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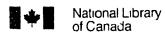# Feminist Pedagogy
and
Unlearning Homophobia

Nadya Burton

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in
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Abstract

Feminist Pedagogy and Unlearning Homophobia

Nadya Burton

The objective of this thesis is to apply the literature on feminist pedagogy to learning/teaching strategies against homophobia and heterosexism, with a view to both enriching and furthering these strategies. The thesis explores current literature on feminist pedagogical theory, as well as a specific 'instance' in feminist pedagogical practice, a workshop I have designed entitled 'Unlearning Homophobia'. The aim is to both examine the relevance of feminist pedagogical theory to this workshop, and also to suggest and render problematic discrepancies between the theory and the practice, and identify areas of improvement and further research regarding the workshop.

This work also covers the theoretical background of two differing approaches to feminist pedagogy and social change through an examination of two feminist educational organizations with which I have worked. The differing models of education and change, and differing theorization of power inherent in these two organizations, highlight very crucial themes in current feminist pedagogical theory and practice, and help to ground this theory in the practical everyday work of feminist pedagogues.

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Chapter I
Introduction and Methodology

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of this thesis is to apply the literature on feminist pedagogy[1] to teaching/learning strategies against homophobia, with a view to both enriching and furthering these strategies. The desire for this project has grown directly from my work, over the last ten years, in the anti-violence movement. Specifically it has been my involvement in two different feminist organizations, the Peterborough Rape Crisis Centre (PRCC), and the Montreal Assault Prevention Centre (MAPC), that led me to seek a way of theorizing what I discovered to be two very different approaches to educating women on ways to deal with the violence in their lives.[2] In the first instance, 'teaching' involved crisis counselling to help women make meaning of the apparently senseless experience of sexual violence, helping them to come to an understanding of what had happened to them in order to aid in the process of healing. In the second instance, 'teaching' involved providing assault prevention training (self-defense) to girls and women (those who identified themselves as survivors of violence and those who did not).

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[1] Throughout this work I will use the terms 'literature on feminist pedagogy' and 'feminist pedagogical theory' interchangeably, and distinguish them from another pair of interchangeable terms, 'feminist pedagogy,' and 'the field of feminist pedagogy'. This is not intended as a separation of theory and practice, but rather as a distinction between different modes of theory/practice. The first pair of terms refer more narrowly to the discursive field or, in other words, to that mode of 'doing' things called 'saying'. The latter terms are used more broadly to include both discursive and non-discursive elements of feminist pedagogy broadly understood.

[2] I worked at the Peterborough Rape Crisis Centre from 1986 to 1990, and at the Montreal Assault Prevention Centre from 1990 to 1993.

Although I found my work at the PRCC tremendously rewarding and a valuable learning experience, I nonetheless felt that the Centre suffered from a certain limited vision about the nature of educating for change, in large part stemming from an inability to address the possibilities of prevention education (in this case against violence). The issue of prevention introduced a problematic that ran counter to the epistemological assumptions from which the PRCC operated. Specifically, the theorization of power as static, as something wielded by men over women (and children), left little room for notions of personal agency or for ideas of educating to prevent violence. In 'classical' emancipatory style, the road to change was best travelled by education which exposed the truth of an unjust society (thus counselling female survivors of male violence about the political rather than solely personal nature of their experience). When 'truth' was duly exposed, society would have to change.

Perhaps the ultimate sign of what I felt to be the limitations of our notions of education for social change were the workshops on sexual violence which I conducted regularly in schools and other community settings. During these sessions we discussed violence, statistics, ramifications, signs of abuse (etc.), and yet never did we address prevention, what we could do to *prevent* violence, either as perpetrators or as 'victims'

In the course of my work at the MAPC, as an assault prevention educator I began to identify the disempowering nature of those workshops. I began to look for a theoretical/pedagogical grounding which would address personal agency and a different theorization of power in the educating process. I sought theory which would relate more closely to the 'empowering' approach to education of the MAPC, that is a more

Foucauldian belief in the relationality of power, in the traditionally disempowered *participating* in relations of domination, and thus being able to interrupt the circulation of power - in effect to *'practice'* power as well as to be victims of it (Foucault,1980a:94). I was interested in an approach that could address this re-theorization of power, and which could still address the social inequality of women (and other groups), which could address the personal agency of women without falling into the traditional blame-the-victim stance.

