searched for a teaching environment in which to experiment with my ideas.

### **Course Format**

#### **Discussion**

To help students understand the complex issues related to a womanless art history that abounds in representations of femininity, I structured each class according to a theme

related to feminist concerns in the arts. Examples of themes would be 'women and beauty', 'gender stereotypes in art', 'the artist in art history', 'the workings of power through representational practice' or 'notions of the artistic gaze' etc. I therefore expected to start each class with a half hour discussion, related to an assigned reading, to allow student's to react, argue, question or reflect out loud. In this way, students would come to class with some groundwork in the subject (I would not seem to 'impose' my ideas on them) and together we could explore the connection between the material and the student's lives.

### **Art Appreciation and Response Activities**

The art appreciation segments of the course were perceived as central in achieving many of the goals mentioned above. First, art appreciation was intended to introduce students to individual women artists. In addition to exploring the subject matter of the artworks, other qualities in the works, such as line, shape, texture or color would be pointed out, particularly when connected to the following art-making component of the class. I would ask students questions with the goal of increasing their understanding of art. Art appreciation would also be useful in introducing different art styles and periods. Letting students respond freely to the artwork was an important part of the process. Together, we would look at art works, describe them and react to them. I would encourage them to 'interpret' what they saw and describe it. Did they like the work? Was anything striking? This aspect, linked to my goals of feminist pedagogy, would be important in establishing open communication lines with the students, sending them a

message that their individual reactions to art were valued and that their participation was integral to the learning process. Response activities at the end of the class were intended to allow students to discuss their art work and to appreciate the contributions of their peers. It was another opportunity to discuss themes, techniques, art notions, to express feelings about the art-making process and to receive feedback.

### **Art-Making Workshops**

I chose to concentrate the art making component of the course on portrait drawing and painting techniques. My rationale for doing this was to enable students to acquire basic drawing abilities as a spring board for further exploration. I planned to use gesture drawing and blind drawing to free up student's possible reservations about their drawing abilities, while simultaneously introducing notions of portraiture like facial construction, drawing of eyes, noses and mouths. Later in the semester, I would introduce painting and collage techniques for them to explore and get acquainted with these media and open up creative possibilities. Through the development of their competence and confidence, it was my hope that the students would then formulate personal meaning in the creation of their self-portraits. Through multiple approaches to portrait-making, the exploration of different techniques, and expanded expressive vocabulary, I sought to augment the student's capacities for emotional expression through their art. Each class would start with a warm-up and a drawing or painting exercise related to a particular approach or technique. Later on in the semester, students would start directly with their own self-directed projects. At that point, my role would be to come around individually to motivate, give pointers or provide technical advice.

**Figure 2** Student at work in “Women’s Perspectives in Drawing”



### **Outline of the 15 Weeks: Plan of Themes and Art-making**

The following outline charts my 15 week plan for teaching “Women’s Perspectives in Drawing.” I have included a more detailed version of this plan in the Appendix 1 (see Original outline of the 15 weeks).

<b>Week 1:</b>	*	Introduction to course (half the class), pastel drawings (second half)
<b>Week 2:</b>	*	‘Art history and women’, blind drawings
<b>Week 3:</b>	*	‘Gender stereotypes in art’, gesture drawing
<b>Week 4:</b>	*	‘The artist, the viewer, the gaze’, drawing eyes
<b>Week 5:</b>	*	‘Representations of women in art’, drawing noses
<b>Week 6:</b>	*	‘Feminist Art’, drawing mouths
<b>Week 7:</b>	*	‘Self-portraits: imagining woman/myself’, facial construction
<b>Week 8:</b>	*	‘Symbolism of the body’, color mixing and portraits, complete face
<b>Week 9:</b>		Exhibition: Marion Wagschal
<b>Week 10:</b>	*	Reactions to Wagschal exhibition, brushstroke techniques and student-initiated projects

- Week 11:** \* 'Creating a coherent body of artwork' and student's chosen themes, collage techniques and student-initiated projects
- Week 12:** \* 'Political action through art,' incorporating text, student initiated projects
- Week 13:** Exhibition: La Centrale-Powerhouse 'Love-Horror'
- Week 14:** \* 'Women artists in Quebec and Canada', student-initiated projects
- Week 15:** Final presentations of artwork and celebration

\* 12 classes with art-making, approximately 24 hours in total

### **The setting: the New School at Dawson College**

The last section 'Initial Plan of "Women's Perspectives"' described "Women's Perspectives" according to my original scheme. In this section, I will explore how theory and practice combined to create a feminist teaching situation that contained paradoxes and contradictions that were fostered by the actual teaching context at Dawson College. Using my field notes and photographs, I will describe and analyze "Women's Perspectives in Drawing-the Self Portrait" with its participants and within its actual setting. My aim is to demonstrate how my goals of providing students with a critical awareness about gender stereotypes in combination with practical art-making techniques of portraiture were translated into classroom reality.

### **Humanist philosophy**

During the winter semester of January 1999, armed with my carefully researched and organized lesson plans and course syllabus as described above, I found Dawson College's New School as a teaching site. Because my brother had studied there years

earlier, I knew that the New School was an alternative school that espoused a Humanist philosophy of education. According to Greta Hofmann Nemiroff, in her book on the New School entitled *Reconstructing Education. Toward a Pedagogy of Critical Humanism* (1992), the philosophical premises of the New School had their roots in the anti-school works of Maslow, Rogers, Brown, Moustakas and other humanistic psychologists and philosophers (p. 27). She says: “the original plans for the New School sprung from a critique of the educational system [in 1973], the school was founded on the notion that all education should be people-centered and process-centered rather than simply information-centered” (p. 27). One of the central goals of humanistic education, as articulated at the New School, was to address the ‘whole learner’ as a psychological entity (p. 5), and to develop a strong concept of self (p. 8).

In addition, the educational philosophy of the New School was greatly influenced by the work of Dewey, the existentialists, the values-clarification philosophers and educators, feminist and black theorists, critical pedagogy and peace education (p. 27). Since social change through education was part of the founder’s original goals (p. 28), the political ‘conscientization’ of students through analysis of power relations would be achieved through what Nemiroff calls ‘critical humanism’. By exploring the “sociopolitical dimensions of knowledge and the individual’s relation to it” (p. 61) the structural silences and ideological messages within education can be revealed (p. 63). Therefore New School students are led to develop a critical consciousness of their “own being in the world” as both teachers and students become engaged in the process of “questioning the dominant ideology and constructing and reconstructing meaning” (p. 58-59). In this process, both teachers and learners are situated in their social contexts, with

the goal of developing intellectual strategies for empowerment (p. 6). Based particularly on Paulo Freire's theoretical writings on pedagogy, Nemiroff says: "the aim of the New School has always been an emancipatory one" (p. 57) which is why the "search for and confirmation of authentic voice is of central importance at the New School" (p. 65). Nemiroff adds that "teaching for social transformation means educating students to take risks and to alter the grounds upon which life is lived" (p. 71).

After doing initial research to understand the ideological position of critical humanism within the New School, I was all the more reaffirmed in my belief that it would be the ideal setting for "Women's Perspectives in Drawing." Therefore, before the beginning of the semester, I met with Pat Powers, the co-director of the New School, to present my syllabus. I showed him my plan (see Appendix 1), which consisted of a detailed breakdown of the fifteen week course that would take place once a week for three hours. In this course, I would introduce students to women artists and contemporary feminist issues, and after class discussions I would teach them specific art making techniques. We would spend half an hour discussing readings, fifteen minutes looking at art works, two hours doing art and conclude with a fifteen minute response period. I was elated at the idea of teaching a CEGEP level course (although unpaid) and eager to make a feminist contribution to the world. Little could I imagine that my 'simple' goals would need to be reevaluated many times during the semester.

### **Class Procedures: Registration, Contracts, Evaluations**

During the interview, Pat Powers explained to me how the Humanist philosophy of the school was translated into class procedures. As discussed above, concomitant with the humanist philosophy of the school, the learners were to be seen as self-directed actors in the co-creation of their learning, playing an active role in educating themselves and the others. In concrete terms, the New School developed many opportunities to allow students to develop their 'voice' through participation in classroom procedures such as registration, contracts, evaluations, and more.

To begin with, Pat Powers stressed the importance of developing a sense of 'community' to enable a particular kind of 'civic solidarity'. The strengthening of group cohesion was intended to create a friendly and congenial learning atmosphere (as opposed to an impersonal one) which fostered a sense of belonging where students would feel accountable for learning (Nemiroff, 1992, p. 171). I would therefore be expected to integrate the New School community, and would participate in a pot-luck lunch for the students to get to know me. Before the assembly, all the teachers (called 'facilitators') would present themselves and their courses (called 'learning groups') and students would ask questions. After the lunch, the facilitators would place a description of their course (called a 'profile') on a board for student's to consult. Then, the facilitators would make themselves available for 'shopping,' an activity where students could come to talk about the proposed learning groups and possibly suggest ideas about what *they* wanted to learn. After two days of scheduled 'shopping,' students would assist a 'finalization' meeting to officially register in the course. According to the procedures, the students and the



facilitator would agree on the course work and the breakdown of the grading. It was a New School tradition to give the students responsibility for a large percentage of the overall grading procedure (usually 40% or 50%) to allow them to evaluate themselves and each other for 'participation'. Certain rules governing presence in class, absences and late-comers were to be established by the group and the students and facilitator would agree and sign what was known as the 'contract'. In the middle and at the end of the semester, group 'evaluations' would be made and 'renegotiations' if students did not agree or follow the 'contract'. Finally, as part of Dawson College's overall effort for literacy, there would be 'writing across the curriculum', which meant that there would be a mandatory minimum of ten pages of writing in each course. As a final point, Pat Powers suggested that I not stick to my syllabus too rigidly and leave room for what might evolve from the process. He added that the New Schoolers were 'dying' to take an art course and he believed that my feminist goals and pedagogy were well suited to the school. "There are a lot of feminists here," he said.

**Figure 3** Students painting in "Women's Perspectives in Drawing"



### **Group Profile of Participants in “Women’s Perspectives”**

The registration process was slow to get off to a start because very few students came to meet me for ‘shopping day’. Contrary to what Pat Powers had told me earlier, two of the students who did ‘shop’ told me that “people just aren’t into feminism.” I was surprised to learn that a large number of students had registered for courses entitled ‘Gender’, ‘Prejudice’, ‘Revolution’ and ‘Race, Class and Gender in Film’. I sorely regretted having put the word ‘feminism’ in my profile (Appendix 3) and this put a first dent in my enthusiasm. Finally, after two days of ‘shopping’, three students registered in my course. By the first day of class, however, five students had signed up for “Women’s Perspectives”: three middle-class white women, one working class white woman and one middle-class white young man. Two of the female students were seventeen years old and recently out of high school. Two of the other students were second year New Schoolers and were nineteen years old. There was one woman of twenty-three, who had studied in a professional nursing program before entering the New School, and who was also a second year student. Four of the five students had gone to the same alternative high school in Montreal, which might have been an indicator of familiarity with alternative approaches to learning. All of the students had previous experience with art, most of them in high school, with the exception of one student who was a complete beginner.

## **The Real Course: “Women’s Perspectives”**

### **Detailed Description of the 15 Weeks**

#### **Class One: Introduction and Debate**

Five students presented themselves to the first class: Judy, Alan, Annie, Cynthia and June<sup>6</sup>. All of the students were fifteen minutes late and arrived at the same time. Once settled on the pillows on the floor of the room, I presented myself and gave a description of the course format to help the students understand how I wished to proceed in each class: discussions, art appreciation, art-making and response activities. Students could expect to receive instruction in art-making techniques every class and would eventually be guided in the creation of self-portraits and self-directed projects. Throughout the semester, I expected the students to connect their personal lives to the studied material and to use the discussion periods for reflecting on various feminist subjects. I gave out a ‘materials list’ that we looked over together. The students appeared bewildered about buying art supplies since they had never done this before. I reassured them and provided the names and addresses of local art supply stores.

Then I proposed we play an ‘ice-breaking’ game where students would break into pairs and discuss the questions in the handout ‘Personal Introduction’ (Appendix 4). After fifteen minutes of talking, students would present each other. It was my belief that this activity would give me a sense of who the student’s were, what expectations they had and

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<sup>6</sup> The names of the participants have been changed for reasons of confidentiality.

what their beliefs about art were. I expected to generate a discussion about feminism in art, the learning of art skills and the evaluation of progress over the semester. I had imagined that this exercise would provoke interesting interaction, stimulation and discussion amongst the participants. Instead, students felt that this activity was silly and they were reluctant (and perhaps embarrassed) to participate. On their pillows, they were bodies lying on the floor, falling asleep and looking bored. I could already see in class one that the semester would be long and difficult.

The group decided that instead of answering the questions student by student that everyone would answer each question at the same time. At first, the answers were quite dry and the dynamism was lacking. June spoke in an inaudible voice and Alan, although audible, was very soft spoken. Annie and Cynthia spoke normally but Judy had 'an attitude' and exhibited antagonism about the activity. Whenever she talked, she spoke in a loud tone that I perceived as intentionally overbearing. Nevertheless, I learned some interesting information from the personal introductions. In particular, I learned that four of the five participants had high school experience in art. One student had no experience. In response to question 2: "What do you hope to learn in this course?" I discovered that the students had unrealistic expectations about the kind of progress that they could make during the next fifteen weeks. They assumed that they would learn to make exact renderings of realistic portraits over the semester. Although, it might be possible, I cautioned, they would have to do a lot of homework to achieve that end. I emphasized however that they would get an opportunity to explore other art styles besides realism, such as abstraction, surrealism, and more (I explained theses concepts). In response to question 3: "What is art?" I discovered that the students had very romantic, modernist

notions of art. They said: “Art is about the beautiful, the grandiose, the overwhelming” and “art touches the soul.” In relation to question 4: “Can art be evaluated?” students, as I had anticipated, felt that art was impossible to evaluate because it was “so personal.” Did they believe that there were no criteria for evaluation? Their answers were mixed. I gave them two handouts about evaluation in art and explained how hard work, use of exercises done in class, work done at home and progress over the semester would positively influence their grades. We discussed how artworks contained stylistic, compositional, or formal elements (like line, shape, colour, texture, etc.) that could be used to reinforce the subject matter.

Questions 5 and 6 related to student’s knowledge of feminism. It didn’t take long for me to realize that my students were not familiarized with feminism. At this point, Judy broke out in an angry explosion against the course. Although she was interested in art, she was annoyed at “feminists” who were always “complaining about everything.” I tried to defend my viewpoint that it was useful to teach about women in an effort to include them (us) into white, middle-class, male canons of art and education. I tried to explain Charlotte Bunch’s four steps for feminist education (see p. 36) and that my goal was not to ‘complain’ but to explore other visions of what women are and can be. Judy’s answer was: “Well, you know, these problems [of social inequity] have already been fixed and don’t exist anymore.” Already in class one, Judy challenged everything I said about women, men and society. It was difficult to fully explain my position as she was loudly outspoken and hostile. Why did she take this course? I wondered. I suspected that she (and perhaps the others) had registered because it was the only art course available. The other students seemed intimidated and were not sure whose ‘side’ they were on and

consequently hesitated to participate. When one student said: “it never occurred to me that there are few great women artists because women are everywhere in art,” Judy never let me respond because she always argued “what’s the point?” and “what difference does this make?” Needless to say, I felt frustrated and uncomfortable in my role. I had not expected to defend the pertinence of my course and felt unprepared for such a virulent attack. I was not sure what approach to take. I hoped that the students would be able to discuss more after they had done some of the course readings. Although I had brought in materials for the students to do a pastel drawing, I felt tired enough from the first encounter to let the class out early that day.

## **Class Two: The Contract**

The students arrived to the second class fifteen minutes late. I asked them politely to make an effort to come on time. They announced to me that they wanted to haggle over the famous ‘contract’, in which the students and I would decide on coursework and evaluations. As in class one, I had to go to great pains to get them to talk. I was surprised when they so readily agreed to my plan. They flippantly agreed to four two-page papers, a sketchbook (to be handed in twice), to read seven articles and to make eight final artworks. However, it took over an hour to agree upon behavioral rules about the number of ‘allowed absences’ and ‘lates’. The students were united in agreeing that there should not be any rules. I, on the contrary had been told by Pat Powers that the students needed structure, and insisted on penalties for too many lates and absences. The students disagreed. It took a lot of self-control on my part to hold my ground and I remained persistent in demanding a solid commitment from the students (especially since all of

them came in late two weeks in a row). Finally, we agreed on accepting two lates and two absences and if the contract was not respected the students would be 'renegotiated'. In the worst scenario, they told me, a student could get thrown out of the class by group consensus. It took over an hour to agree and sign the contract. I found the whole experience wearisome because I knew that precious time was being lost. It was necessary to omit part of my lesson plan for that class. I therefore chose to delete the discussion of Broude and Garrard's (1994) Introduction: Feminism and Art in the Twentieth Century to leave more time for art-making. We did not have time to compare Janson's (1986) *History of Art* to Nancy Heller's (1987) *Women Artists Illustrated History*, which would have been useful to supplement the (unexpected) discussion that took place in class one.

After signing of the contract, the students took a long break. Since the class had started at 11:00<sup>7</sup>, it was lunch time when they left for their fifteen minute break. Judy and Cynthia, in particular, were gone for half an hour because they had gone down to the cafeteria and waited in line there. By the time they returned, they had not yet eaten. I felt irritated by this and at the same time I did not know how to handle the situation. It was difficult to start when half the class was not ready. I would say: "Okay guys, let's start in five minutes" but when the students kept on eating, all I could do was wait.

Finally, when everyone was set up, I had the students fold their paper many times to make 12 squares. In each square I would give them a word: anger, pain, energy, depression, joy, serenity, masculinity, love, power, femininity, happiness, and weakness,

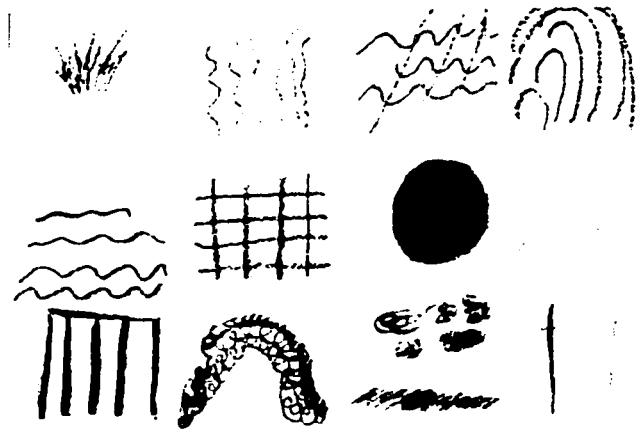
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<sup>7</sup> This was the only time-slot available for "Women's Perspectives."

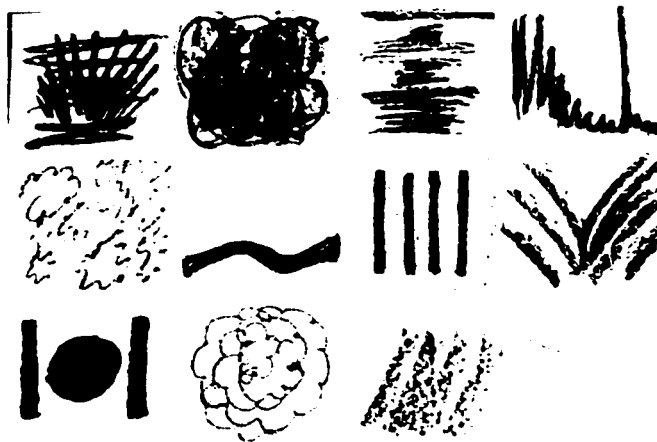
and they would have a few minutes to make a pencil drawing of each word (see Figures 4-8).

Anger	Pain	Energy	Depression
Joy	Serenity	Masculinity	Love
Power	Femininity	Happiness	Weakness

**Figure 4** Judy's Drawing of Words



**Figure 5** Annie's Drawing of Words



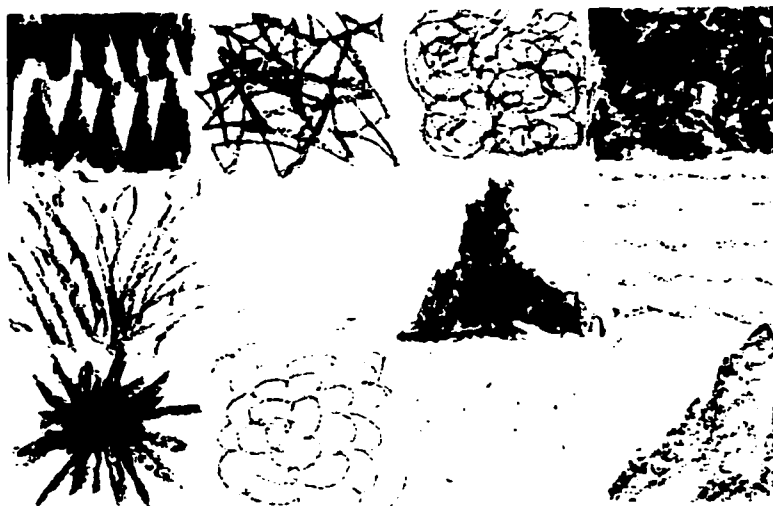


I found this exercise to be a non-invasive approach to exploring ideas related to masculinity and femininity and to make connections between lines and shapes that were used to express higher or lower levels of energy or emotion. I suggested they transposed their favorite drawing onto a larger piece of paper, this time adding color in dry or oil pastels (see Figures 9-13). This activity was a success as the students seemed to enjoy themselves and worked with concentration and involvement.

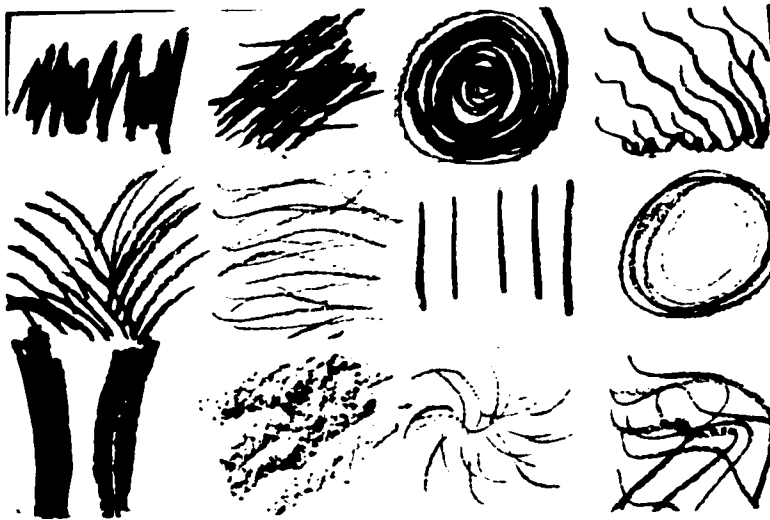
**Figure 6** Cynthia's Drawing of Words



**Figure 7** Alan's Drawing of Words



**Figure 8** June's Drawing of Words

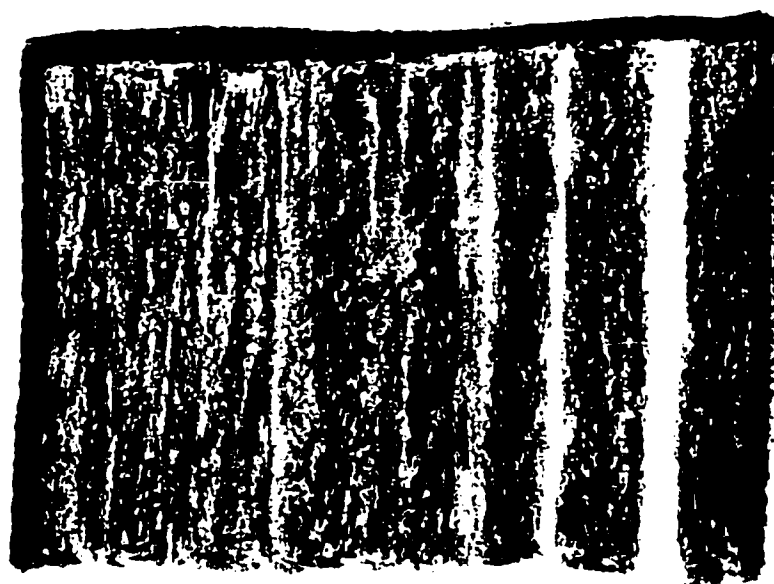


During the response period, I made some parallels between the soft, flowing lines of femininity, love and serenity and the bold, dark or square lines of masculinity, power and anger. I chose, however, to let the students integrate their images on their own, with minimal interpretation on my part, since the images spoke for themselves. I had expected that this might have been a good opportunity for the students to discuss their 'unconscious' associations between gender stereotypes and possibly the disjuncture between these ideas and their real feelings about their gender. Regrettably, the students refused to talk during the response activity. I would say: "Did you enjoy the exercise?" (no answer), "Have you ever done anything like this before?" (no answer), "Do you notice any similar patterns between each other's drawings?" "Come *on* guys, help me here!" (reluctant answers). "Yes, I liked the activity" and "it was fun."

**Figure 9** Cynthia's 'Energy'



**Figure 10** Judy's 'Power'



**Figure 11** Annie's 'Femininity'



**Figure 12** Alan's 'Masculinity'



**Figure 13** June's 'Serenity'



### **Class Three: Debate over Stereotypes**

In class three, I decided to experiment with different places to sit in the classroom to see if changes in the environment would modify the level of student energy (either zeal or apathy) in the discussion (see lesson plan in Appendix 9). Sitting around a table, I waited for the students, who were again twenty minutes late. When they arrived, I was disappointed to see that none of them had brought in their art materials, as I had asked the preceding week. I proposed to buy the art materials for them as a group and then split the fees individually. The students agreed to my idea. Then, I asked them some questions about Julia Wood's (1996) article: Sex and Gender, that they were supposed to read as homework. To my discouragement, the students had not read that article, nor the one from the week before (Broude and Garrard (1994), Introduction: Feminism and Art in the

Twentieth Century.) Annie said: "I forgot to read them." As a result, the students, who had little knowledge of art history in the first place, could not relate to the lack of women artists in the canon of art history or to the issue of representation of women in art. When I attempted to explain the articles, it appeared to the students that I was "trying to tell them the way things are" (which I was to a certain extent).

Taking a deep breath in an effort to remain calm, I decided (as gently as possible) to tackle the subject of gender stereotypes. I believed that recognition of stereotypes was primordial to grasping the pertinence of reading, writing, and discussing in this class and to appreciating the relevance of making art that revolved around empowerment through expanded perceptions of self. During this discussion, nonetheless, it became clear to me that the students did not understand the difference between sex and gender (it was indeed very unfortunate that they had not read the article on the topic). Alan, for example, argued that men were 'naturally' aggressive and women 'naturally' passive. When I tried to respond to comments such as these, I was often received with doubts and blank faces, if not hostility. The students made little eye contact with me while I was speaking. It was as if they were not interested in hearing what I had to say. They would turn 'on' when they talked and turn 'off' when I did. To make matters worse, I was at pains to prove my claims and ill prepared to demonstrate the existence of oppression.

Although, I attempted to illuminate the discussion with statistics (from memory) about inequity between men and women in terms of a gendered division of labor or differing economic realities, Judy "did not see my point." Furthermore, Judy felt enraged that I appeared to believe that my 'point of view' was more valid than hers. For her, the

most basic information about gender discrimination or bias was difficult to admit and understand. She argued that “there was always another side to the story.” “My brother makes less money than my sister” and “my dad always takes care of the kids and does the cleaning...” Alan insisted that “men too were discriminated against” and “were victims too.” The other students were notoriously quiet.

Trying to shift the focus off what appeared to the student’s as my ‘opinion’, I spontaneously suggested we make two categories on the blackboard: ‘male stereotype-ultra macho’, and ‘female stereotype-ultra-feminine’. Agreeing to these categories and then putting in words was in itself a source of disagreement. Finally, however students agreed that if movies stars were visualized as representatives of the two categories, the task would be easier. They chose Arnold Schwarzenegger to represent the ultra macho but they felt it was important to note that Schwarzenegger had appeared in some non-macho roles and that maybe he *himself* as a person was perhaps not macho. They agreed that in many movies such as ‘The Predator’, ‘The Terminator’ Schwarzenegger indeed was stereotypical. The students chose Cameron Diaz, the ‘dumb blond’ as a representative of the stereotype of femininity, but mentioned many other actresses as well, such as Julia Roberts, Nicole Kidman, Pamela Anderson and others. Interestingly, they also came up with a third category ‘in the middle’ to describe a woman who did not fit into their understanding of the ultra-feminine. They chose Michelle Pfeiffer in her role as Cat-woman in ‘Batman Returns’ to typify this category. These are the words they chose to describe the stereotypes:

### **Male Stereotype: Ultra-macho**

Strong, full of muscles, smart, daring, courageous, ingenious, organized, powerful, aggressive, saves the woman, hero, dominates, wins, is fearsome, uses bad language, abusive, is intimidating, is violent.

### **In the Middle (Cat-woman)**

Vicious, attacks, strong, nasty, jealous, is controlled by the hero (Batman), sexy body but not feminine attitude, cannot be trusted, is hypocritical, a bitch, she deserves to be dominated/put down/stopped, is evil.

### **Female Stereotype: Ultra-feminine**

Weak, bubbly, dumb, silly, goofy, nice long hair, long nails, make-up, perfect face, gorgeous, fabulous clothes, victim, is saved, not too independent, sexy, beautiful.

This activity allowed me to see that the students did understand and recognize stereotypes. I asked them to qualify the categories. They decided that the ultra-macho was mostly 'positive' because he achieved his goals, although he used physical force, which was more negative. The ultra-feminine was overall negative because she was "silly, dumb and a victim" but it was positive that she was "sexy and beautiful." The category 'in the middle', had power but was overall negative because the woman was "a bitch." I pointed out to the students that there was no 'intelligent woman' in these categories and they agreed that she would fit in somewhere between the ultra-feminine and the cat-woman, as she was seen as "positive but maybe not very feminine."

The next step was to try to get the students to situate themselves on the continuum between ultra-macho and ultra-feminine. Most of them situated themselves near the 'intelligent woman' but expressed that these categories were fine for movie stars but that they did not see how the stereotypes affected *them*. Although I sensed the potential for another debate, I tried to demonstrate how the stereotypes both corresponded to people in



the real world and left important differences out. For example, where did the warm-hearted man fit in? What room was left within these stereotypes for a less 'flashy' woman, a more natural woman or an intelligent woman? Why was the 'powerful' woman a 'bitch' but a 'powerful' man a 'hero'?

To me these issues were very interesting and revealing but somehow, in the eyes of the students, this aspect of the discussion seemed forced and contrived, in a sense they must have felt that I was leading them towards certain conclusions about their observations of stereotypes. Judy blurted out in anger that "you feminists should stop talking about this stuff and just *do* something about it" (she repeated this frequently). I wanted to explain that this course was a form of feminist action, but in vain. I tried to be patient and tolerant with the students but I had never before experienced outright confrontation and vocal anger in my teaching. I did not know how to respond calmly without trying to prove, convince, or argue. My defensive 'method' failed terribly and was a far cry from the goals of feminist pedagogy. Although I was satisfied with the exercise on the blackboard, I felt it was too painful to waste any more time and energy in fruitless discussion. Cynthia and June looked pale and bewildered and were speechless in such a conflictual atmosphere.

After another extended break, the students returned to participate in the drawing exercises I had planned. Although I felt drained, I swallowed my anger and rapidly showed the students some examples of artwork from Janson's (1986) *History of Art* and then some artists from Heller's (1987) *Women Artists Illustrated History*. I kindly asked to them to observe the artwork and make minimal comments but to refrain from

discussion of any sort! I also showed them Jacqueline Morreau and Kathe Kollwitz, pointing out shading, facial expression, use of tones, lines and subject matter. The students then set themselves up for the charcoal exercises, doing circles within circles and gesture drawing for a warm up. Then they did a blind drawing of their hand. Although the students worked in silence and with concentration, there was unfortunately little time left. We did not have time for response.

#### **Class Four: Latecomers, Breaks and Materials**

Class four began late, as all the participants again arrived close to half an hour late. When they all were seated, I expressed my anger about the significance of coming to class on time. “But it’s *only* art class!” and “well, start without us!” This only fueled my frustration, and I explained that the course was important and exciting to me but their attitudes reflected in ‘lateness’ and constant conflict was becoming a burden. “Besides,” I argued, “we agreed in the contract that there would be maximum of two ‘lates’ and now the whole class would need ‘renegotiation.’” It took close to half an hour for the students to agree to coming on time, to take only a twenty minute lunch break and not to leave early. Once that was settled, I handed them the materials I had bought for them and showed them the bill. They acted disappointed because they felt that they did not “get their money’s worth.” One student said that I did not “ask her permission” to buy her materials and now she was “forced” to pay for mine. This new source of conflict devoured more class time.

Although I feared more negative feelings, I continued with my lesson plan, which consisted of having the students compare so-called ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ images of

women that they had (supposedly) brought in. Originally, I had imagined that this activity would stimulate interaction and discussion among the students, in correlation to Berger's article: *Ways of Seeing* (but since we were already off my schedule this article would be read in the following week). I expected that the students would have had time to reflect and question the images on their own while researching positive and negative qualities. I discovered that none of them had done their homework and did not have any magazine cut-outs of 'positive' and 'negative' images of women. Since they had not taken the time to do the research, the personal connection to their experiences was next to impossible. When I showed them art and media images that I had brought in (just in case), the students felt that my images were "not representative" and that these were only *my* ideas of 'positive' or 'negative'. The fact that I had 'staged' the activity made them feel like resisting! Needless to say, I was getting furious and turned to do an art appreciation activity instead. In relation to 'staged' situations, I thought that Cindy Sherman's photography of herself in various costumes and in various 'feminine' roles would be of interest to the students. This was true to a certain extent but the overall enthusiasm was low.

During the break, the students were gone for over half an hour, which again aggravated me further. I felt that the class discussions were getting painfully bogged down by student resistance and I could never get to the more empowering side of feminism. After all, I was interested in empowerment through art-making and felt that too little time was being spent doing art. To make matters worse, only one of the students had brought in a mirror, as requested for the drawing activity that day, which was detailed drawing of eyes. I had luckily brought in some extra very small mirrors (again just in

case) which four of the student used for the rest of the semester, never feeling that it necessary to bring in bigger ones to see themselves better, regardless of my recommendations (see Figure 14). Thus, after the break, I taught the students to draw eyes with shading (Figure 15). They worked in silence and let me guide them into realistic drawing.

**Figure 14 Small Mirrors**



**Figure 15 June's Drawing of an Eye**



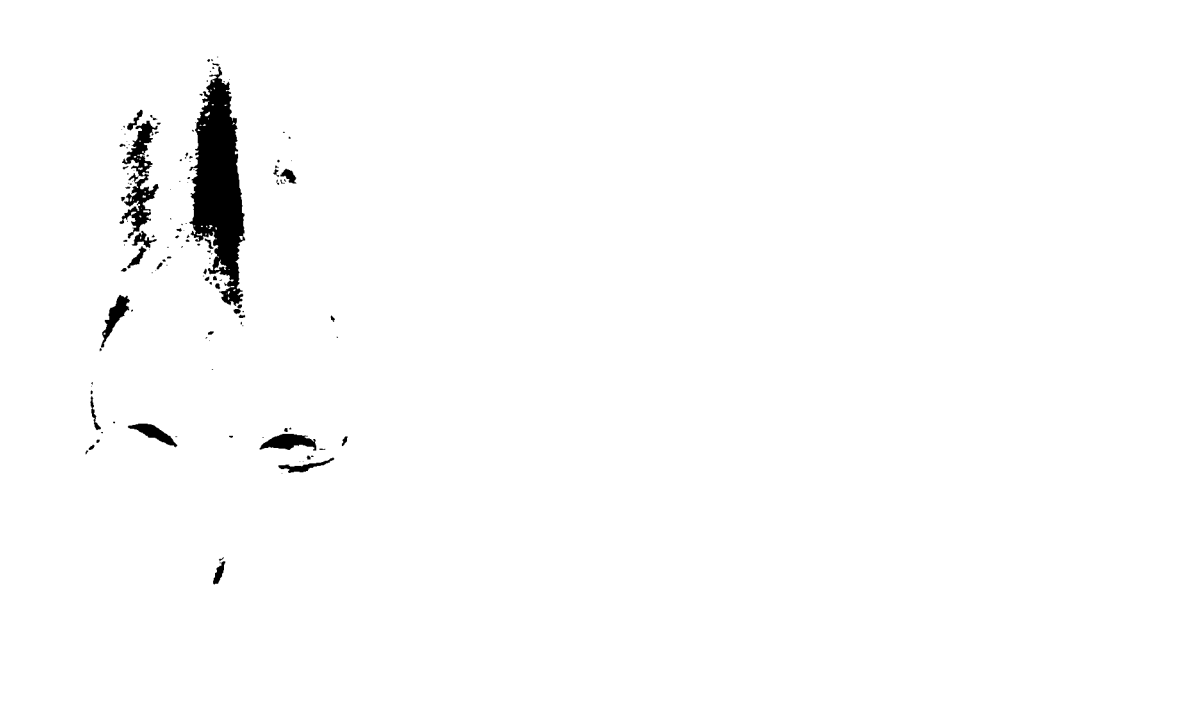
### **Class Five: Debate over the Gaze**

In class five, students came in on time but two were absent. This meant there were only three students present that day: June (along with her pet rat) who never uttered a word, Alan, who was usually soft-spoken and Judy. The students had had two weeks to read John Berger's 'Ways of Seeing' and I hoped to get some feedback from them. I was not interested in getting involved in a full-blown discussion but was interested in hearing their opinions, if they had any. Judy, of course, felt somewhat belligerent about the pertinence of the reading but liked it that the article was written by a man. She said "It's hard to describe...it just seems 'right' when it's written by a man." The discussion was relatively docile but dull because Judy talked alone, the other two did not participate and I remained calm (if not to say cold). It was my general feeling that the students had not read the article. Again, I asked questions that received no answers and there was no eye contact. Afterward, I made comparisons between some paintings in Janson's (1986) *History of Art* and Meret Oppenheim's and Alice Neel's paintings.