In feminist pedagogy, I found a theoretical arena that delved into these issues. It was my desire to name and further explore the different teaching strategies of these two Centres (despite the shared ultimate goal of educating to challenge sexist norms which tacitly condone violence against women and children), that led me into the realm of feminist pedagogy.

Feminist pedagogy is an innovative and challenging area of educational theory and practice; its proponents come from a wide array of fields and disciplines, and its terrains of practice are diverse.* My aim in exploring the often complex and shifting terrain of feminist pedagogy is twofold: on the one hand, to help theorize and further explore the different approaches to feminist educating at the PRCC and the MAPC, and on the other

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* Some of the significant works in the area of feminist pedagogy include: Bunch and Pollack (1983) Learning Our Way: Essays in Feminist Education; Cully and Portuges (1985) Gendered Subjects: The Dynamics of Feminist Teaching; Ellsworth (1989) "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy"; Lather (1991b) Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy With/In the Postmodern; Lewis (1990) "Interrupting Patriarchy: Politics, Resistance, and Transformation in the Feminist Classroom"; Luke and Gore (1992) Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy; Weiler (1988) Women Teaching For Change: Gender, Class and Power.

hand, to help assess and enrich my practice in education against homophobia.

Over the past several years, I have designed and implemented a three-hour workshop entitled 'Unlearning Homophobia'.[4] Educating against homophobia is an integral feature of the landscape of feminist pedagogy. Discourses on issues of power, privilege, and oppression are central to feminist pedagogy. Thus, difference in race, gender, sexuality[5], culture, class, age, etc., are taken up by feminist pedagogues in an attempt to theorize and practice a pedagogy which is not only feminist in the sense that it deals with women's specific oppression as related to gender, but feminist in the sense that it is 'counter-hegemonic'.[6] This means addressing the range of ways in which individuals are oppressed (in society in general and in pedagogical processes in particular), not only as gendered beings, but as gay/lesbian/bisexual, as poor, disabled, etc., and it means examining how these different experiences meet in individuals in unique and shifting ways:

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[4] A discussion of the terms 'unlearning' and 'homophobia' will follow shortly.

[5] Although the term 'sexual orientation' is often used in the way in which I am here using 'sexuality', the choice is explicit on my part. I find 'sexuality' to be a more broadly-based term which focuses more properly on the dimensions of desire of the subject in question. In contrast, the concept of 'sexual orientation,' tends to over emphasize the centrality of an external object, in this way defining sexuality in relation to an other, rather than in relation to the self. There are dimensions of sexuality which escape the narrow external focus of 'sexual orientation'.

[6] By counter-hegemonic I mean "the creation of a self conscious analysis of a situation and the development of collective practices and organization that can oppose the hegemony of the existing order and begin to build the base for a new understanding and transformation of society" (Weiler,1988:52). I also mean that hegemonic attitudes of our society include not only sexism, but also racism, classism, homophobia, anti Semitism, etc., and therefore education which is truly 'counter-hegemonic' concerns itself not only with educating against sexism, but in educating against these other forms of oppression as well.

Feminism...'is the political theory and practice that struggles to free *all* women....Anything less than this vision of total freedom is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement'. (Barbara Smith quoted in Trinh T. Minh-ha,1986/7:20)

From a seemingly endless array of forms and experiences of oppression, I have chosen (for my 'practice' and therefore for examination in this thesis) the focus of educating around homophobia. The rationale for this choice is grounded in personal experience, in my work in both the aforementioned feminist educational organizations, and in the relative gap in this area within the literature and research on feminist pedagogy.