As in other weeks, Judy "did not see the point" in comparing different paintings of female nudes by male and female artists. At this point, the other students complained about the discussions, claiming that not enough time was spent doing art. I agreed with them but answered: "Things would be better if you took the course seriously, did your homework and respected the contract!" Against my best intention, and because of the student's disinvolved and low-key attitude, I realized that I had set up an 'us-her' duality that I did not enjoy. With this in mind, I resolved to let go of discussions for the next weeks and to start the classes directly with art appreciation. I wanted to relieve myself of

the burden of trying to elicit enthusiasm from non-responsive energy-less teenagers. After the break, the students worked on rendering their nose on a large piece of paper (see Figure 16).

**Figure 16** June's nose



### **Classes Six and Seven: Revision of the Contract and Mid-term Evaluations**

Although I was determined to alter the course format away from class discussions, classes six and seven were taken up by New School procedures that were time consuming and involved 'negotiation.' In class six, the students wanted to revise the contract to reduce the coursework. Mostly they wanted to reduce the number of papers from four to three, the readings from seven to five and the number of final paintings from eight to four (see Appendix 5). Instead of counting for 40% of the total grade, the students wanted the final artwork to count for 20%. I agreed to these changes as I could see that the goals of the first contract would not be met. Needless to say, I had not planned this revision as part

of my lesson plan and felt exasperated to lose time (yet again!) I then led an art appreciation activity in which the students looked at “The Dinner Party” by Judy Chicago. The students found her work “weird” and “wild,” and seemed very impressed with Chicago’s goal of validating the feminine by rendering a taboo visible by making vaginas into celebratory artwork. They also enjoyed looking at Nikki de Saint-Phalle’s “Nana” series of joyful, dancing, fat women. The students proceeded to work on drawings of the mouth. The general atmosphere was more relaxed than usual.

Class seven was the day of mid-term evaluations, where each student had to tell the class what they felt they had achieved since the beginning of the semester. The other members of the group would discuss each student’s progress and/or problems, if there were any. The atmosphere was very dreary on that day and the activity took a long time. The students came to the decision that both June and Cynthia were ‘at risk,’ the former for never speaking in class and the latter for being late and missing two classes. The two students promised to improve. Class seven was also supposed to be the day the students handed in a paper about their reflections on gender and stereotypes. After the evaluations, I asked for the papers, of which I received only one. It was no doubt a diffusing technique, but the students argued that they should not be obliged to write papers in an art course. Judy said: “To be honest with you, I’m just not going to write those three papers for art.” When I explained that writing was part of Dawson College’s “writing across the curriculum,” she retorted that “fifteen percent of her grade was worth sacrificing.” I tried to convince them that the writing could be useful in clarifying their ideas and in motivating artwork. Although the students were dissatisfied, I remained firm and refused to even think of revising the contract yet again. Since there was not enough time left for

art-making, I let the class out early that day. Halfway through the semester, I felt terribly discouraged. It seemed that I was not achieving my goals and that my whole feminist project was a complete failure.

### **Class Eight: Imagining Self**

Class eight can be seen as the turning point at which I was no longer interested in discussions at all and changed my orientation away from feminist theory and feminist pedagogy (for the time being). I decided to start the class directly with art-making to see if that would make a difference in the class dynamic. That day, the students did a significant amount of drawing. They did scribble warm-ups, blind drawings of their faces (Figures 17-18), practiced placing eyes, noses, mouths and ears in facial construction exercises (Figure 19), did contour drawings and one sustained realistic self-portrait with shading (Figures 20-21).

**Figure 17** Alan's Blind Drawing

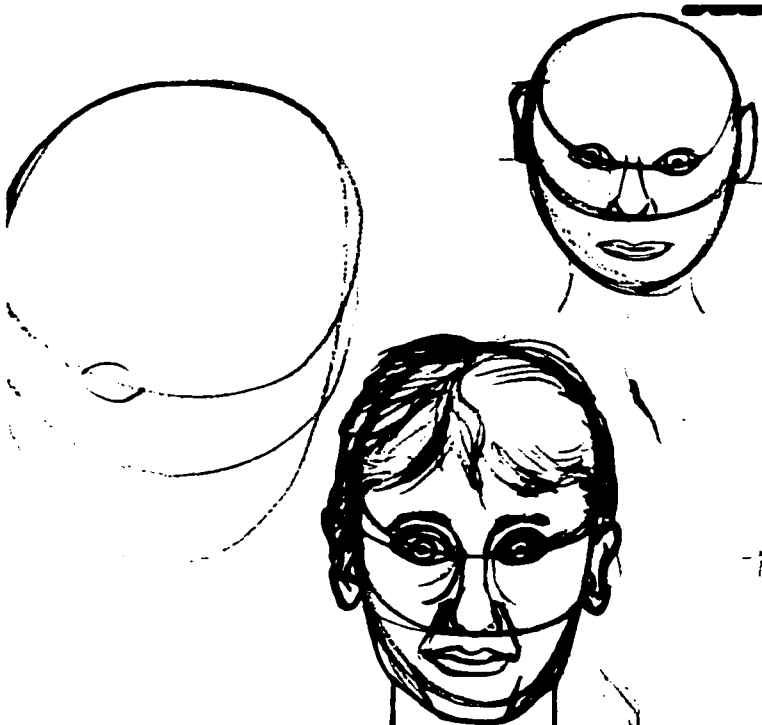




**Figure 18** Annie's Blind Drawing



**Figure 19** Alan's Facial Construction Exercise



**Figure 20** Annie's Realistic Self-Portrait

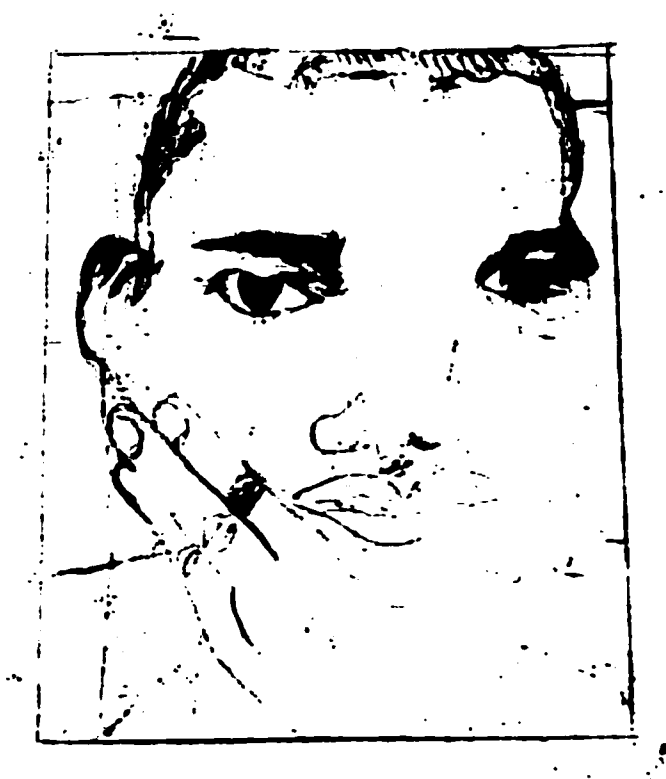


**Figure 21** June's Realistic Self-Portrait



After the break, we spent some time doing art appreciation of Frieda Kahlo's self-portraits. Then the student returned to finish shading in their portraits. In the last half hour of the class, there was enough time to do a response activity. Most of the students were hesitant but enthusiastic when talking about their artwork in front of their peers. Judy, who was a beginner, had had much more difficulty with her drawing skills and she did an 'upside-down' drawing of a magazine image (see Figure 22). She received a lot of validation and encouragement from her peers for her efforts. I could see that she was very proud and very pleased. The students and I enjoyed this class, as it was the first time since the beginning of the semester that there was no conflict of any sort.

**Figure 22** Judy's Upside-down drawing



## **Classes Nine and Ten**

In class nine, the class met at the Bellefeuille gallery on Green Avenue in Westmount to see Marion Wagschal's exhibition 'New Paintings.' The students were very interested and stayed at the gallery for an hour and a half. Since they had a 'reaction report' to write on the exhibition for the following week, we agreed to discuss the show in class ten.

Class ten unfortunately began with a 'renegotiation' of a student who had missed three classes and was late many times. The student in question, Cynthia, showed up more than half an hour after the debate had begun, and it took another half hour for her to plead with the group. I felt confused about the whole process because although I agreed that Cynthia had already made promises that she did not keep, I also knew that she was working hard in her sketch-book (see Figure 23), had caught up with the readings and was integrating feminist ideas in her artwork. Although I expressed these ideas, the students nevertheless decided to kick her out of the class. She was crying when she left the room. The atmosphere was quiet and pensive as the students left for the break. After their return, they did a color-mixing exercise that I called 'artist's conversation with a palette', within which they incorporated imaginary shapes. There was exuberant feelings of joy during this project, so I decided to let go of discussing the Wagschal exhibition and to find out about the student's reactions from their papers.

**Figure 23** Cynthia's Sketch-book



### **Classes Eleven and Twelve**

I had observed in class eight that starting the day directly with art-making had the positive result of improving the classroom atmosphere. By shifting the emphasis of the course on art making instead of on discussions (generally avoiding them when possible) and by putting art appreciation after the break, the ambiance was greatly improved. I discovered that I could finally build *rapprochement*. Therefore, I started class eleven directly an exercise on brushstroke techniques (see lesson plan in Appendix 10). I had the students try out brushstroke techniques “à la Frankenthaler” where there were vigorous brushstrokes, wash, drips, dry brush, and more (see Figures 24-25). After the break we looked at examples of Frankenthaler’s work and discussed the topic of abstraction, as well as 1960’s Abstract Expressionism.

**Figure 24** Brushstroke Poster



**Figure 25** Demonstration of Brushstroke Techniques



In class twelve, I introduced collage with tissue paper, both under and over painting. The students greatly enjoyed this and Judy in particular made a very interesting piece (Figure 26) which depicted three dancing female nudes with a large face that was partially collaged over. I was very excited with her artwork, which in return made her feel very appreciative. This exchange had a positive impact in her attitude toward me (which had always been recalcitrant). Thereon after, I noticed that from time to time she would 'hang out' in class during the break and started coming to class earlier than the others to talk to me about "stuff." It appeared to me that Judy had perhaps suffered from a low self-concept and that reinforcement as well as validation of her art-making skills permitted her to relax more and even open up to learning. She was much less defensive for the rest of the semester. After the break that day, the students examined the artwork of Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger and the Guerilla Girls. Although, they did not talk much, they were fascinated by the artwork with text. Judy said she liked the 'theatrical' aspects of "in your face" (her words) activism in art. Both of these classes were positive and pleasant.

**Figure 26** Judy's 'Dancing Women' Collage



### **Classes Thirteen, Fourteen and Fifteen**

Class thirteen took place at La Centrale, Powerhouse gallery for the exhibition 'Amour/Horreur. Love/Horror, Volet II'. The students thoroughly enjoyed this exhibition for its feminist shock value. There was photography of labia piercing, a metal dress, a knife with measurements and two balls underneath, pantyhose stretched out ten feet by metal balls and much more. It seemed that more contemporary art forms were perhaps more familiar, less threatening and of great interest to the students. It was my impression that this exhibition stimulated more feminist thought than the other twelve weeks. Although it may not have been apparent before due to the hostility, I figured from their enthusiasm that the students had absorbed some feminist ideas all along.

Class fourteen was a sad return to endless discussion over evaluation of each student's 'participation' grade, worth 35% of the total grade (graded by the students). Although I tried to act as a moderator, the students spent half the class arguing about each other's performance during the semester and coming to a group decision about grades. At the end, they evaluated "Women's Perspectives" in general, claiming, to my utter astonishment, to have "enjoyed the conflict of the early weeks." They felt they had learned a good deal about art but regretted not having put more effort into class work from the start! They mentioned particularly enjoying the art appreciation segments and the wide variety of artists that I showed them. At times they would have liked more direction instead of self-initiated projects. They found that I was well organized, yet flexible and patient and encouraged me to continue at the New School because my weaknesses had more to do with unfamiliarity with class procedures than with course content. I found the students to be very honest during the overall evaluation of my course



and was relieved that they recognized their lack of commitment. It was the first time that I had received positive feedback from them. After the evaluations, the students were free to choose the type of art-making they felt like doing but only June finished her artwork that day (see Figure 27).

**Figure 27** June's Self-Directed Project

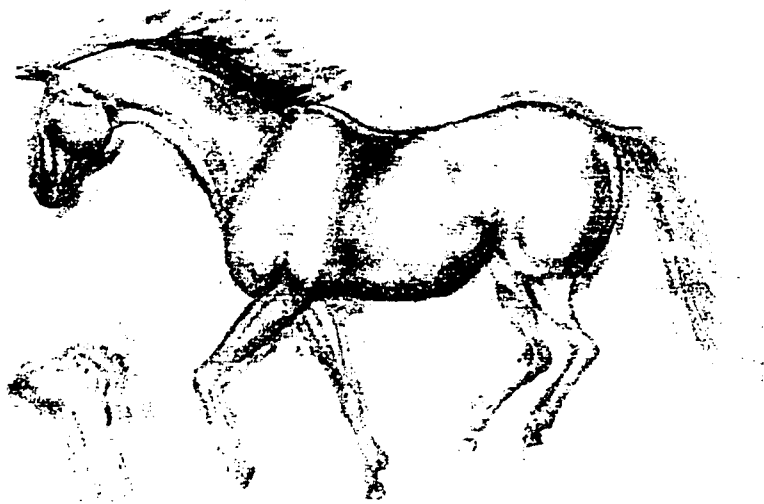


The last class was a complete disaster. Class fifteen was scheduled to be the day of the 'final presentations' of artwork. Therefore, the students would again grade each other for 15% of their total grade. I anticipated that it would be tricky to have the students evaluate each other's artwork since there had been practically no response activities in class. This was in part due to the never-ending discussions about class procedures or

arguments about feminism that took up too much time. Often, I had chosen to cut out the response activities to leave more time for art-making. In preparation for the final evaluations, I gave the students a handout to give them some guidelines for evaluating each other's progress and final artwork in relation to the overall topic of self-portraits (see Appendix 8). Nevertheless, there was great tension over the group evaluations of the artwork. Judy was so argumentative and defensive about her artwork that she refused the grades the other students wanted to give her. She insisted that her work was "personal, misjudged and misunderstood." The other students argued that although she had gone wild with painting and collage and greatly enjoyed herself, she did "sloppy last minute work-last night" and did not see how she had integrated any of the exercises related to portraiture. It took over an hour and half to evaluate her and, although I intervened many times, a fight broke out and Judy cried.

When it was Annie's turn to show her artwork, Judy felt vicious, and wanted revenge. Like Judy, Annie also had final projects done at home without supervision and that did not incorporate portrait exercises. She argued bitterly about her grade and disagreed with her classmates about the importance of using the techniques learned in class. Alan said he did not see "how a drawing of a horse related to self-portraits" (see Figure 28). This comment made Annie livid and she burst out in tears. Because of this, the evaluations got out of control and went way over class time. Although I did not mention it, I suspected that this piece had perhaps been made in a previous year, since it was not done on the paper or with the materials used in class, and since Annie had not worked in that style during the course.

**Figure 28** Annie's Horse



After a short break, the other two evaluations went smoothly and strengths and weakness were discussed without any further complications (Figures 29-32). Nevertheless, the whole episode ended the class on a painful note. In very the end, when the students threw all their art in a garbage can, I couldn't help feeling that the whole experience had been a series of disappointments. I consoled myself that the fifteen-week ordeal was finally over.

**Figure 29** Alan's Final Project I



**Figure 30** Alan's Final Project 2



**Figure 31** June's Final Project 1



**Figure 32 June's Final Project 2**



**Outline of the Real 15 Weeks**

- |                 |           |  |
|-----------------|-----------|--|
| <b>Week 1:</b>  |           | Introduction, <u>debate over art history and women</u> , (whole class)                                       |
| <b>Week 2:</b>  | <b>#*</b> | <u>The Contract</u> (half the class), pastel drawings of words   |
| <b>Week 3:</b>  | <b>*</b>  | <u>Debate over gender stereotypes</u> (half the class), blind drawing and gesture drawing of hands, charcoal |
| <b>Week 4:</b>  | <b>#*</b> | <u>Discussion about latecomers, long breaks, materials</u> (half the class), drawing eyes                    |
| <b>Week 5:</b>  | <b>*</b>  | <u>Debate over 'the gaze'</u> (half the class), drawing noses  |
| <b>Week 6:</b>  | <b>#</b>  | <u>Revising the contract</u> (half the class), drawing mouths  |
| <b>Week 7:</b>  | <b>#</b>  | <u>Mid-term evaluations</u> (whole class)  |
| <b>Week 8:</b>  | <b>*</b>  | 'Self-portraits: imagining myself,' facial construction, complete face                                       |
| <b>Week 9:</b>  |           | Exhibition: Marion Wagschal at Bellefeuille gallery  |
| <b>Week 10:</b> | <b>#*</b> | <u>Debate</u> : Students kick a classmate out of the course (half of class)                                  |

<b>Week 10:</b>		Color-mixing and portraits
<b>Week 11:</b>	*	Brushstroke exercises and student initiated projects
<b>Week 12:</b>	*	Collage techniques and student initiated projects
<b>Week 13:</b>		Exhibition: La Centrale-Powerhouse "Love-Horror"
<b>Week 14:</b>	#	Final evaluations of 'participation' grade, student initiated projects
<b>Week 15:</b>		Final presentations of artwork

# 6 classes partially or totally devoted to New School procedures

\* 8 classes with art-making, approximately 10 hours in total

\_ 10 classes with conflict in discussions

6 full classes (according to my plan) only three of which included art making

(See Appendix 2 for the detailed outline.)

### **Evaluation of "Women's Perspectives"**

To evaluate "Women's Perspectives" it is noteworthy that the student's particular strengths were their capacity for meaningful response to artworks, as they showed themselves capable of intense involvement with art and eloquent in interpretation. Progress with art-making was sufficient but not enough time was devoted to it (in and out of class) for students to fully exploit the techniques of portraiture. Aside from considerable effort, dedication and progress in June's artwork, the overall lack of serious work in student's individual projects and sketch-books was disappointing. Nevertheless, efforts had been made (especially at the last minute), students progressed stylistically, conceptually and technically over the semester, and that they appeared to have learned about art and feminism.