As feminist discourse in its myriad of forms has attempted to address issues of difference (thanks primarily to the work over the last decade of overlapping groups of women of colour, lesbians, Jewish women, and working-class women, which will be addressed more directly in Chapter III of this work), it has moved gradually from subjects most to least palatable to dominant feminism (that is, to the predominantly white, middle class, and heterosexual women's movement). Early feminist discourses on difference centre, somewhat obviously, around gender. With a less than gentle push, the parameters of the debate expanded to include first race, and then class. Sexuality still often lags far behind. Often paid lip-service, included innocuously in a long list of differences, sexuality is one of the obvious power imbalances which holds powerful sway (hiring and firing, custody, physical violence and death, teen suicide, as well as taunting and emotional torture to young gay/lesbian/bisexual students are issues only touching the tip of the iceberg). Educating against homophobia is a relatively newer field of study and practice, and thus the literature is less vast than the range of work completed in the

area of race or class. For the above reasons, at this particular moment, it is a focus badly in need of attention.

Personal and professional experience both raise other important reasons for this focus. The former is most simply stated as an understanding of and desire for choice that is so systematically denied individuals in our society. My experiences as a woman challenging the traditional gender and sex roles of my culture have been both enhanced by the opportunities of lesbianism and limited by homophobia. An examination of how homophobia limits choices as well as how, like other forms of oppression, it reduces the quality of our learning environments is an important personal and political task.

The professional impetus relates to issues of sexual assault and assault prevention as addressed at the PRCC and the MAPC. In the first instance, homophobia serves to drastically reduce the number of disclosures of sexual assault by boy children and male adults.[7] As long as male-male assaults are perceived as acts of homosexuality rather than of sexual violence, our society will not hear the voices of male victims of violence who need the care, healing, and prevention education we are increasingly affording girls and women. This means that education on the reality that the overwhelming number of male-male assaults are committed by heterosexual and not gay or bisexual men, and that assault is an issue of power and control rather than of 'sex,' or an expression of one's sexuality, is of critical importance.

In the second instance, educating against homophobia is one step in reducing the

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[7] For statistics on reporting of sexual assault by boys and men, see Eugene Porter (1986), Treating the Young Male Victim of Sexual Assault: Issues and Intervention Strategies.

violence which is visited upon gays/lesbians/bisexuals by a homophobic society. 'Gay bashing' is perhaps the most widely publicized form of violence that gays and lesbians must live with however violence takes many forms on the long continuum from very subtle harassment to murder. Violence against those our society sees as 'other' or deviant' is common. Educating against homophobia, attempting to reduce the source of anger and violence against gays/lesbians/bisexuals is one (albeit small) step in helping to end this violence.

Finally, in line with the feminist project of eradicating sexism and misogyny, it is crucial that we bring to light how homophobia functions to bolster and even further sexist ideology. In her book Homophobia, A Weapon of Sexism, Suzanne Pharr (1988:19) writes that lesbians and gay men are perceived as threats to the very heart of the heterosexual/patriarchal structure of our society. She goes on to suggest that homophobia is a tool used by a sexist or patriarchal ideology to keep women in positions of subordination:

> If lesbians are established as threats to the status quo, as outcasts who must be punished, homophobia can wield its power over all women through lesbian baiting. Lesbian baiting is an attempt to control women by labelling us as lesbians because our behaviour is not acceptable, that is, when we are being independent, going our own way...saying no to violence...bonding with and loving the company of women...insisting upon our own authority...; lesbian baiting occurs when women are called lesbians because we resist male dominance and control. (Ibid)

For all these reasons, educating against homophobia is the 'practice' I seek to assess and enrich through the eyes of feminist pedagogical theory. I will use this theory to help assess the Unlearning Homophobia workshop, in this way creating the crucial link between theory and practice, without which neither can function effectively.

1.2 LOCATION

It is currently fashionable, when doing feminist research and writing, to identify one's 'location,' that is to identify one's social positionings, or from whence one comes. The feminist impetus for what often ends up being a list of apparently stable and unproblematic 'identities' (i.e., I am a white, Jewish, able bodied, middle class, heterosexual, etc., etc., woman), is well grounded in a critique of apparently bias free or neutral research. The increasingly accepted conclusion that our identities play into what we know and how we come to know has led many feminists to lay out clearly *who they are*, thereby hoping to make explicit and to explain why they might perceive/interpret/know in their own unique ways.