In all fairness, the evaluation of "Women's Perspectives" can only be done by creating distance from the emotional climate that was troublesome throughout the course. In this regard, being flexible with the original of plan "Women's Perspectives" permitted

the transformation of a difficult situation into one where the students learned about art. Although they did not learn everything I originally planned, I realize in retrospect, that the project was very ambitious, with too much material and too little time. It was necessary for me to let go of many expectations I had toward the students (such as developing their feminist consciousness) and this process of letting go (or resignation) made room for students to alter their resistance somewhat. Interestingly, by placing the emphasis on art-making rather than on feminism half-way through the semester allowed students to shift their preconceived negative attitudes toward feminism (and feminists). This change in the student-teacher dynamic allowed for a more personal and less confrontational reconsideration of gender stereotypes. Thus, the goals of feminist pedagogy were achieved after all.

A profound indicator of the success of “Women’s Perspectives” is best illustrated by the changes in student behavior in class. I found it heart-warming, for example, that June, who had expressed during the mid-term evaluations that she “never talked” because she “hated everything she said,” had begun talking about her artwork and her thoughts on the readings. It appeared that she gained self-confidence through strengthening her art-making abilities. It was she that profited the most from the techniques of portraiture and was able to explore visions of ‘self’ in her art. June’s ability to open up in class was also made possible by Judy’s shift in attitude toward me. Once Judy perceived that I was truly supportive of her artistic progress, she became more trusting and less oppositional. In retrospect these factors stand out as the most significant aspects of “Women’s Perspectives.” In the end, June’s remark made the fifteen week struggle worthwhile when she said “before I knew I had feminist *tendencies*...but now I know I am a feminist.”

## **Analysis: Understanding Student Resistance**

### **Resistance to Feminism**

Although the content of “Women’s Perspectives” was interesting in itself, it was the challenge of bringing non-mainstream material into the classroom that constitutes the basis for thought-provoking analysis. As amply described above, although I had some successes, I encountered many difficulties in relation to student’s attitudes, such as apathy and resistance to feminist ideas. These challenges led me to do research into student resistance and to theorize hypotheses about a more successful enterprise.

As a feminist art educator inexperienced with consciousness-raising, I started out teaching “Women’s Perspectives in Drawing: the Self-Portrait” at Dawson College’s New School with enthusiasm and high hopes. It was my intention to involve students into what I perceived as meaningful discussions and related art-making techniques in an effort to ‘give’ them a voice. From the outset, my efforts were halted by strong resistances to feminism that became hostile and difficult to cope with. The students were not making the connections that I thought were obvious and I was forced to reassess my goals. I revised my approach to include analysis and exercises for students to adequately understand certain words, ideas, concepts and realities related to gender: what is gender, what is a stereotype, etc. Nonetheless, once the argumentative tone of the course was set, it seemed difficult to alter the trajectory of resistance to feminism in particular and to my course in general.



It may seem odd that students would enroll in a course on women in the arts and then resist the content. However, it may appear that students resist feminist ideas because they are unaware of the most basic facts concerning gender discrimination and social injustice. In the case at Dawson, for example, students wanted to be *convinced* of the pervasiveness of gender, racial and class discrimination and the extent to which it affected their own lives. Explaining the existence of “oppressive conceptual frameworks such as patriarchy with its basic beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions that are used to justify and maintain the subordination of one group by another” (Warren, 1989, p. 47) was insufficient. The students in “Women’s Perspectives” wanted ‘proof.’ When presented with well-known facts about gender inequality in the work force (comparable pay for comparable work) or a gendered division of labor in terms of childcare or domestic issues, students would find examples to disprove the average rule: “my sister makes more money than my brother” or “my dad always cleans the house and takes care of the kids.” The notion of generalizations often appeared conceptually difficult for some students to grasp (Bohmer, 1989, p. 63).

Ironically, empirical generalizations would be confused with stereotypes and the findings rejected on the basis of exceptions from the rule. A more profound understanding of how statistics and averages are calculated, and why this data allows researchers to understand, predict or change human behavior can help to clear issue up (Bohmer, 1989, p. 63). Explaining the difference between the rigidity of stereotypes that are arbitrarily imposed upon a group of people and the more neutral generalization based upon research that are flexible enough to account for exceptions, could help student grapple with the concept of ‘types’. (p. 65)

The student's lack of knowledge (or denial) about basic facts surprised and destabilized me since I did not know actual statistics off-hand. I had not planned for this sort of ground-work in my lesson plan, which resulted in a lowering of my patience.

Later on, I gave the students photocopies from Hilary Lip's (1988) book *Sex and Gender* that contained actual statistics on gender discrimination. When interpellated for discussion, it was clear that the students had not read the material. With hindsight it seems obvious that some of the resistance was a way of redirecting attention away from their failure to do the work. Nevertheless, an interesting objection that the students had to data that would 'prove' the existence of discrimination against women (that I read out loud) was that the political nature of the inquiry was considered suspect. According to Bohmer, the very nature of the findings may be believed to be colored by the researchers' feminist agenda or personal beliefs (1989, p. 66). Feminists may in fact only be "complaining" about issues that are "in the eye of the beholder" (in the words of Judy). "Vocal feminists get labeled feminist battle axes with a gender agenda" (Luke, Gore, 1992, p. 202). Questions do not arise, however, doubting the meaning nor the use of data in sociology courses, for example, which are considered "value-free" (Luke & Gore, 1992, p. 66). In women's studies, the material may be biased in favor of an argument about women's oppression (!) which leads some students to challenge the material. This points to the invisible power of patriarchal indoctrination which appears as normal, neutral and non-political, the stereotype about women's lack of authority and the deeply imbedded adversarial (and hierarchical) model of education in which the strongest argument wins.

Eventually, on insisting students look at the numbers on paper, some students at Dawson did recognize how the statistics related to the lives of their mother's in particular. For most of them, it was nevertheless difficult to listen to statistics about social inequity, especially in terms of careers. In conjunction with a lack of historical perspective, many students believed strongly in the individualistic work ethic that *they* would be recompensed by their personal effort (Rothenberg, 1988, p. 138). This idea would seem logical in the world students have been led to believe in and participate in through education, a world that truly recognizes talent, brilliance and ambition, and be devoid of systems of privilege based on race, sex and class. When statistics point to difficulties for members of their social position or group, students prefer to believe that *they* will be the exceptions. From this perspective, it can be assumed that "Women's Perspectives in Drawing" introduced students to gender oppression for the first time on a conscious level. The disillusion the students experienced in having to admit that the world was not the place they understood it to be caused them to experience anger directed at the facilitator. It seemed easier to deny the existence of oppression than to analyze it.

According to sociologist Victor Rios' (1988) there are three explanations for people's opposition to social change:

- the change is not understood
- the proposed change threatens basic security
- the proposed change is viewed by those it is intended to benefit as imposed on them<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Victor Rios is quoted by Karen Warren (1989, p. 56), his colleague at Macalester College. Rios made these statements at the Macalester College Faculty Retreat on Cultural Pluralism, Feb. 13, 1988.

Students can be reluctant to engage in self-critique and to identify with issues of oppression because it confronts them with ugly realities they would prefer to avoid (James, 1991, p. 82). Feminism itself is thus perceived as oppressive and seen as a threat as it challenges all aspects of student's personal lives they have learned to negotiate (James, 1991, p. 171). These 'threats' that feminism creates include:

The threat of abandonment; the threat of having to struggle within unequal power relations; the threat of psychological/social/sexual, as well as economic and political marginality; the threat of retributive violence—threats lived in concrete embodied ways. (Lewis, 1992, p. 187)

Lewis concludes: "Is it any wonder that many women desire to disassociate from 'those' women whose critique of our social/cultural world seems to focus and condense male violence?" (1992, p. 187).

For women students then, feminist politics can require difficult emotional work (Lewis, 1992, p. 172) because it has an effect on their personal interactions with men. Women are involved in the care-taking of men and they do not want to 'oppress' individual men or make them responsible for the overall system. By stating that there is always 'another side to the story' to consider, they do not want to 'hurt the feelings' of men, and in so doing override the possibility of understanding how individual men profit from the system of privilege in every day life. This was particularly true since there was one male student in "Women's Perspectives," who certainly did not fit the stereotype of the 'macho male.' Lewis continues: "The protective posture on the part of women on behalf of men is the result of psychological investment women are required to make in the emotional well-being of men." (1992, p. 172) Caring about men's opinions and

achievements at the expense of their own is what education has taught women to do. The “potential ‘betrayal’ and psychosexual rejection of women by men has created a conflict between a woman’s desire for knowledge and simultaneous desire for embodiment as sexually desirable human being” (Lewis, 1992, p. 182). For young college women especially, who are just discovering their sexuality, feminism can appear ‘man hating’ and they do not want to put their femininity at risk.

Although some women’s behaviors, stands and choices would identify them as feminists, they are reluctant to do so (Cohee, 1998, p. 2). This was the case for my students at Dawson. Women seemed to fear coming together as a group and being negatively labeled ‘feminist’ because “the very fact of ‘knowing’ is an act of insubordination” (Lewis, 1992, p. 179). To expose injustice out in the open and to demand rectification might be seen as an act that justifies ridicule and further violation (p. 179). It is interesting to note that very few women signed up for my course at Dawson because I had mentioned the word ‘feminist’ in the syllabus. As I had mentioned earlier, students told me that people “just weren’t into feminism.” It is easy to imagine that seventeen and nineteen year old students may have negative images of ‘feminists’ gleaned from the media. They were excited however by the radical tone of the other New School courses entitled ‘Gender’, ‘Prejudice’, ‘Revolution!’

When students become aware of their oppression or privilege, they may sense that their expectations for the future might need revision. The difficult work begins when personal behaviors or attitudes come under investigation pertaining to gender and other

stereotypes and students recognize the ideological underpinnings of what they believed was personal choice. This is the case for example when young women feel the ambiguity involved in wearing tight clothing or make-up. The notion of the individual as a free agent, romantically 'untouched' by society (and possibly rebellious of it) is exposed to be a fiction. Students are shocked when they realize how they have been culturally conditioned. Lewis states the problem quite clearly: "For many women the 'good news' of the transformative powers of feminist consciousness turns into the 'bad news' of social inequality and therefore, a perspective and politics they want to resist" (1992, p. 168). It was for these and other reasons that teaching "Women's Perspectives in Drawing—the Self-Portrait" was fraught with difficulties I was unprepared to deal with. I had simply assumed that the opportunity to explore how student's lived reality may have gone unnamed and unnoticed (Rothenberg, 1988, p. 139) would open up interesting dimensions of identity politics that might in turn be reflected in exploratory artwork. Instead, the feminist project took a turn toward resistance. I suspect nevertheless that some students read the statistics afterward at home which might have positively influenced their attitudes in class as time went on.

### **The Alternative Culture of the New School**

The New School students were a combination of 'hippies' and 'punks,' both in their styles of clothing and in their ideas. They were full of tattoos, nose, lip and tongue rings, and raggedy clothes with long hair. It was not clear if they were in favor of social justice or anarchic rebellion.

Greta Nemiroff suggests that part of the resistance student's experience is due to their age group, which ranges from 16 to 25 years of age. She says: "Students of college age are experiencing enormous physiological, emotional, and social changes in their lives. Their bodies are still undergoing internal changes that may result in radical changes of appearance" (1992, p. 108). This makes them all the more sensitive to 'looks', 'life-style', and 'in-ness' and may render personal explorations of gender stereotypes even more difficult. Nemiroff says: "young adults are tempted to think of themselves as being a kind of superteen-that is, a person who has really made it, the epitome of the teenage ethos" (p. 135). This would explain why the atmosphere at the New School falls between 'too cool to be involved' and outright anger, as it demonstrates the extremes of unresolved teenage behavior. It might also explain the student's fascination with the shock value of art like in Chicago's Dinner Party or the body piercing in the Love-Horror exhibition. Nemiroff also recognizes the complexity in getting students to question issues of oppression since "strict fidelity to abstract moral constructs such as peace or justice, unrelated to existing conditions, is more typical of adolescent thinking" (p. 136)

Another factor that connects age group with problems of resistance is the situation of economic recession in which many 'New Schoolers' grew up in. Nemiroff believes that "the combination of the political backlash and a serious economic recession has worked to wipe out many, if not most, of the very modest and mild changes [of social progress] of the 1960's" (1992, p. 49). This political backlash was reflected in student's frequent rejection of feminist ideas on the basis 'political correctness.' Raising serious questions regarding the existing social forms engendered resistance often expressed through choosing ignorance and "by refusing to acknowledge that their subjectivities

have been constructed out of social practices that surround them” (p. 68). As part of a generation that has been greatly influenced by consumerism, Nemiroff argues that students today, supported by the media, see education as meaningful “as a way of getting into a higher income bracket to buy more” and to acquire “self-esteem through possessions” (p. 109). In her view, students are more inclined to resistance today than when the New School was founded because they see a CEGEP education as “a form of coercion to get somewhere else, a stepping stone to university” and the New School “appears as the best of all available evils” (p. 142). In this sense, they are not psychologically prepared for alternative forms of learning where questions such as ‘who am I?’ and ‘who am I really?’ can cause painful reactions to be relived.

Another particularity of the New School is the problematic relationship it entertains with the “‘regular’ Dawson,” as it was often called. On the one hand, the students felt happily ‘different’ from the rest of Dawson. On the other hand, they felt rejected by it, as Cynthia once told me “they call us the ‘weirdoes’ on the seventh floor.” The fact that many students come to the New School out of disenchantment with past school experiences (Nemiroff, 1992, p.114) may be reflected in rebellious clothing, ideas and the ‘marginal’ choice in alternative education. This may result in oppositional attitudes and possibly an *a priori* ambiguous relationship to what constitutes ‘real’ learning. In very concrete terms, the New School is ostracized from the rest of the Dawson community, both in terms of its physical location at the very top of the building and at farthest end of the hallway, and its lack of budget for full-time staff or materials of any sort. This obliges the school to hire Baccalaureate and Master’s students from the Montreal university community on a volunteer basis, and sometimes second year students



from within the New School (!) Knowledge of this 'no pay' status may have an impact on the student's perception about the quality of their education, generating an even greater need for protective resistance.

### **Points of Contention: Logistics, Course-work, Grading**

When students enroll at the New School, they are presumably aware of, and in agreement with, the humanistic goals of the school as they are manifested in class procedures, contracts, etc. In practical reality, however, they struggle with the alternative aspects of learning such as group process, self-directed learning and personal commitment. Although they initially rejected the more impersonal teaching and learning styles of 'regular' Dawson, they nevertheless abuse of the loose structure and emphasis on the process in the 'open classroom' to waste time, or avoid involvement. Says Nemiroff: "students are often initially surprised to see that they are expected to be responsible and accountable for and to themselves and others in the community" (1992, p.113).

Reflecting on the above, what stands out most clearly is the discrepancy between student's initial registration in a feminist course and their subsequent unwillingness to participate in the logistics or coursework. Throughout the fifteen weeks, the points of contention were:

Being absent or late and taking extended breaks

Not buying materials and not bringing them in from week to week

Refusal to participate in class discussions or over-reacting

Not doing the course-work they had contracted to do

Power struggles over grading

It can be imagined, for example, that writing the 'contract' with the students would be helpful in clarifying expectations and responsibilities, but in practical terms it did not make them feel accountable. It was unfortunate that they could not hold up their agreement, especially in relation to reading and writing. The idea of sharing the grading procedure with the students initially relieves the facilitator of the pressure of authority. In classroom reality a form of chaos developed out of a lack of leadership. The interminable discussions about logistics (evaluations, renegotiations, etc.) were excruciatingly painful at times. This had the result of preventing students from being exposed to all the material originally planned and from following logical steps toward grasping certain concepts or art-making techniques. Although I agree with the pertinence of having an open class atmosphere, at times it felt like community therapy or an excuse not to get to work. Much class time was taken up due to misunderstandings and bad feelings. To a great extent, there were a lot of power struggles among students and between the teacher and the students. It must be added that the students were very honest about each other's performance in the evaluations, but sometimes so blatantly frank that it bordered on lack of respect.

It appeared to me, therefore, that there was incongruity between the theoretical underpinnings of the school and the practical applications of it. The seventeen and eighteen year old students in "Women's Perspectives" did not appear ready for, or capable of, appreciating what alternative education had to offer them. The dissonance

they experienced between their previous education and the alternative one, created a feeling that alternative learning was not real. Since they shared some of the power (in grading for example), then school necessarily appeared 'easy' because it did not correspond to their indoctrinated beliefs about what constitutes 'real' learning (from master to pupil). Since individual participation was emphasized, then coming to class was all that mattered and 'anything goes.' As Nemiroff writes: "At the New School, we experience frequent resistance on the part of students to completing work they themselves have contracted to do, to considering insights suggested to them, or to ways in which the ideologies of the school have become expressed through custom and practice (Nemiroff, 1992, p. 70). When suddenly given power in relation to their education, they fail to "put themselves in the equation" (O'Barr, 1994, p. 273). They do not use their power to learn *for and from themselves* but to get permission for being late. In essence, they feel empowered to rebel against the 'facilitator,' the school, and ultimately themselves. They do not grasp that "it is radical to suggest the importance of nurturing as well as independence, community as well as individualism, caring as well as responsibility in the classroom" (Gaskell, 1995, p. 110) and that this is far from *easy*.

### **Art: an 'Easy Credit'**

Another issue related to resistance is that "Women's Perspectives" was the only art class available at the New School. Students may have registered *in spite* of the feminist content and may have expected it to be an 'easy' course. This might be an idea about so-called 'complementary' art courses left over from high school. In class one, for example, students expressed the idea of coming to art class to 'have fun' and 'to relax'

since “art was impossible to evaluate because it was so personal.” In class four, they told me “but it’s *only* art class!” when I was angry about late arrivals. If art was not a serious subject, was without standards and impossible to evaluate, there would be no rush to buy the art materials either.

It became visible therefore that the Dawson students had preconceived ideas about art, learned through their education, that art is not a serious subject. This is why students often experienced conflict between their understanding of art as a leisurely, easy, passive activity (what Sandell calls the ‘feminine-identification of art’ (1991, p. 184) and the real demands of the course that (appeared to them) as heavy: five articles to read, in-class discussions, sketchbooks, three papers, four final artworks, and one presentation. This only made a difficult class atmosphere even worse. Many times during the semester, students came to me and said: “There was a paper due in my ‘English Composition’ class so I couldn’t do my sketchbook (my paper, my artwork, my reading or whatever).” They did not feel that the deadlines in an art class were as important as in other subjects. In essence, they believed (and said) that art-making did not involve intense work. As I already mentioned, Judy accepted lower grades to avoid writing papers, and Annie, faced with the reality of having to make meaningful art in the end of the semester, may have presented artwork done in a previous year. By refusing to do class readings, to discuss, to work in their sketchbooks or to do final artwork, students compromised their potential for art learning.

It is for all these reasons that I now believe that even a ‘regular’ art course (without the feminism) would be fraught with behavioral and accountability problems at the New

School. In this alternative humanities program, students had serious career related projects to tackle, relegating art to the last of priorities.

### **Perceived Authority and Feminist Pedagogy**

In many ways the students of “Women’s Perspectives” resisted what they perceived as my authority as a teacher. By coming in late, not respecting the contract, or refusing to participate they were testing my limits. When Judy said: “I didn’t think you were any good before you showed us your artwork,”<sup>9</sup> I realized that students had been doubting my competence as a teacher while resisting what they perceived as authority and reacting to what they interpreted as irrelevant to the learning process (such as making connections to their personal lives). I see these issues as indications of a gap between the goals of feminist pedagogy and the need for authority in the feminist classroom.

Many times, Pat Powers, the co-director of the New School would say to me: “students would never try *that* behavior with me!” During staff meetings, fellow male facilitators, often younger and with less teaching experience than I, said that they did not have any problems with authority or resistance in their classrooms, even in their gender or racial-related courses. Since women teachers are not automatically accorded the same authority as male professors due to stereotypes about women, both male and female students tend to devalue and trivialize women’s ideas and accomplishments (Maher, 1998, p. 26) rendering resistance all the more probable. In addition, as mentioned

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<sup>9</sup> The students saw three of my oil paintings in my car, incidentally, on the way to the Marion Wagschal exhibition.

previously, the issue of authority is further exacerbated at the New School due to lack of resources, requiring unpaid teacher-trainees to facilitate groups. This no doubt undermines the teacher's expertise, as unpaid positions do not convey the same status and respect that paid professionals do.

What complicates the issue even more is that feminist pedagogy posits itself as a means to share authority with the students and to break down teacher-student hierarchies. It becomes all the more difficult for the feminist pedagogue to share an authority she is not accorded in the first place. And in the case I experienced at Dawson, how does one establish power in the eyes of students without attempting to have power over them? When the students did not respect deadlines, for example, I did not know what else to do but to remind them of their responsibilities. This may have exacerbated issues of authority through transference, reminding them perhaps of parental directives: "don't forget to wash your hands..... to come in by eleven.....*to do your art homework!*"

### **General Patterns of Apathy**

In addition to a problematic relationship to authority due to the student's age group, the alternative atmosphere of the New School, the unconscious lack of authority accorded to unpaid women teachers, the class procedures related to humanistic goals of education and finally to the loose approach of feminist pedagogy, students in "Women's Perspectives" exhibited both resistance and apathetic attitudes toward any discussions with political content. Either Judy was vociferous or the others were silent and lacked opinion. Sheldon Berman (1997), in his book *Children's Social Consciousness and the*

*Development of Social Responsibility*, investigates the reasons why young people today appear to exhibit apathetic attitudes toward social-political issues. Berman finds that many youths “stand at a great distance from the political arena, drawing a boundary around themselves that, at once, protects them from buffeting questions and paralyzes them into inaction. At an early age they begin to live as if that social and political arena were detached from their daily lives” (p. 2). Quite accurately describing a common sense of disconnection with the world, a twelve year old boy tells Berman in an interview: “I care about the world, but it doesn’t concern me, even though it does” (p. 1).

This ambivalence about the social-political world was obvious for the students at Dawson as they shied away from what sounded ‘politically correct.’ In a detached and aloof way, they were interested in learning about women in art, even though it didn’t concern them. They were not sure if it was good or bad to be for women’s issues and felt separate from the world of discrimination. One student told me: “the world is out there and I am in here, and I just want to break away and be free.” Other reasons Berman finds for political inactivity are learned helplessness, lack of abilities for problem-solving and lack of conflict resolution skills (p. 36).

One of Berman’s major findings is that young children who are brought up in uncontested and ‘harmonious’ governmental regimes such as in Canada or the United States, marginalize and avoid conflict (p. 112). As they grow older, they are intimidated by politics in the media and tend to overestimate the level of conflict involved. Children from other countries like South Africa or Northern Ireland, however, learn to live with conflict on a daily basis (p. 112). Therefore, Berman suggests practical solutions such as

the presence of positive role models of social activists in children's daily lives, open classrooms that involve discussions about controversial subjects and conflict resolution techniques (p. 109). He says: "Students would be helped to acquire a sense of personal effectiveness by participating in successful social change events" (p. 157). Through practice students would learn the 'how' of activism. Although Berman is dealing specifically with primary school children, his ideas underline the importance of teaching college students to understand their place in a world of conflict and to learn resources for surviving and overcoming difficulties.

## **Reflections on "Women's Perspectives"**

### **Criticism of "Women's Perspectives"**

In reflecting on "Women's Perspectives," I can see that there were several problems with the overall project. First of all, I did not adequately understand and prepare for the age-group or the type of alternative culture I was to experience at the New School. I was unfamiliar with (and therefore frustrated by) the classroom procedures that took up so much of the class time. I planned my course according to my interests and knowledge but did not take into consideration that the students would be mostly inexperienced in art, and therefore not capable of independent art work (and too irresponsible). As beginners, they would have benefited from more directive teaching and structured art projects that they could then interpret in their own way. In other words, instead of student-initiated projects, I should have given them problems to solve with specific directions, for



example: “Do a realistic drawing of a hand with two primary and three secondary colours. The background must have texture in it.”

It becomes clear in retrospect that the connection between the feminist theme in each class and the art-making component was too loose. Since I gained my inspiration from Marion Wagschal’s “Women’s Perspectives in Painting” course that I took at Concordia University years earlier, I overlooked the fact that it was only offered to third year fine arts students, who had considerable experience with art and art history. Therefore there was a rift between what I had originally planned and the actual needs of the students at Dawson.

Furthermore, I was not informed about the possibility of student resistance to feminism and therefore ill prepared to deal with it. Although I received considerable support and help from my supervisor at Concordia, Elizabeth Saccà, I received little institutional support at Dawson, which might have helped me directly in the classroom. Had I more experience with conflict resolution techniques myself, it might have been possible for me to confront the student’s resistance directly in a collective effort to solve the dilemma. Instead, I was so frazzled that this idea never occurred to me. Within the struggle to follow my plan while dealing with the unforeseen circumstances, I lost my initial focus of connecting the students to their personal experiences, their bodies and their lived-lives in the world. Instead, I got caught up in an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ frame of mind (both me versus the students, and us/feminists/activists versus them/patriarchy/status quo). This confirmed the mythic structure of the opposition, leaving it in place while, merely and ineffectually reversing the evaluation of its terms.

Although I was trying to create a space for the inclusion of women in the arts, through argumentation with the students, I had in some ways opened the gulf between us.

In connection with unknowingly setting up a 'me' versus 'them' division in the classroom, I discovered in my subsequent research that one of my founding arguments about the objectification of women through use of the 'male' gaze was limited. In trying to bring students to recognize this type of gaze in art history, I was again reinforcing an oppositional framework (good gaze, bad gaze and more subtly 'acceptable' or 'unacceptable' art). At the time, I based my analysis on Laura Mulvey's thesis (1985) that women are traditionally constrained within a passive female spectatorship, and see other women and themselves only in terms of the 'male' gaze. However feminists, such as Sherlock (1992) for example, feel that the definition of female spectatorship "as a male masquerade....fails to deal with the multiple and often contradictory positions all human beings assume" and finds it to be "a position without political hope" (p.52). Similarly, Desjardins (1989) believes that Mulvey's definition of women's "oscillation between a feminine and a masculine position" (who variously identifies with the active subject *and* with the objectified female body), does not offer "an optimistic view that a spectator can transform a text at the level of reception" (p. 71). This indicates that although the implied viewer of art may traditionally be male, there could be "disjuncture between patriarchal text and female audience" (Gledhill, 1997, p. 373). In this regard Christine Gledhill asks some pertinent questions:

Does a fiction construct only one, fixed position for the spectator, so that our choice is either to occupy that position or switch channels?

Is the viewer-the social audience member-in total thrall to the subject position constructed in the text?

Can the viewer find—or construct-*other* positions within the text, which coincide more closely with her own particular social experience and outlook, and which may be at variance with dominant gender ideologies? (1997, p. 374)

In relation to this Griselda Pollock (1993) provides an interesting insight into the ‘problem’ of viewing art:

The psyche is indelibly marked by the culture which forms it, while also containing more than any culture will officially sanction...[Therefore] we can read art symptomatically for meaning shaped by the drama of the subject. (p. 11)

This suggests that women (and men) may be able to find ways of interpreting art that do not strictly adhere to the male gaze or to objectification of the female body. It also points to the varying degrees with which the male gaze objectifies women. According to Mathews, “theories of the male gaze too often ignore what might escape or resist being understood in its terms alone” (1991, p. 417) and there are variations that range from “seductive sexuality to uncomfortable domination” (p. 426). Therefore, although the images of women may partake of an overall oppressive ideology, they may not be perceived as equally offensive. Consequently, by contrasting the intended spectators to the actual social audience, it is illuminating to discover that male-centered artworks can signify more than one meaning to both complying or resisting viewers. It is this last point that would have interesting to explore in “Women’s Perspectives” in relation to the canon of art (and how to approach it). Perhaps this nuance in the interpretation of the gaze would have made the subject more palatable and less controversial for the students.

In conjunction with this discovery about the gaze was a recognition about the type of feminism I was unwittingly embracing when teaching “Women’s Perspectives.” My more recent feminist research has led me to question the women artists I showed in the art appreciation segments of the course. I presented artists that I had found in feminist anthologies such as N. Broude and M. Garrard’s (1994) *The Power of Feminist Art*, W. Slatkin’s (1985) *Women Artists in History*, N. Heller’s (1987) *Women Artists*, M. Tipett’s (1992) *By a Lady-A Century of Canadian Women Artists*, L. Lippard’s (1976) *From the Center-Feminist Essays on Women’s Art* and more. It did not occur to me at the time that these white women artists had in some sense been recognized through ‘official’ gallery and publication systems. I did not identify my ‘brand’ of feminism as ‘white middle-class feminism,’ and was unaware that I was leaving out all discussion of race and ethnicity, as if these categories were extraneous to discussions of gender or to the formulation of ‘voice.’

In this way, I again adhered to an oppositional framework by simplifying the factions. Yvonne Gaudelius says: “unless we accept this responsibility of teaching across difference, we will continue to teach in ways that define male subjectivity as the norm and relegate women [and the other] to a status of socially constructed inferiority and object” (1998, p.172). Furthermore, it becomes a suspicious political position to demand more inclusion of women in the canons of education without emphasizing the various intersections between race, class and gender that do not represent a single unified voice (Orner, 1992, p. 74). Thus, race and class cannot be separated from issues of gender as this knowledge is necessary to any project on identity politics that aims for ‘authentic

voice.’ especially in a CEGEP or university context where few ‘others’ are represented among the professoriate.

In this regard, some post-structural feminists, like Patti Lather and Elizabeth Ellsworth, have criticized notions of empowerment by asking who it is that is empowering whom? And whether this is not yet another hierarchy of power relations? Lather says: “we need to think outside of a framework which sees the ‘other’ as the problem for which we are the solution” and “there is no innocent discourse of liberation” (Lather, 1994, p. 132). In Mimi Orner’s view “calls for ‘authentic’ student voice contain realist and essentialist epistemological positions regarding subjectivity” (1992, p. 75). Concomitantly, Ellsworth argues that “no one affinity group could ever ‘know’ the experiences and knowledges of another, nor the social positions that were not their own” (1992, p. 110). Therefore, she continues, “it is only by accepting a multiplicity of ways of knowing (that are never fixed and that change) that difference can become a source of creativity” (p. 111). Finally, “instead of framing the slipperiness of identity as a problem to be solved, feminist post-structuralists regard the inability to fix identities and be known through them in any definite way” to be empowering in itself (p. 74). It is what she calls a “pedagogy of the unknowable” (p. 110).

These arguments about the necessity of acknowledging the ‘unknowable’ aspects of identity allude to the critical question of how members of privileged groups can partake in the unlearning of oppression. It is pertinent to ask:

How we as individuals-mostly white members of the dominant culture either male or female-can break the circles of privilege from which we ourselves speak. How do we make room in the academy for new voices and questions?” Issues of voice are matters of concern not only in how we choose texts and manage our classroom

relations. They arise as well in how we conduct our affairs as inheritors and managers of the academy. (Jackson, 1993, p. 40)

Finally, contrary to my entire plan at Dawson, it should not be expected that students encountering political issues for the first time would be able to deal with the material or understand their position. Ellsworth says: “social subjects who are split between the conscious and unconscious, and cut across by multiple, intersecting, and contradictory subject positions, can never fully ‘know’ their own experiences” (1992, p. 110). Nemiroff suggests that teachers in alternative situations need to develop “great sensitivity, supportiveness, patience and trust,” (1992, p.89) a “dose of utopianism,” and “must be willing to be ‘bearers of dangerous memory,’ keeping alive the memory of human suffering by recounting the history of the marginal, the vanquished and the oppressed, and by actively opposing the hegemonic practice of ‘not naming’ (p.72). Therefore, she believes that “teachers whose dream is the transformation of society have to get control of a permanent process of forming themselves” (p. 72) to have a solid knowledge of their subject matter and enable disagreement without disconfirmation (p. 182). A major difficulty, however, is legitimizing the open expression of student voice while simultaneously challenging aspects of that voice which negate the educational and political vision of the teacher (p.69). For all of these reasons a course like “Women’s Perspectives” is not recommended for a first-time teaching experience in a context that would be unknown or unfamiliar.

### **Hypotheses about a Successful “Women’s Perspectives”**

When analyzing “Women’s Perspectives,” it becomes clear that the most important improvements toward the success of the course would be knowledge of the age group and more realism about time constraints and New School procedures. One helpful insight concerning the age-group is found in Barbara G. Davis’ (1993) book, *Tools for Teaching*. She proposes teachers become aware and gear their teaching to appropriate phases of their students’ intellectual development (p. 178). She outlines that freshman college students tend to need more structure, want the ‘right’ answers in a ‘yes or no’, ‘either-or’ fashion and have little tolerance for open-ended discussions (p. 178). Basing her ideas on Perry’s (1970) model, and adapted from Schmidt and Davidson (1983), Davis suggests teachers help students move to higher levels of cognitive development. She says: “to help students appreciate other points of view [and to] challenge students’ clichés,” teachers should reinforce the value of entertaining competing arguments and support the notion that not all evidence is equally valid (p. 179). She concludes that students will need guidance and empathy because “the appreciation of multiple points of view, wrong decisions and dealing with uncertainties” may cause anxiety (p. 180).

In relation to outbreaks of anger in the classroom, familiarity with conflict resolution strategies inspired from psychotherapeutic practice could be helpful. In the face of strong emotions, student hostility could be redirected to better understand its source. In “Women’s Perspectives,” instead of searching for more proof or more persuasive arguments, which only railed against further resistance, it would have been appropriate to bring students back to their feelings of resistance about the course. In this way, the

emphasis would have remained on the process of learning as opposed to content of the material. Other techniques from psychotherapy which could be used to channel student energies into more productive venues would be the acknowledgment of personal boundaries, directive and non-directive counseling techniques, listening skills, paraphrasing, reflection, the use of questions, and role-playing exercises.

Concretely in relation to teaching another feminist art workshop, my hypotheses about ideal conditions would be:

- A studio setting with sinks, worktables or easels
- More mature clientele, with life-experience
- Participants with knowledge of feminism or interest in the proposed topic
- Experience or interest in art-making

**Figure 33.** Participants at work in “Women’s Body Image Art Workshop”





## **5. Operational Implications: “Women’s Body Image Art Workshop”**

In order to test the hypotheses above and to verify to what extent I could succeed in soliciting interesting discussion and commitment to feminist art-making, I planned and organized a three hour art-making workshop entitled “Women’s Body Image Art Workshop.” It was my intention to orchestrate ideal conditions to improve my teaching strategies, and avoid (or at least manage) confrontations like the ones I experienced in “Women’s Perspectives.” With this goal in mind, I placed my advertisements in strategic places at Concordia University to attract a specific clientele to my workshop: on the billboards of the Fine Art Building, at the Simone de Beauvoir Institute, at the Liberal Arts College, the Department of Applied Social Science. I also placed an advertisement in the special section ‘Women’ of the Montreal Gazette. Although I could not control who exactly would participate in the workshop, I aimed for a well-rounded group of adults who shared different characteristics that might lead to the success of the “Women’s Body Image Art Workshop.” In sum, I expected students who were knowledgeable feminists interested in art (Simone de Beauvoir), some knowledgeable artists interested in feminism (Fine Arts), some knowledgeable in social work, group dynamics and conflict resolution techniques (Applied Social Science), some knowledgeable (and deeply invested in) so-called ‘male-centered canons’ of education (Coffey & Delamont, 2000) from the Liberal Arts College and some as adults with life experience from the Montreal community. It was to be expected therefore that my participants would be a group of educated women with knowledge in one or more of the proposed areas of analysis: feminism, art, group dynamics, educational canons and life-experience of gender oppression. Essentially, the

goals of “Women’s Body Image Art Workshop” would be the same as those of “Women’s Perspectives.” I hoped to touch on the same points and in the same manner as described on pages 37-38. Again, there would be the components of discussion, art appreciation, art making and response.

To make the art-making component accessible to participants least experienced in art, I planned a workshop that would be directive and not intimidating for beginners. I would be less directive if there were experienced artists or students of art among the participants. My experience with “Women’s Perspectives” proved to me how some beginners hold unrealistic expectations of their learning abilities in a relatively short period of time. To avoid possible discouragement about realistic drawing abilities of bodies in a three hour workshop, I devised a directed activity that would act as a springboard for creative art-making. The project would overcome the difficulty of drawing by tracing the participant’s own bodies on large pieces of paper. Once the tracing would be finished, they could choose painting, cutting and/or collage to explore personal meanings. At the same time, it was my idea this project would be most appropriate for auto-portraiture since real bodies would touch the paper and serve as ‘text’ for the artwork. To end the workshop, I would lead a short response activity, to verify in what ways the participants integrated the earlier discussion of body image into their paintings/collages and how they perceived the experience in general. I prepared a short questionnaire to learn more about the participants and the success of the workshop (see Appendix 12).

### **Participants in “Women’s Body Image Art Workshop”**

As discussed above, I expected to receive mostly students from Concordia University and some women from the Montreal community. Since I had placed over 12 posters on all the available billboards in the Visual Arts Building, I assumed that a majority of the participants would be from the different Fine Arts Departments. During the week that preceded the workshop, I did not receive a single call from any Fine Arts students. To my consternation, I discovered on the very day of the workshop that 10 of my posters, (duly stamped by the Dean) had been taken down within the Fine Arts building. It is impossible to know for sure whether the posters were removed by detractors. However, I was astounded to see that other posters on the different boards had remained in place. This realization was disturbing to me and made me feel somewhat nervous about any unseen but lurking adversaries. It made me wonder if this person (who I imagined as a crazy ‘he’) might try to prevent me from giving the workshop. During the hour and a half that I was alone in the classroom, in a relatively empty university on a Sunday morning, setting up the art materials for the workshop, (and trying not to be paranoid), I felt vulnerable as a woman and as a feminist in this context, having recently read an article on the Montreal Massacre at the Polytechnique<sup>10</sup>.