Although I believe the desire to render explicit one's location, thus denying false notions of objectivity and neutrality, is an important one for writer and reader alike, I also concur with Patti Lather and Gayatri Spivak that many of these attempts, although "normative in feminist scholarship" (Lather,1991:166), turn to a "kind of confessional attitudinizing...a confessional self-description" (Spivak quoted in Lather,1991·166). For me to 'list' my various identities appears to be in fundamental conflict with the poststructuralist/postmodern* impetus to render any identity complex, shifting, unstable,

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* These titles present certain terminological difficulties. As Mike Featherstone (1988) has noted of postmodernism, "the *Modern-day Dictionary of Received Ideas* confirms 'This word has no meaning. Use it as often as possible'" (p.195). To make matters worse, many contemporary theorists use the terms postmodernism and poststructuralism interchangeably. Throughout this work I use poststructuralism to refer specifically to a movement in contemporary French philosophy (represented by the work of Foucault, Derrida, Delueze). Postmodernism I take to be a more general term referring to a broader stream of cultural theory and practice which has taken root in North America but which draws inspiration from certain themes in French theory. While this distinction

and non unitary:

> ...the politics of location...have become fundamental to a number of theoretical paradigms, including various versions of feminism and postmodernism. Central to all of these positions is the importance of challenging, remapping, and renegotiating those boundaries of knowledge that claim the status of master narratives, fixed identities, and an objective representation of reality. Within feminist and postmodern discourses, this has expressed itself in recognizing the situated nature of knowledge, the partiality of all knowledge claims, the indeterminacy of history, and the shifting, multiple and often contradictory nature of identity. (Giroux, 1991:26)

Patti Lather (1991) speaks directly to my concerns when she writes:

> For example, that I write from a position of heterosexual privilege is not unimportant, but 'heterosexual' feels a thin term and unattractive kind of closure to the complexity of my life. How to use such categories as provisional constructions rather than as systematic formulations and what this means in terms of identity politics remain largely unexplored territory. (p. 166)

The questions I am left with are therefore complex. In what ways are my various 'locations' relevant, and how are they explicable in a way that is true to the changing, shifting nature of my identity? I am a woman working in academia, but my grounding is in the grass-roots women's movement. The background that brings me to my personal concerns with issues of power, privilege, and oppression, is my childhood in a feminist and Jewish home which simultaneously opened my young eyes to the injustices of sexism, racism, and anti-Semitism, but which was also middle-class and more or less traditionally nuclear, and rendered invisible the classism and homophobia of my family and society at large. As I move now through the complex terrain of my own and others'

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is my own and will not necessarily be followed in the sources I am quoting, it is hoped that the context will make the meaning of these terms clear.

privileges and oppressions. I search for ways to remain accountable to that part of myself which seeks to change unacceptable conditions (always in practice as well as theory), while acknowledging where in certain places I may be part of sustaining those conditions

bell hooks (1990) makes sense of 'location' by positing it not simply as a place from where we come, but also where we are going:

> As a radical standpoint, perspective, position, 'the politics of location' necessarily calls those of us who would participate in the formation of counter-hegemonic cultural practice to identify the spaces where we begin the process of re-vision. (p.145)

Thus my location is not simply a litany of assorted oppressions and privileges, but rather it is in part where I seek to go with my knowledges, how I choose to use my experience and learning, hopefully in ways which are helpful in generating ('re-visioning') a counter-hegemonic and more just place for us all to be.

Before leaving this subject. I want to briefly address the complexities, contradictions, and opportunities of dealing primarily with educating against homophobia as a heterosexual feminist. Identifying myself as such affords me a very real opportunity to experience the painful inadequacy and severe limitations of identities which make any claim to adequately describe who I am, my motivations, desires, and dreams 'Heterosexual' is a term that invites closure, rather than allowing for the complex, shifting, flowing changes that more adequately describe sexuality. Despite the limitations of these kinds of categories, I do acknowledge how that label I carry in the world affords me tremendous privilege, and particularly in this instance, *safety*. To educate against, even to mention or discuss homophobia for most gays/lesbians/bisexuals in the educational field, carries with it tremendous risk. To be identified as gay or lesbian is

to risk not only ridicule, ostracization by students and colleagues alike, but also to risk losing one's job, even one's profession." I am acutely aware that my ability not only to work in this arena, but also to adopt it as an area of academic study is rendered (relatively) easy by the heterosexual privilege upon which I can draw at will.