Nevertheless, at one o’clock on Sunday, March 10<sup>th</sup> 2002, nine women came to participate in “Women’s Body Image Art Workshop.” Eight of these women were from the Montreal community and had seen the advertisement in the Montreal Gazette. One

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<sup>10</sup> On December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1989, fourteen women were killed at the University of Montreal’s Ecole Polytechnique for supposedly being “feminists.”

woman was a student from the Master's program in Art Education at Concordia University. All nine of the participants were white and middle-class, eight were Anglophone, one Francophone, six of whom were Jewish, seven heterosexual, and two lesbian. In terms of age, two of the participants were in their thirties, one was in her forties, five were in their fifties, and one was over sixty. Most of the women held professional positions: three CEGEP teachers, one guidance counselor in CEGEP, one psychologist, one musician, one artist, one student (who worked part-time as an art teacher and part-time as a social worker) and one unidentified. Most of these women had university degrees: two with Ph.D's, two with Master's degrees, one student in a Master's program, two with Bachelor's degrees and two unidentified. Six of the women had training or experience in art and three were complete beginners. Four women were knowledgeable with feminist research, three "somewhat," and two did not specify. Eight identified themselves as feminists, one did not "call herself" a feminist.

### **Description of the Workshop**

#### **Motivational Activity and Discussion Period: One Hour**

I began the workshop by introducing myself, the participants, and the workshop. I had asked the participants to bring in four 'positive' and one 'negative' image of women from magazines and I invited them to place these cut-outs under the categories on the tables: 'positive', 'negative', 'half and half'. Each participant had approximately ten images, which resulted in more images than could fit on each table. I specified that they were allowed to move any images (even the ones that were not 'theirs') from one category to the other, if they did not agree with its placement. I imagined that this 'risk-

taking' would help stimulate the discussion. The participants actively played with the pictures and seemed thoughtful and interested. Even before the official beginning of the discussion, they were talking amongst themselves about their feelings and reacting to the images. We decided to start with the so-called 'negative' images and the participants were very eager to talk, often interrupting each other. Since everyone had something to say, my role was to mostly to moderate the discussion, allowing participants to finish their sentences without interruption. Sometimes I would prompt questions or paraphrase ideas to clarify them more fully. When one woman (a CEGEP teacher no less!) blurted out "your idea is absolutely ridiculous!" I needed to set down ground rules about disagreeing with other's ideas in a respectful manner.

**Figure 34** Magazine Cut-outs



Although the participants had placed certain images of women in the ‘negative’ category, there was hesitancy at first to condemn the images as *images*. In other words, they felt it was important to distinguish between liking representations of women for their artistic qualities (good photography, nice pose, etc.) but not liking the underlying ‘message’ or ideological content (woman as object, woman as sexual, etc). The very first image that spurred reaction was an image of a tribal woman with gold rings around her neck from National Geographic. They found that this “was a nice picture” but that it “portrayed a cultural practice that harmed women’s bodies” and that seeing this image made some “feel bad inside.” I asked the women to explain what was ‘negative’ about the images in this section. At first, the participants agreed that the images were ‘negative’ because women were portrayed as “superficial consumers,” that fashion images were “moronic” and did not correspond to their idea of “the everyday woman.” At this point, the participants exchanged visions of different types of women (career women, homemakers, students) and recognized how fashion images show a “fancy,” “glamorous,” “sexy” woman who does not appear busy. One woman remarked “well look at us here. none of us are dressed or made up, and we are everyday women.”

It was generally agreed that fashion imagery had greatly angered the participants when they were younger but in growing older they had become “indifferent” to them and the images were “contrived” and “all about money.” When asked if maybe indifference was a form of defense, they said it was a means of “survival” to “protect” themselves from the messages behind the images. Interestingly, it was at this point that anger began to be voiced about ideal female beauty. “This woman looks subjugated” or like “sex objects,” “inanimate and posed” and felt that these representations became “obscene” on

the side of a bus. One woman said: "I can choose to buy a magazine or not, but I feel coerced to look at billboards on the highway and this makes me really mad." Also, the frequency of nudity was "disturbing" to many, and the women felt that the frequent images of sexy women in lingerie and bathing suits were "exaggerated," "ridiculous," and "not realistic." They felt "annoyed" by the fact that society presents "one size" for women, that is, thin, and that at the same time there is "a stereotype about beautiful women not being smart and not being taken seriously." Another said: "It's not considered feminine or attractive to be smart, women are not supposed to be smart." Some women were surprised by this and said "Still? Not today? I thought things had changed!"

There was repeated preoccupation about the effects of beauty on younger women. In many ways, the women felt that they had themselves come to a certain understanding of the world with time and of their place within it. And although they sometimes had contradictory feelings, they were perhaps more realistic of the limits of their own bodies. They admitted to having suffered more as younger women. Most of the participants, ranging from fat to very thin, agreed to having felt "fat" as early as ten years old. They felt "pressure to conform" when they were younger. This led the discussion toward the participant's experiences with their daughters (there were many mothers and grandmothers) and how body conscious young girls were and still are today. There was agreement that younger women suffer the most from media representations of an idealized female form because: "the images say 'you've got to look like this to be loveable'" and felt strongly that young women's abilities "to take pride in themselves" were affected. An interesting comment was when a participant said that:

Over and beyond all these images, self-confidence and positive body image are subliminally passed on from mother to daughter. If the mother has a strong and positive body image, regardless of her shape, this will influence the daughter even more than societal pressure.

In this regard, the participants agreed that raising the consciousnesses of girls and young women was important, and stimulating critical stance to resist oppressive stereotypes, that affect the body and mind, was needed.

When asked directly if the 'negative' images affected their feelings of self-worth now, the participants answered: "What bothers me is that the image seems to say: 'This is what I am but you are not,'" "I would like to look like her, but I can't," "I compare myself and then feel fat and unattractive," and "I don't want to look fat." The women felt that all parts of their bodies were held up for impossible comparison with ideals of beauty: hair ("nice color-not grey") and body hair ("must be shaved off"), skin ("type, tone and color, wrinkles"), body size ("tall-but not too tall, not short and thin"), eyes, eyelashes, eyebrows, shape of face, hands, nails (fingers and toes), shoulders, breasts, stomachs, belly buttons, hips, buttocks, thighs, elegant feet, etc. This made them feel "mad," "it is stupid," "absurd" and "it bothers me." It was easier, however, to accept having "non-elegant hands or feet" for example, than accepting one's natural (or current) body size. The idea of aging (or looking young) and being, becoming or remaining thin were major preoccupations for these women. Fatness and wrinkles stood out as dominant sources of dissatisfaction and concern that "affected feelings of self-worth, self-love and self-concept."



Furthermore, women felt resentful that the images of young, thin, white women influenced men's perceptions of women and that "even oversized men want women who are beautiful and thin." They said: "this makes me hate men," "these images impose on women their ideas of what they want women to be" and "it's a lot of stress to worry about being 'always beautiful'." It was generally agreed that fashion images do not "reflect reality." Women said: "I like a more natural look," "I like it when the women look 'real'" or "simpler," "less decorated." "I like to see older women." Nevertheless, it came up many times that the participants had ambivalent and contradictory feelings. They rejected notions of ideal feminine beauty and yet wanted to conform. "We know it's not good to worry about how we look but then we do." Finally, due to the time limit, we agreed to skip over discussing the "half and half" images because most of the ideas related to ambivalence and contradiction had already been expressed.

At this point, the group turned to the table with the 'positive' images. Suddenly, there was much excitement and many women starting talking at the same time again. The 'positive' images showed women with "feelings," "in relationships, (friendships, mother-daughter)", "actively engaged in an activity, not passive or posed," "they are real people," "older women," "not necessarily thin or young or white," "having fun," and "real working women," some in "non-traditional roles (lawyer, doctor, etc.) and not stereotypical." These images made women "feel strong," "feel good about themselves," "enjoy myself as a woman," and "forget about looking good and just living my life and being myself."

We turned briefly to look at some examples of traditional art historical images of female nudes by male artists on one side of the bulletin board. On the other side, I placed

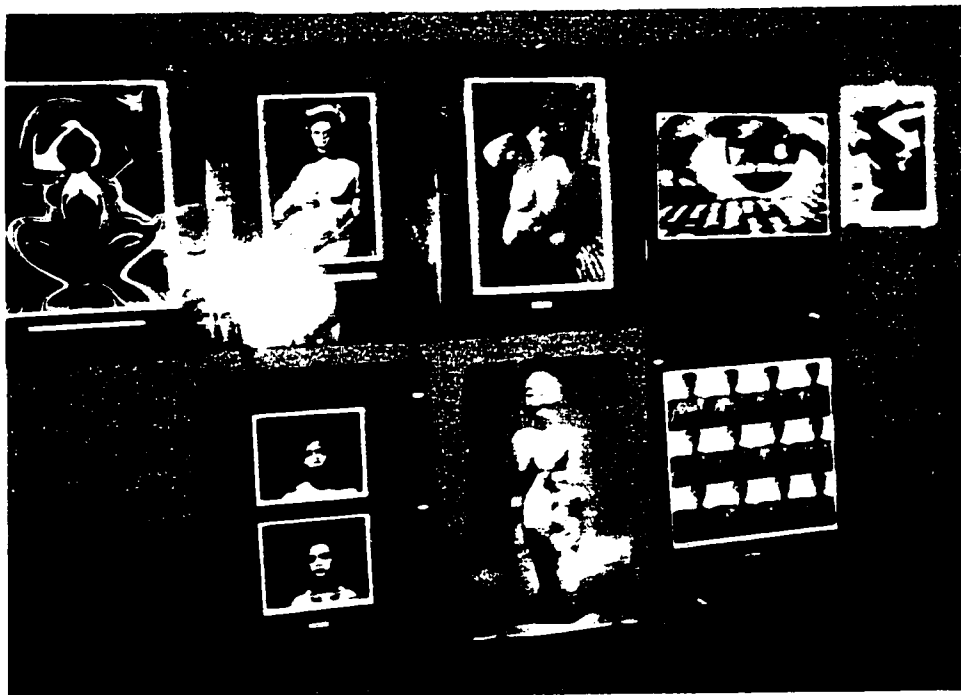
images of female nudes by contemporary feminist artists. In comparing the two sides, the “men’s version” of women was perceived as “more stylized,” “cold,” “posed,” and “unnatural.” The “women’s version” was perceived as “more natural,” “real body,” and “women’s experience.” Although the selection of artwork was restricted and certainly not exhaustive, I was mostly interested in observing the parallels participants made between art and media representations of women, especially in relation to ‘gaze’ and ‘pose.’ I had placed Janson’s *History of Art* (1986) on a nearby table for the women to consult, if they desired to explore further. I purposely chose to be brief with this aspect due to time constraints. On a longer term basis, it would have been interesting to introduce the participants to art history (because they were less familiar with it) and to make more analogies between past and present representations of women’s bodies and stereotypes in art. Moreover, it was important for me to keep the focus of the workshop on the participant’s experiences. I did not want to get into a full-blown discussion of oppression and power, especially in a three hour afternoon workshop. Besides, there was already a very rich and complex body of material to work with.

**Figure 35** Some Examples of Traditional Female Nudes



To conclude the discussion, the participants remarked they were “astounded by the number of images of women that surround us and shape us our vision of other women and ourselves.” They found that searching for positive and negative images made them “more aware of how hard it was” to find images of women that they felt were really positive. Although they were already aware of their own contradictory feelings in relation to female beauty, they felt “it was enlightening to see these feelings shared by others.” Overall, it can be said that the participants were generally in agreement about ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ images. They were honest in their reactions and feelings, had a positive attitude, were pleasant with each other and appeared to have enjoyed the discussion.

**Figure 36** Some Examples of Feminist Art



### **Art-Making: One Hour and a Half**

After the discussion, I rapidly presented the art-making project by showing the participants a demonstration piece I had made (see Figure 41). I explained the tracing technique and showed them how I overlapped three different body positions and used paint. One woman asked me if I had a preconceived plan for my painting. I said “no” but explained that it felt meaningful to have my real body touch the paper in an artwork that was about generally women’s bodies.

**Figure 41** Demonstration of Body Tracing Artwork



When asked “is there something specific you want us to do?” I suggested they create an artwork “related to their experiences as women” but that the actual translation of those ideas was open to individual exploration of form, subject matter or use of painting and collage techniques. I offered my assistance to those who needed it and would leave the others free to self-direction. I then invited the participants to take a short break to enjoy some cookies, coffee and juice I had brought in. I was surprised at how rapidly and avidly they got right down to work, remaining very involved for an hour and a half. Only two of the participants traced their bodies, while all the others did painting and collage. I gave specific guidance to the two beginners who needed direction but left the other’s to their independent work. I went around providing suggestions from time to time, or asking questions such as “what are you going to do with the background?” which would draw attention to aspects of the unfinished work without telling the person what to do. It was interesting to see that all of the participants incorporated collage into their work.

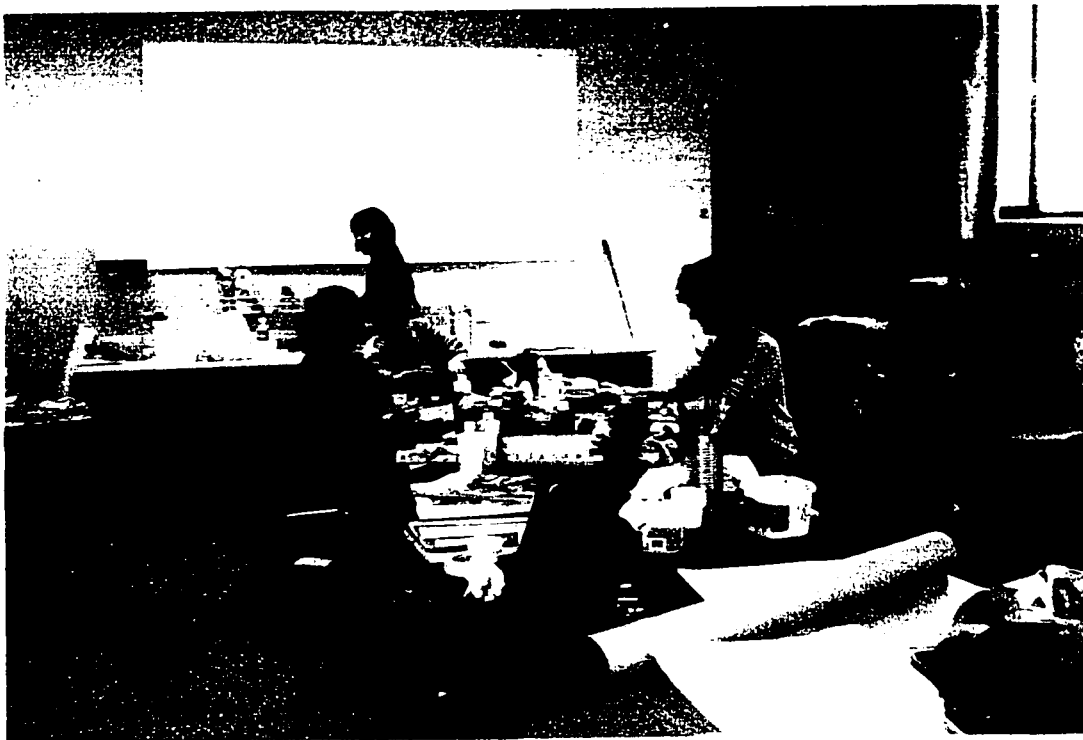
**Figure 38** Participants at work in “Women’s Body Image Art Workshop”



### **Response: Half an Hour**

I ended the workshop with a response period to allow the participants to talk freely about their artwork and explain what they were trying to do. Most of them expressed satisfaction with their collages and integrated ideas from the earlier discussion into their artwork. Some of the women had intentionally portrayed ‘positive’ attributes of women (such as strength, power, action, friendships) but for others the themes appeared spontaneously or subconsciously, without a preconceived plan or specific intention. It was noteworthy to see that all of the artwork, except one piece, was autobiographical. Each participant spoke about her artwork while the others and I responded spontaneously, sometimes making comments or asking questions about the subject matter or the techniques.

**Figure 39** Participants in “Women’s Body Image Art Workshop”



The following is a list of the words that were used by the artists and the viewers during the response, in relation to the particular artworks<sup>11</sup>:

**Robin Coplevitch (Figure 40)**

- Looks like me (not intentional)
- Woman's soul
- I see me in there
- A regular woman
- Strong women in the collage
- Rage
- Can feel the body

**Figure 40** Robin Coplevitch



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<sup>11</sup> The participants gave their consent and asked me specifically to identify their real names as part of their contribution to this feminist project and to give them recognition for their artwork.