These opportunities are important to name; however, there are also limitations to doing this work while not currently living as a lesbian. As a non-lesbian, issues of representation are central in my attempts to educate against homophobia. How and in what ways can I speak of gay/lesbian/bisexual life and experience? What part of this experience can I adequately bring to the classroom, and what will be necessarily excluded?

> To raise the issue of the Other is also to raise the issue of not representing the Other, involving therefore questions of enunciation, of translation, and of interpretation. (Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1986/7:6).

As a non-lesbian educating against homophobia, how does my own privilege and, however unintentional, homophobia come into play? What do they stop me from seeing, hearing, feeling? These questions are not easily answered, and I raise them not to respond to and then dismiss them, but rather to name them as integral to the ongoing discussion and complexity of my particular pedagogical practice.

Part of my location concerns the fact that I have made certain assumptions in the writing of this thesis, which I attempt to make as explicit as possible throughout the work. Most significantly, at the very outset, is that this thesis in based on the very broad

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" On the risks taken by gay, lesbian, and bisexual teachers see: Parmeter and Reti (1988) The Lesbian in Front of the Classroom: Writings by Lesbian Teachers; Khayatt (1992) Lesbian Teachers: An Invisible Presence.

assumption that homophobia is negative and undesirable. I do not devote time to an explanation of what, in fact, is wrong with homophobia (although I will presently address what I see it to *be*), or why gays/lesbians/bisexuals should not be oppressed or discriminated against. As Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) states in an outline of an anti racism course she taught, "this class would not debate whether nor not racist structures and practices were operating at the university; rather, it would investigate *how* they operated, with what effects and contradictions" (p.299). That homophobia and other forms of oppression are negative, contrary to healthy learning and living environments will be taken as a given. The question to be examined will be how to effectively educate *against* homophobia.

1.3 DEFINING OUR TERMS

There are a variety of terms that will be used throughout this paper which might be usefully clarified. The first and most obvious of these is the term 'pedagogy'. In the introduction to a special issue of <u>Screen Magazine</u> on pedagogy, David Lusted suggests that pedagogy remains a mostly obscure term, even to those in the educational field, most often assumed to be synonymous with 'teaching'. It is Lusted's description of the term which is most widely cited in feminist pedagogical literature. He suggests that the term pedagogy,

> ...is important since, as a concept, it draws attention to the *process* through which knowledge is produced. Pedagogy addresses the 'how' questions involved not only in the transmission or reproduction of knowledge but also in its production. Indeed, it enables us to question the validity of separating these activities so easily by asking under what conditions and through what means we 'come to know'. How one teaches

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is therefore of central interest but, through the prism of pedagogy, it
becomes inseparable from what is being taught, and crucially, how one
learns. (Lusted,1986:2-3)

He goes on to say that pedagogy is in fact a multiple process referring to,

...the transformation of consciousness that takes place in the interaction
of three agencies -- the teacher, the learner and the knowledge they
together produce. (Lusted,1986:3)

This kind of definition is particularly useful for feminist pedagogical theorizing

because it foregrounds the interactive element between the teacher, learner, and

knowledge, and because it fundamentally eschews the traditional transmission model (in

Freirian (1970) terms, 'banking education') of education. Lusted's definition of

pedagogy suggests that in fact knowledge is not unproblematically transmitted from

academic, to teacher, to students, but rather that it is created, its multiple meanings

contested, struggled over, and continually negotiated in the pedagogical process.

Interestingly, the term pedagogy is taken up by a wide range of radical

educational theorists because it seems to address and include the political aspects of the

educational process. As Henry Giroux (1992) suggests:

Pedagogy is, in part, a technology of power, language, and practice that
produces and legitimates forms of moral and political regulation, that
construct and offer human beings particular views of themselves and the
world. Such views are never innocent and are always implicated in the
discourse and relations of ethics and power. To invoke the importance of
pedagogy is to raise questions not simply about how students learn but
also how educators...construct the ideological and political positions from
which they speak... The purpose and vision that drives such a pedagogy
must be based on a politics and view of authority, that links teaching and
learning to forms of self- and social empowerment that argue for forms
of community life that extend the principles of liberty, equality, justice,
and freedom to the widest possible set of institutional and lived relations.
(p.81)