**Hope Smith (Figure 41)**

- Title: "Body and Soul"
- Collaged text important
- Image of Yoko Ono, strong woman
- Chaos
- Time passing
- Goddess, warrior grandmother
- Energy, sexuality, humor

**Figure 41.** Hope Smith "Body and Soul"





**Marlene Gottheil (Figure 42)**

- Title: "Claim the Whole Realm"
- Women of different ethnic groups
- Inclusivity and togetherness
- Strong women
- Smiling, positive
- Real feelings
- Mother-daughter relationships
- Nice composition

**Figure 42** Marlene Gottheil "Claim the Whole Realm"



**Daphna Leibovici (Figure 43)**

- Literal representation of woman
- Affirmation of female form
- Form and shape
- Sculptural
- Big breasts and bellies: the first Venus
- Earth goddess
- Aggressive aspects of women
- Sensuous sexuality

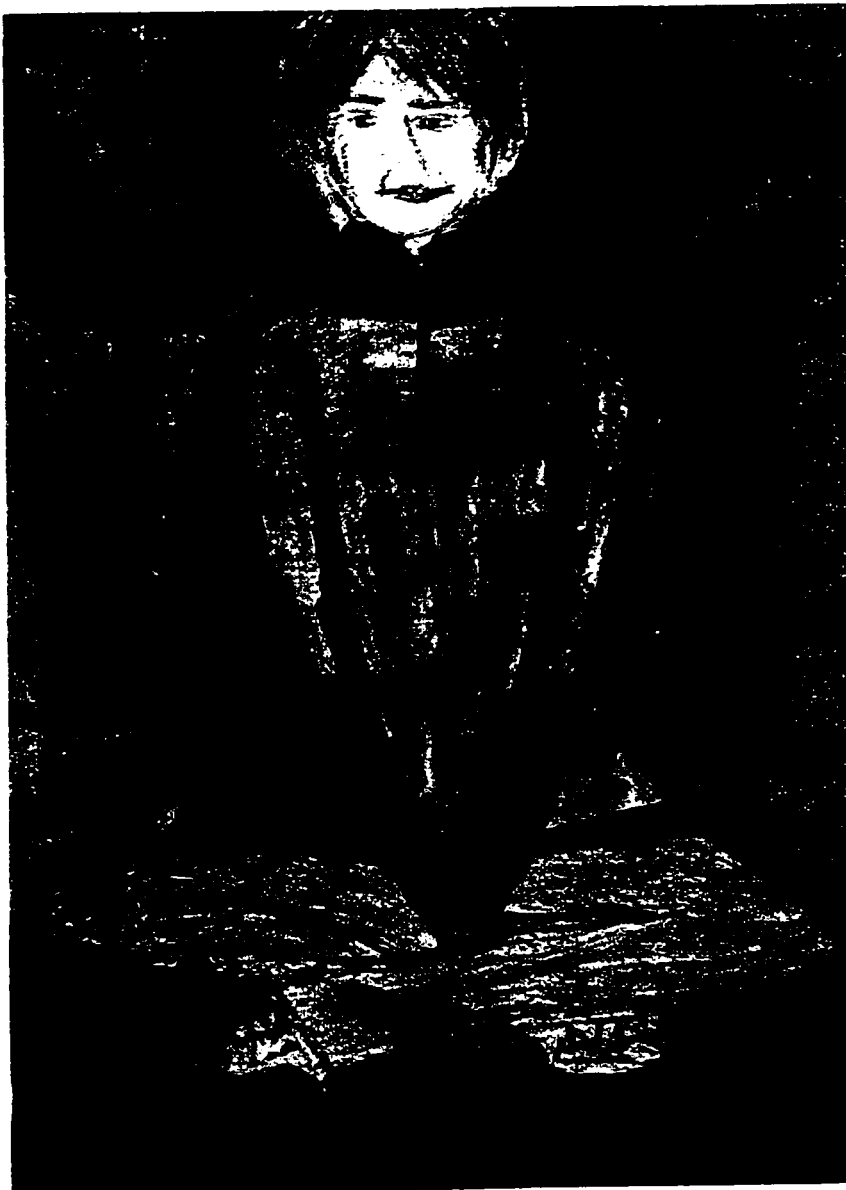
**Figure 43** Daphna Leibovici



**Jan Richman (Figure 44)**

- Self-portrait
- Running shoes important
- Natural self
- Peaceful, Zen, calm
- Strong colors
- Upright pose

**Figure 44** Jan Richman



**Cheryl Kies (Figure 45)**

- Traced my body
- Ominous alter-ego lurking
- Twisted personality
- Sexy, erotic dancer, Folies Bergères
- Strong, vibrant, electric black hair
- Integration of painting and collage
- Chagall-like

**Figure 45** Cheryl Kies



**Marie-Claude Simard (Figure 46)**

- Myself
- Contradictory feelings about being a woman:
  - So cute but silly, hilarious and sad
  - Don't know what it means to be a woman
- Bending over backwards to please everyone: being a mother and a professional
- Fantasies of stretching to get free
- Confined in a small space: wanting my body to open up
- Trapped, rigidity, fragility
- Pastel scribbles in the background reflect humor

**Figure 46** Marie-Claude Simard



**Carol Rabinovitch/Joyce Stewart (Figure 47)**

- Worked collaboratively, learning from each other to work slow and fast
- Did not finish
- Women walking into the world
- All different women
- Hats show they are women

**Figure 40 Marie-Claude Simard**

**Figure 47** Carol Rabinovitch/Joyce Stewart



It is interesting to note that all these descriptions above refer to real women, their experiences and concerns as opposed to stereotypes of women. The very words the participants chose to discuss their artwork and those of others reveal recurring themes. For example the repeated notions of female strength can be perceived in words such as: “strong woman/women,” “goddess,” “warrior grandmother,” or simply in the repetition of the word ‘strong’ five times (strong colors, strong black hair, strong women, etc.). There was acknowledgement of the differences among women: “women of different ethnic

groups,” “inclusivity and togetherness,” and female action: “women walking into the world,” “importance of running shoes,” “fantasies of stretching free,” “bending over backward,” “real feelings.” Female sexuality was represented in active (not passive) terms: “sexy, erotic dancer, Folies Bergères,” “strong, vibrant, electric black hair,” “energy, sexuality, humor,” “can feel the body.” There was recognition of the ambivalence and contradictions in relation to feminine beauty: “ominous alter-ego lurking,” “twisted personality,” “contradictory feelings about being a woman: so cute but silly, hilarious and sad,” “don’t know what it means to be a woman.” Finally, the overarching theme ‘woman/myself’ could be seen in words such as: “woman’s soul,” “I see me in there,” “looks like me,” “myself,” “a regular woman,” “body and soul,” “smiling, positive, real feelings,” “aggressive aspects of women,” “natural self.” For these women, making art about themselves was ‘real’.

Overall, I was amazed at the positive attitude and the openness of the participants in discussing their personal ideas, and sharing their intimate concerns about their bodies and lives. Very much in the spirit of ‘feminist collaboration’, all of the participants felt strongly about having their names appear with their artwork in this Master’s thesis. They were excited by this idea and said that it made them feel “validated in their art-making” and “recognized as important” in my feminist project.

### **Questionnaires**

The answers in the questionnaires (see Appendix 12) were helpful in situating the participants in terms of experience and age. Although some issues had already been

explored during the discussion, the questionnaires gave people the opportunity to reflect further or add ideas they had not shared earlier. For example, question five: "Do you feel influenced by representations of women's bodies and 'feminine' beauty in art (and the media) and does this affect your feelings about your body?" had been discussed earlier from a spontaneous and personal perspective. On paper, however, the responses were perhaps more theoretical and the women's professional experience as writers, teachers and communicators shone through:

-Yes, I feel fat and unattractive

-I believe we all are. The stylized and anorexia forms we see in the media and art cause us to be unsatisfied with our bodies for not fitting into the current impossible standard of beauty.

-Yes, I think that feminist literature has helped me in resisting the pressures/influences in terms of conforming/giving in to a standardized ideal of feminine beauty...(which is not possible to attain).

-I am offended by the perpetuation of 'anorexic beauty.'

-The worship of youth is more difficult than 'perfect' body for me.

-I try not to let 'feminine beauty' affect me in a negative way. Occasionally, I feel a bit out of the youth culture and it makes me scrutinize my wrinkles and the aging process...but in general I have always felt good about my body and satisfied with my looks even though I've never been beautiful in a North American sense.

There was a lot of additional information about the connection between art and body image in the responses to question six: "Do you think that exploring issues of body image and personal identity through art-making can change anything for women?"

-Yes, I think each woman can appreciate her uniqueness through art.

-It brings out sub-conscious thought, the very contradictions women live. It is interesting how a calm person can express aggressive feelings, an antagonistic person can show her warm side

-It can at the very least start a dialogue for women-help them to explore the sometimes not so subtle (negative) influences directed at them and ultimately empower women.



-It raises their awareness and own personal self-worth. Hopefully at the same time raise their consciousness' about women in other cultures.

-I think this kind of workshop could help people who haven't thought about these things before become more self-aware, and liberated from media and art stereotypes

-I think it can help young women explore their inner myths and stereotypes and create some personal, more healthy ones

-I think it has an impact. Any metaphor for self-perception is valuable

-It evacuates anger, it frees the fires inside

-Growth/exploration, and helps to develop use of art materials

In relation to question nine: "Did you learn anything," participants answered:

-I can do art. This was new to my self-conception

-Women may benefit in sharing a space, working together and focusing 'just' on themselves and the construction of that self!

-More an affirmation of my own beliefs with new insight

-I learned a lot about how I react to images of women in our culture. We don't always notice our reactions. I don't like artifice or big hair or men's ideas of what is sexy à la Playboy...I like it best when I feel that they [models, movie stars, celebrities] look like me in terms of a casual style. I also learned some painting techniques which pleased me enormously.

-Self-exploration

-I learned a lot talking around the table of various photographs with the other women.

-There are a lot of fragilities, and mixed feelings.

Question 8 was meant to evaluate the level of satisfaction in the workshop and to give me some feedback as a teacher: "Do you think this workshop was successful?" All of the nine participants answered "yes." Question 10 was designed to give the participants a chance to criticize or complete, or simply to voice their ideas about the workshop in general. These are the comments they wrote:

-You were very good. Not too directive, so we felt free. You had a wide variety of materials we could use and it was inspiring. Thank you for a very pleasant afternoon.

-More workshops

-Good work

-Absolutely successful

-Extremely well organized. The discussion at the beginning was thought-provoking. Even hunting for positive and negative images the night before.

-You did a fabulous job

-It was fun!

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## **6. Comparison between “Women’s Perspectives” and “Women’s Body Image”**

One of the most important distinguishing differences between “Women’s Perspectives” and “Women’s Body Image Art Workshop” was the age, maturity and the level of education of the participants. In the first group there were five (and then four) students who were teenagers in a college environment. In the second group there were nine participants who were mature women, mostly professionals with Masters and doctoral degrees. Also, the contexts in which the two courses were given were very different. In “Women’s Perspectives” the students were in an evaluated fifteen-week CEGEP course that they did not consider a ‘core’ course (important or demanding) and although they had registered by choice, they nonetheless felt coerced in participating. In “Body Image<sup>12</sup>,” the women were free to participate, they were not evaluated, the workshop was only three hours long and they were interested in getting to know each other. The motivations of the adult participants were entirely different and although the course was given at Concordia University, it fell along the lines of community art education.

In their book, *Adults and their Leisure, the Need for Lifelong Learning*, J. Verdun, Jr. and D. McEwen (1984) explore the reasons adults seek out lifelong learning and the role leisure education plays in society and in the lives of adults. Their research on adults shows that they are motivated by a desire to improve their lives and take pleasure in the learning process and the self-discovery that ensues from it (p. 112). Other reasons, such

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<sup>12</sup> I will shorten “Women’s Body Image Art Workshop” to “Body Image” to allow for smoother reading.

as improving self-confidence, developing social contacts and seeking escape or stimulation, are also significant (p. 100). This was definitely the case in “Body Image.” The women came to have fun on a Sunday afternoon. There was lots of talking, and some of the women had ‘vaguely’ seen each other on different occasions within the Jewish community and were not complete strangers. Almost all the participants came in pairs, as they had brought a friend. Wanting to further improve the atmosphere of community learning<sup>13</sup> (and because I was so grateful to have participants in the first place since I had received so few registrations), I brought in cookies, juice and coffee. In contrast to Dawson, I *expected* the participants of “Body Image” to take an extended break and was surprised when they did not. The fact that there were ten participants in “Body Image” allowed for more interaction and discussion of ideas, as opposed to the low level of energy that was exuded by the five (and then four) students at Dawson. Also in contrast to “Women’s Perspectives,” the participants in “Body Image” did not have unrealistic expectations about what they would learn in a three hour workshop and they did not express modernist ideals of making “grandiose art that would touch the soul.” Therefore the group dynamic in “Body Image” was positive and engaging, the women were interested in the topic, knowledgeable about it and they came with the intention of having a satisfying afternoon.

In both courses powerful emotions were expressed (anger, frustration, joy) and this required sensitivity to allow students to express themselves without interruption. In “Women’s Perspectives,” it was difficult to bring students to really connect with the

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<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note that the New School wanted to recreate the ‘community’ setting but that the institutional context rendered this practically impossible within the classroom situation.

source of their emotions or to talk about them at all. In “Body Image,” many times the women would talk at the same time or cut each other off. I found it useful to develop the role of the teacher-as-moderator in these instances and to build on conflict resolution techniques. In “Body Image,” I found that I was not perceived as an authority figure so much as an organizer of an event, a moderator of discussions, and a time-keeper. The fact that I was also the youngest woman present and that I was open about my research intentions may also have down-played issues of authority. Furthermore, I was not teaching these women about issues so much as I was listening to their thoughts, ideas and reactions, only sometimes asking questions or summarizing ideas. I found that pre-existing knowledge of discrimination or oppression was fundamental to the flow of discussion. It was then an easy step to move beyond pain to the more empowering and positive feelings that can be generated in the ‘here and now’ through art. Originally, I had expected “Women’s Perspectives” to work as smoothly as “Body Image.” In “Body Image,” I really felt that I was able to put feminist pedagogy into practice.

I believe it requires a lot of patience on the part of a feminist educator to teach a course like “Women’s Perspectives in Drawing: the Self-Portrait” in a similar context with young students who may only have a small knowledge of gender injustice or may feel disconnected from it. It is my idea that such a project would need a large amount of ‘groundwork’ (or consciousness-raising), in which the students focus on their personal experiences as girls and women. Many motivational activities that require students to do research at home, or make connections outside the classroom would facilitate coming to terms with oppression. Successful action, as suggested by Berman, would help ground theory in the real world. But there still remains the problem of accountability and

stereotypical attitudes toward art learning. For me as a teacher, “Women’s Body Image Art Workshop” was successful as action in the world and it reaffirmed my belief that teaching about women in the arts can be empowering.

## **7. Conclusion**

To conclude, I have learned that it is hard to work with a new kind of student in an unfamiliar setting like the New School and introduce new content at the same time. I realized how difficult teaching can become in a course like “Women’s Perspectives in Drawing: the Self-Portrait.” My experience has shown me that issues of empowerment are not necessarily obvious or self-evident and that success with students cannot be measured within the parameters of a single course but moreover within a longer term perspective (that the teacher may not be aware of) possibly in the student’s individual lives and in life-long learning beyond school.

In “Women’s Body Image Art Workshop,” the positive response and results of the participants allowed me to feel successful in contributing to social change through art education. The realization that preoccupations with beauty, fat, or wrinkles are not just ‘personal’ craziness but rather a collective experience of oppression is empowering for women. Experiencing and expressing the contradictions women live within a group setting turns theoretical knowledge of oppression into concrete reality. This exposure permitted me to understand that although women may be conscious of anger at the patriarchal system and its underlying oppression through images of beauty, there is a gap between knowledge ‘with the head’ and knowledge/feelings in the body. Art-making can be one of many steps to tap these feelings and to imagine, dream and invent other visions of self/woman. In this way, actual living women can begin to break through the internalized images of woman as object. In the words of Greta Nemiroff: “insights become catalysts for change in people’s attitudes, self-esteem, and courage to engage in

projects for change when attached to feelings” (1992, p. 90). Even so, it appears that more work will be needed to ground women *in the real body* here and now, to accept and validate it through its manifestations of shape, age, color, and so on. In the present context of patriarchy, a deep-rooted effort to bridge intelligence and femininity can help women cope with their lived contradictions, both within and without of themselves. Art educators can facilitate this happening.



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## 9. Appendix 1

### **“Women’s Perspectives in Drawing-the Self-Portrait” Original Outline of the 15 weeks**

#### **Week 1**

**1- Discussion:** Presentation of participants, teacher, course

**2-Art-making:** Pastel drawings of words

**3-Homework**

**Reading:** Nochlin, Linda (1994) *Starting from Scratch: The Beginnings of Feminist Art History*

#### **Week 2**

**1- Discussion:** The canon of art history and the absence of women

**2- Art appreciation:** Janson’s History of Art

Nancy Heller’s *Women Artists Illustrated History*, Jacqueline

Morreau

**3-Art-making:** Blind drawing hand, charcoal on paper

**4-Homework:**

**Reading:** Broude and Garrard (1994), Introduction: Feminism and Art in the Twentieth Century

**Sketchbook:** Blind drawing of object

**Bringing in:** magazine cut-outs: 4 ‘positive’ images of women, 1 ‘negative’

#### **Week 3**

**1- Discussion:** Gender stereotypes in art, representations of women

**2- Art appreciation:** Janson’s History of Art

Jacqueline Morreau, Kathe Kollwitz

**3-Art-making:** Facial construction and gesture drawings, charcoal on paper

**4-Homework:**

**Reading:** John Berger (1972) *Ways of Seeing*

**Sketchbook:** Negative/positive space (handout)

**Bring in:** Magazine cut-outs ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ images of women

#### **Week 4**

**1- Discussion:** The artist, the viewer, the gaze in art

**2- Art appreciation:** Robert Doisneau, Cindy Sherman, images from fashion magazines

**3-Art-making:** Drawing eyes

**4-Homework**

**Sketchbook:** One drawing of eyes

## **Week 5**

**1- Discussion:** The female nude in art

**2- Art appreciation:** Comparison: Janson's History of Art, Meret Oppenheim and Alice Neel

**3-Art-making:** Drawing the nose, charcoal on paper

**4-Homework**

**Reading:** Martin & Meyer (1997). *Female Gazes*, Introduction. (one page)

**Sketchbook:** One drawing of a nose

## **Week 6**

**1- Discussion:** Feminist art: reclaiming the female body

**2- Art appreciation:** Judy Chicago, Nikki de Saint-Phalles

**3-Art-making:** Drawing the mouth, charcoal on paper

**4-Homework**

**Writing:** 'Reflection,' 5 page paper: "In what ways have I been influenced by gender stereotypes and how does this affect my perception of myself?"

**Sketchbook:** One drawing of a mouth

## **Week 7**

**1- Discussion:** Self-portraits: imagining woman/myself

**2- Art appreciation:** Frieda Kahlo

**3-Art-making:** Facial construction and complete face: Blind drawing

Contour drawing

Realistic drawing with shading

**4-Homework**

**Reading:** Frueh Joanna (1994) *The Body Through the Eyes of Women*

**Sketchbook:** One complete face with imaginary components

## **Week 8**

**1- Discussion:** Symbolism of the body

**2- Art appreciation:** Georgia O'Keefe, Nancy Spero, Sylvia Safdie

**3-Art-making workshops:** Exercise: colour-mixing

**4-Homework**

**Reading:** Handout from SchoolArts magazine (one page)

**Sketchbook:** Practice of colour-mixing in a student-initiated painting

## **Week 9**

**1-Art appreciation:** Exhibition: Marion Wagschal at Bellefeuille gallery

**2-Homework**

**Writing:** 2 page 'reaction report' on the exhibition

## **Week 10**

**1- Discussion:** Marion Wagschal exhibition: reactions

**2- Art appreciation:** Helen Frankenthaler, Betty La Duke

**3-Art-making workshops:** Exercise: brushstroke techniques in painting and student initiated projects

**4-Homework**

**Sketchbook:** brushstroke techniques in imaginary painting

## **Week 11**

**1- Discussion:** Creating a coherent body of artwork: student's overall themes

**2- Art appreciation:** Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Guerilla Girls

**3-Art-making:** Exercise: texture and background, collage techniques and student-initiated projects

**4-Homework**

**Sketchbook:** collage techniques

## **Week 12**

**1- Discussion:** Political action through art

**2- Art appreciation:** Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Guerilla Girls

**3-Art-making:** Exercise: incorporating text into painting  
Student initiated projects

**4-Homework**

**Sketchbook:** one drawing that incorporates text

## **Week 13**

**1-Art appreciation:** Exhibition: "Amour/Horreur, Love/Horror, Volet II at La Centrale/Powerhouse gallery: Various artists

**2-Homework**

**Writing:** 2 page 'reaction report' on the exhibition

## **Week 14**

**1- Discussion:** Women artists in Quebec and Canada

**2- Art appreciation:** Betty Goodwin, Marcelle Ferron, Lillas Torrance Newton, Emily Carr and various others in M. Tippet's *By a Lady, Celebrating Three Centuries of Art by Canadian Women*.

**3-Art-making:** Student initiated projects

## **Week 15**

**1-Final presentations of artwork, 30 minutes each**

**2- Response activities and discussion**

**3- Celebration**

**Appendix 2**  
**“Women’s Perspectives in Drawing-the Self-Portrait”**  
**‘Real’ Outline of the 15 weeks**

**Week 1**

**1- Discussion:** Presentation of students and teacher (game), introduction to the course  
DEBATE over the relevance of a course on women in the arts

**2- Homework**

**Reading:** Nochlin, Linda (1994) *Starting from Scratch: The Beginnings of Feminist Art History*

**Week 2**

**1- Discussion:** THE CONTRACT (over half of class time)

**2- Art appreciation:** Janson’s History of Art

Nancy Heller’s *Women Artists Illustrated History*,

**3-Art-making:** Pastel drawings of words

**4-Homework**

**Reading:** Broude and Garrard (1994) *Introduction: Feminism and Art in the Twentieth Century*

**Bringing in:** magazine cut-outs: 4 ‘positive’ images of women, 1 ‘negative’

**Week 3**

**1- Discussion:** DEBATE over the existence of gender stereotypes and representations in art

**2- Art appreciation:** Janson’s History of Art, Jacqueline Morreau, Kathe Kollwitz

**3-Art-making:** Blind drawing and gesture drawing of hands, charcoal on paper

**4-Homework:**

**Reading:** John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing*

**Sketchbook:** Negative/positive space (handout)

**Bring in:** Magazine cut-outs ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ images of women

**Week 4**

**1- Discussion:** LATE-COMERS (half of class time)

**2- Art appreciation:** Robert Doisneau and Cindy Sherman, images from fashion magazines

**3-Art-making:** Drawing eyes

**4-Homework**

**Sketchbook:** one drawing of eyes

## **Week 5**

**1- Discussion:** DEBATE over 'the gaze' and the pertinence of Berger's article (half of class time)

**2- Art appreciation:** Comparison between Janson's History of Art, Meret Oppenheim and Alice Neel

**3-Art-making:** Drawing the nose, charcoal on paper (very little time left)

**4-Homework**

**Reading:** Martin & Meyer (1997) *Female Gazes*, Introduction. (one page)

**Sketchbook:** One drawing of a nose

## **Week 6**

**1- Discussion:** REVISING THE CONTRACT (half of class time)

**2- Art appreciation:**

**3-Art-making:** Drawing the mouth, charcoal on paper

**4-Homework**

**Writing:** 'Reflection,' 5 page paper: "In what ways have I been influenced by gender stereotypes and how does this affect my perception of myself?"

**Sketchbook:** one drawing of a mouth

## **Week 7**

**1- Discussion:** MID-TERM EVALUATIONS (whole class)

**2-Homework**

**Reading:** Handout from SchoolArts magazine

## **Week 8**

**1- Discussion:** Self-portraits: imagining woman/myself

**2- Art appreciation:** Frieda Kahlo

**3-Art-making:** Facial construction and complete face: Blind drawing  
Contour drawing  
Realistic drawing with shading

**4-Homework**

**Reading:** Frueh Joanna (1994) *The Body Through the Eyes of Women*

**Sketchbook:** One complete face with imaginary components



## **Week 9**

**1-Art appreciation:** Exhibition: MARION WAGSCHAL

**2-Homework**

**Writing:** 2 page 'reaction report' on the exhibition

## **Week 10**

**1- Discussion:** STUDENTS KICK A CLASSMATE OUT OF CLASS (one hour debate)

**2- Art appreciation:** Marion Wagshal: reactions

**3-Art-making:** Exercise: colour-mixing

## **Week 11**

**1-Discussion:** Creating a coherent body of artwork, student's overall themes

**2- Art appreciation:** Helen Frankenthaler, Betty La Duke

**3-Art-making:** Exercise: brushstroke techniques in painting and student initiated projects

**4-Homework**

**Sketchbook:** brushstroke techniques in imaginary painting

## **Week 12**

**1- Discussion:** Political action through art

**2- Art appreciation:** Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Guerilla Girls

**3-Art-making:** Exercise: texture and background, collage techniques and student initiated projects

**4-Homework**

**Sketchbook:** collage techniques

## **Week 13**

**1-Art appreciation:** Exhibition: 'Amour/Horreur, Love/Horror, Volet II' at La Centrale/Powerhouse gallery: Various artists

**2-Homework**

**Writing:** 2 page 'reaction report' on the exhibition

## **Week 14**

**1- Discussion:** FINAL EVALUATIONS, group participation grade (half the class)

**2-Art-making workshops:** Student initiated projects

## **Week 15**

FINAL PRESENTATIONS OF ART WORK, 1 hour each, going over-time because of endless fighting, crying and arguing over group grading.

### **Handouts (to be read at home)**

Blind-drawing, gesture drawing

Right brain/left brain

Evaluations in art

Words to talk about art, 2 pages

Final presentations and portfolio assessment (evaluation criteria)

Guide for response activities in art

Doodles

Upside down drawings

Line exercises

Facial construction

Shading and tones

Brushstrokes

Positive/negative shapes

Page from SchoolArts magazine

Art Curriculum for gender equity, identity, process and purpose

Georgia O'Keefe

Frieda Khalo

Meret Oppenheim

Kathe Kollwitz

Judy Chicago

Jacqueline Morreau

Helen Frankenthaler

Various in Lucy Lippard's Mixed Blessings

Betty La Duke

Mary Pratt

Marion Wagschal  
Jenny Holzer  
Howardena Pindell  
Myriam Shapiro  
Elizabeth Murray  
Alice Neel  
Cindy Sherman  
Lilias Torrance Newton  
Nancy Spero  
Sylvia Safdie  
Various in N. Heller's *Women Artists, an Illustrated History*  
Various in M. Tippet's *By a Lady, Celebrating Three Centuries of Art by Canadian Women*

### **Class Readings**

Berger, John. (1972). *Ways of Seeing*. Middlesex, England and New York: Penguin.

Broude, N. & Garrard, M. (1994) Introduction: Feminism and Art in the Twentieth Century. In Broude & Garrard, (Eds.), *The Power of Feminist Art*, (pp. 10-31). New York: Harry N. Abrams.

Frueh Joanna (1994) The Body Through the Eyes of Women. In N. Broude & M. Garrard (Eds.), *The Power of Feminist Art*, (pp. 190-207). New York: Harry N. Abrams.

Martin & Meyer (1997) *Female Gazes*. Toronto: Second Story Press (one page).

Nochlin, Linda (1994) Starting from Scratch: The Beginnings of Feminist Art History in N. Broude & M. Garrard (Eds.), *The Power of Feminist Art*, (pp. 130-139). New York: Harry N. Abrams.

### **Optional readings:**

Garber, E.(1992). Feminism, Aesthetics, and Art Education. *Journal of and Research*, 33 (4) 210-225.

Lips, Hilary. (1988). *Sex and Gender, an Introduction*. Mountain View, California: Mayfield Publishing Company.

Nelson and Robinson (1995). *Gender in the 1990s*. Ed. E. Nelson & B. Robinson, Toronto: NelsonCanada.

- Parker, R.& Pollock, G. (1981) *Painted Ladies in Old Mistresses, Women, Art and Ideology*, (pp. 114-133), New York: Pantheon Books.
- Sandell, Renee. (1991). The Liberating Relevance of Feminist Pedagogy. *Studies in Art Education*, 32, (3), 178-87.
- Schor, Mira, (1994). Backlash and Appropriation. In N. Broude & M.Garrard, (Eds.), *The Power of Feminist Art* (pp. 248-263). New York: Harry N. Abrams.
- Wood, Julia (1996). Gender and Relationships. In J. Wood (Ed.), *Gendered Relationships*,  
Mountain View, California: Mayfield Pub. Company.

## **Appendix 3**

### **Women's Perspectives in Drawing: the Self-Portrait Academic Profile**

**By Heather M. Veltman**

I propose to teach “Women’s Perspectives in Drawing: the Self-Portrait.” In this course students will get acquainted with basic drawing techniques such as blind contour drawing, gesture drawing, facial construction, eyes, noses, mouths, etc. There will be exercises with line, texture, shading and students will be encouraged to develop personal symbolism and a coherent body of work. The main emphasis will be on self-portraits as a means for exploring issues of (female) identity. In addition, there will be assigned readings, personal reflections to write and a drawing journal. It would be interesting to have three outings during the semester: two visits to artist’s studios and one gallery visit.

Each class will begin with a discussion of a topic related to feminism and art. Then a technique will be introduced and specific women artist’s work will be shown as motivation. The students will then proceed with their own art-making, ending with a response/validation period in which the artworks will be analyzed and personal issues and feelings will be discussed.

Shopping: Tuesday, January 19 <sup>th</sup> 1999, 1:00 to 3:00	in Room 2
Wednesday, January 20 <sup>th</sup> 1999, 1:00 to 2:30	in Room 2

Finalizing: Friday, January 22 <sup>nd</sup> 1999, 1:00 to 1:30	in Room 2
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## **Appendix 4**

### **Women's Perspectives in Drawing: the Self-Portrait** **Personal Introduction**

***Work in groups of 2***

***Each person presents the other to the group***

**1-What is your experience with art?**

**2-What do you hope to learn in this course?**

**3-What is art?**

**4-Can art be evaluated? Why or why not?**

**5-Explain your interests in learning about women in the arts?**

**6-Personal experience you would like to share?**

## **Appendix 5**

### **Women's Perspectives in Drawing: the Self-Portrait** **Revised Contract**

#### **Workload**

3 written papers  
2 gallery visits  
4 written reflections  
2 dates to hand in sketchbooks (middle and end of semester)  
4 finished artwork by end of term  
5 articles to read

#### **Grading**

##### **Students**

Class discussion and participation	35%
Final presentation of artwork	15%

##### **Facilitator**

Sketchbook	15%
3 papers	15% (5% each)
Artwork	20%

#### **Classroom procedures**

Being late (3 'lates' equals on absence) and lowering of participation grade  
3 absences equals a fail (or renegotiation)  
Late work results in lowering of final grade  
15 minute break

## **Appendix 6**

### **Women's Perspectives in Drawing: the Self-Portrait**

#### **Sketchbook: 15%**

**Blind drawings**

**Contour drawings**

**Gesture drawings**

**Hands**

**Feet**

**Eyes**

**Noses**

**Mouths**

**Complete face**

**Vase/face drawings**

**Scribbles, doodles, squares, circles, patterns, textures, etc.**

**Negative/positive space**

**Upside-down drawings**

**Self-portraits**

**Exploratory paintings, imaginary scenes**

**Abstract art**



## **Appendix 7**

### **Women's Perspectives in Drawing: the Self-Portrait**

Three required papers: 15%

#### **1-Personal Reflection: 5%**

Write a five page paper that answers the following question: "In what ways have I been influenced by gender stereotypes and how does this affect my perception of myself?"

#### **2-Reaction Report: 5%**

Write a two to three paper on your reaction to Marion Wagschal's exhibition "Recent Work" at the Bellefeuille gallery. What did you like (lines, shapes, textures, subject matter, etc.) On what levels did you react: intellectually, emotionally, aesthetically? Remember to structure your writing: introduction, development and conclusion. Build an argument and give examples to support your ideas. Try to keep a focus that you can develop in depth.

#### **3-Reaction Report: 5%**

Write a two to three paper on your reactions to the exhibition "Amour/Horreur, Love/Horror, Volet II" at the La Centrale-Powerhouse gallery. What feminist ideas were played with in this art show? Can you make any connections to the course readings? Do you think that this artwork can contribute to awareness that leads to social change? Why or why not?

## **Appendix 8**

### **Women's Perspectives in Drawing: the Self-Portrait**

#### **Oral Presentations of Artwork**

**Duration: 15 minutes**

The oral presentation must cover the following areas.

- 1-Personal connection to themes and subject matter: why you chose it or how it evolved, what it means to you now
  - 2-The artwork: final four paintings
    - a) Describe your art ideas (what were you trying to do)
    - b) Explain the images
    - c) Discuss the use of lines, shapes, colours, textures (did you try anything new or discover a technique?)
  - 3-Explain the difficulties you experienced, and the successes
  - 4-Bring in an image of an artist you admire, explain why
  - 5-Conclusion: How has your artwork evolved during the semester? Are you satisfied? Anything else you would like to share with the group?
- 

#### **Group grading of Oral Presentations of Artwork: 15%**

Excerpt from *Teaching Children Art* by J. Hobbs and J. Rush (1997)

- |                                   |                            |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1-Perception (observation skills) | 5-Historical understanding |
| 2-Expressiveness                  | 6-Aesthetic appreciation   |
| 3-Inventiveness                   | 7-Technical quality        |
| 4-Critical Thinking               | 8-Overall growth           |

## Appendix 9

### “Women’s Perspectives in Drawing-the Self-Portrait”

#### Lesson Plan 3

**Theme:** Gender stereotypes in art

**Objectives:**

- a) Understanding, recognizing stereotypes
- b) Critically examining representations of women
- c) Connection to student’s personal experiences of stereotypes
- d) Blind drawing and gesture drawing of hand with charcoal
- e) Looking at artworks made by women, charcoal portraits: Jacqueline Morreau and Kathe Kollwitz

**Discussion:**

- a) Participants experiences with gender stereotypes
- b) Discussing articles: Broude and Garrard and Nochlin
- c) Looking at Andrea, Titian, and others in Janson’s History of Art
- d) Connection to student’s feelings about their (female) bodies? Identity?

**Technique:**

- a) Drawing circles within circles, approximately in the middle
- b) Blind drawing of hand, gesture drawing in movement

**Response:**

- a) Students perceptions of their artworks
- b) Validation of artworks by teacher
- c) Reactions to the workshop

**Comments:** The discussion was full of dispute because the notion of stereotypes was not obvious for them to understand (or admit). I suggested we make two categories on the blackboard ‘male stereotype-ultra macho,’ ‘female stereotype-ultra-feminine.’ Agreeing to these categories and then putting in words took much struggle and time. Schwartzneggar, in “The Terminator” was the ‘macho’ and Cameron Diaz the ‘ultra-feminine.’ The students came up with Michelle Pfeiffer in the role of ‘cat woman’ from the movie “Batman Returns-1996,” for the ‘in the middle category.’ The two female stereotypes: negative.

The male stereotype: powerful and positive (but violent). Where is the intelligent woman? Students say “positive” but not ‘feminine.’ Although this activity was interesting for me, students did not seem to see how the stereotypes affected *them*. The discussion was way too long, full of too much anger on the part of Judy, who insisted that “you feminists should stop talking about this stuff and just do something about it.” (She would never listen to my answer that this course was one way to do something). After an extended break, the students participated well in the drawing exercises, but I felt drained. We did not have time for response.

## Appendix 10

### “Women’s Perspectives in Drawing-the Self-Portrait”

#### Lesson Plan 11

**Theme:** Brushstrokes

**Objectives:**

- a) Changing the tense climate with students—avoiding conflict-ridden discussions
- b) Recreating rapport with students by focusing more on art
- c) Loosening up expectations of realistic drawing, learning about abstract art, making ‘mistakes’ into assets
- d) Developing dexterity and gesture with a paintbrush
- e) Expression through use of painted lines: dry, wet, curvy, etc.
- f) Looking at women artists: Helen Frankenthaler, Betty La Duke

**Technique:**

- a) Demonstration of painted lines: dry brush, transparencies, splattering, drips, etc.
- b) Turning the explorations into an abstract project and/or incorporating techniques into a portrait painting, background effects

**Response:**

- a) Students perceptions of their artworks
- b) Validation of artworks by teacher
- c) Reactions to the workshop

**Comments:**

Avoiding conflict was a good strategy because the students sat down to work right away with less fooling around. However, there was little communication between me and them, in the first part of the class. After the break, we looked at Helen Frankenthaler and Betty La Duke and the students were very interested and animated. The atmosphere seemed less tense between us all. When returning to art-making, two of the students had a hard time thinking of self-directed projects and stayed blocked for some time (about half an hour), regardless of my suggestions. Two of the students worked well, the other two started paintings that they did not have time to finish, were disappointed with their work and then threw them out (!) I think it is necessary for students to think up self-directed projects before they come to class...or to let themselves explore intuitively.

## **Appendix 11**

### **Women's Body Image Art Workshop**

#### **Lesson Plan 1**

**Theme:** Women's bodies/my body

**Objectives:**

- a) Recognizing the 'ideological' body in art and media representations  
women and beauty
- b) Looking at artworks made by feminist artists
- c) Getting participants to talk about their experiences of their female bodies
- d) Creating a collage related to the theme of women's bodies
- e) Using painting and collage as expressive mediums

**Discussion:**

- a) Presentation of participants, professor, subject
- b) Looking at magazine cut-outs students brought, 'positive' and 'negative' images as perceived by student
- c) Connection to participants' feelings about their female bodies?

Identity?

- Writing words about feelings on the blackboard
- d) Looking at and reacting to artworks by feminist artists
- e) Presentation and demonstration of art-making activity

**Technique:** Drawing with markers, tracing the body, painting with gouache on long white paper, cutting, collage and mixed media.

**Response:**

- a) Students perceptions of their artworks
- b) Validation of artworks by teacher
- c) Reactions to the workshop

## **Appendix 12**

### **Women's Body Image Art Workshop**

#### **Questionnaire**

*Please do not write your name*

1-Do you have experience or training in art? If yes, from where?

2-Are you a Concordia student? If yes, from which Department?

3-Are you knowledgeable with feminist research?

4-Would you call yourself a feminist?

5-Did you find the discussion about women's bodies in art, feminine beauty and women's personal experiences of themselves relevant to your experience? Please explain.

6-Do you feel that it is useful for women to explore issues of personal identity through art-making?

7-How would you rate the success of this workshop?

8-Did you learn anything?

9-Comments and/or suggestions?

*The answers in this questionnaire are strictly for research purposes and will remain confidential. Thank you for your collaboration.*

## **Appendix 13**

### **Women's Body Image Art Workshop**

#### **Consent Form**

I hereby give permission to Heather M. Veltman, Master's Degree student in the Department of Art Education at Concordia University, to identify the artwork that I produced in "Women's Body Image Art Workshop." I therefore give my consent to having my name appear in Ms. Veltman's Master's thesis next to a photograph of my artwork.

**Participant's**

name \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's**

signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_