To draw on the term pedagogy in current educational theory is to draw on the wide range of overtly political theorizing and practice that has been done in the educational field from Paulo Freire's <u>Pedagogy of the Oppressed</u> onward. In bell hooks' words, pedagogy involves 'oppositional world views,' a kind of teaching and learning that addressees not only critique but also hope and possibility. Speaking of a childhood teacher, hooks (1988) comments:

> Passionate in her teaching, confident that her work in life was a pedagogy of liberation (words she would not have used but lived instinctively), one that would address and confront our realities as black children growing up in the segregated South, black children growing up within a white supremacist culture. Miss Moore knew that if we were to be fully self realized, then her work, and the work of all our progressive teachers, was not to teach us solely the knowledge in books, but to teach us an oppositional world view--different from that of our exploiters and oppressors, a world view that would enable us to see ourselves not through the lens of racism or racist stereotypes but one that would enable us to focus clearly and succinctly, to look at ourselves, at the worlds around us, critically--analytically--to see ourselves first and foremost as striving for wholeness, for unity of heart, mind, body, and spirit. (p.49)

Pedagogy, thus, rather than merely suggesting that the transmission of knowledge is a complex process, in fact problematizes the nature of knowledge itself, suggests that knowledge is never neutral or disinterested, and postulates pedagogy as a political process:

> ...to teach in a way that liberates, that expands consciousness, that awakens, is to challenge domination at its very core. (hooks,1988:50)

Another term requiring brief discussion is 'homophobia'. For the purposes of this work, homophobia will be taken to be the "irrational fear and hatred of those who love and sexually desire those of the same sex" (Pharr,1988:1). Although this definition is apparently succinct and clear, it is not without its complications. In a review of Pharr's

book Claudia Card suggests that Pharr's (and others') use of the term 'irrational' tends to reduce the hatred directed towards gays/lesbians/bisexuals to a 'phobia', and that to do so is to individualize this phenomena to a personal problem rather than to highlight the very political and societal nature of the oppression. Card (1990) writes:

> As one who has often been targeted by others' hostile heterosexist attitudes -and who has used the term 'homophobic' as loosely as anyone--I must say that if there is irrational fear behind this hostility, it can be far from evident. Put-downs labelled 'phobic' frequently manifest the contempt, ridicule, and mockery of people who seem to know exactly what they are doing and why. (p.112)

While I share Card's concern about highlighting the political and societal nature of hatred and fear of gays/lesbians/bisexuals, I would suggest that irrationality is not by any means synonymous with 'individualized,' and further that to posit this hatred and fear as an entirely 'rational' process is filled with as many problems as is its opposite.

Card's review poses some interesting ideas about homophobia reflecting not a fear of the 'other' but rather a fear of same-sex love in oneself. She ultimately appears, however, to concede that if the term can be adequately divorced from the medical model's notion of 'homosexuality' and the prejudice against it, then it can function as a useful, albeit problematic concept.

Mariana Valverde (n.d.) makes a distinction between homophobia and heterosexism:

> The terms 'heterosexism' and 'compulsory heterosexuality' (which are generally used interchangeably...)were developed by lesbian feminist theorists during the seventies, particularly by Ti-Grace Atkinson, Adrienne Rich, and Charlotte Bunch. Just as 'sexism' was invented to cover a multiplicity of problems resulting from male dominance, so 'heterosexism' refers to a whole gamut of experiences and attitudes deriving from the social imperative to become 'real' men and 'real' women and then live

happily ever after in a 'real' family.

The elevation of monogamous heterosexuality to the status of the *only* valid lifestyle is the real explanation of the persecution suffered by lesbians, gays, and other 'deviants'. Using the term 'heterosexism' thus emphasizes that discrimination and oppression of lesbians and gays is not just an extreme position held by a few bigots, but is rather the logical result of the imposition of rigid gender and sexual roles on men, women, boys, and girls. The social problem faced by gay people is thus not 'the *gay* problem' but rather the problem of heterosexism. (p.36)

Valverde's use of the term heterosexism thus intentionally draws on the societal nature of oppression towards gays/lesbians/bisexuals, and she is careful to distinguish it from homophobia:

Heterosexism, I want to argue, is not quite the same thing as homophobia... This irrational fear and hatred of homosexuality, known as 'homophobia', is -- at least in North American urban centres   found mostly in extreme right-wingers and in bible-thumpers. Blatant homophobia is becoming passé and disrespectable, much in the same way that blatant anti-Semitism and overt male chauvinism have become passé. Nevertheless, as in the case of both anti-Semitism and male chauvinism, a phenomenon can be disapproved of in polite, trendy circles, but this by no means implies that the more covert and subtle manifestations of such prejudice cannot do a great deal of harm. (Ibid)

Certainly then, homophobia, if etymologically defined, might refer to a medical state of 'irrational fear' (phobia). However, I hope readers will accept my continued use, and perhaps imprecise definition of the term. Homophobia carries with it certain more commonly understood meanings which I seek to retain (that is the commonly accepted notion of the term as the fear and hatred directed towards gays/lesbians/bisexuals and the oppression that gays/lesbians/bisexuals experience), which is often not understood when the term heterosexism is used. Despite its rather vague meaning when examined closely, the term homophobia continues to be the common usage term, including notions perhaps better described by heterosexism. As Jonathan

Dollimore (1986) states of the term homophobia:

> This is, I confess, an ambiguous and not entirely satisfactory term, though I don't propose to unpack that ambiguity except to say that the sense in which I'm using it is roughly descriptive of a manifest phenomenon: the hatred, fear and persecution of, the raging at, homosexuality. (p.5)

I therefore seek to make explicit the fact that while I will continue to use the term homophobia, I use it not in the sense of individualized phobias, but rather to refer to the widespread antagonism and hatred of gays/lesbians/bisexuals in our society.

It is important to acknowledge that in my work educating against homophobia I see the 'unlearning' to be *both* an individual responsibility and a societal one. The dialectic between individual and societal, between challenging our own very personal fears and hatreds while simultaneously acknowledging their societal source and the imperative to work for social change beyond our own experiences, is an integral part of the 'unlearning homophobia' I espouse.

The final term I would like to clarify is 'unlearning'. The term is borrowed from Ricky Sherover-Marcuse who was the originator of 'Unlearning Racism Workshops', which she designed in California in the 1980's and implemented world-wide (Child Assault Prevention Training Center, 1989:1). Her particular approach to educating against racism and anti-Semitism is explained in detail in Chapter II, however a few general words are required here.

Sherover-Marcuse used the term 'unlearning' because she believed that fear and hatred were *learned* by most of us at young ages, growing up in racist, sexist, homophobic, classist societies. Her powerful and compassionate determination that we were not to blame for learning to fear and hate was crucially coupled with the conviction

that it is our responsibility to *unlearn* the oppressive attitudes and practices our society espouses.

In adopting the term 'unlearning', I thus make some very important assumptions about the nature of social change. I use unlearning, firstly, to indicate the personal nature of beginning to challenge our fears and hatreds. I seek to acknowledge that growing up in societies which are racist, homophobic, etc., means that, not withstanding exceptional circumstances, most of us grow up learning those very attitudes. I also desire to emphasize, through the notion of unlearning, the responsibility to change that each of us carries as well as our *ability* to do so. Learned attitudes are not something beyond our control; the agency required to change deep-set beliefs and attitudes is something 'unlearning' emphasizes. We are not hapless victims of bad information, but rather subjects capable of change and growth in both thoughts and action. 'Unlearning' foregrounds our ability to make these changes.

To focus on the individual and personal nature of changing attitudes and beliefs is not to deny the other side of the same coin, that is, the very political and social nature of the task. Homophobia, like racism and sexism, is not simply an individual problem, and thus requires more than solely individual solutions. This thesis is grounded in the assumption that homophobia is both a personal issue, and a societal issue which is bolstered and reinforced through institutionalized practices based on unequal power relations.

Thus homophobia is not simply or uniquely an individual's fear or hatred of gays/lesbians/bisexuals, but it is also a set of social relations in which

gays/lesbians/bisexuals are constantly and consistently denied rights and freedoms afforded others in our society. For these reasons, unlearning must, if it is to provide the impetus for any kind of radical social change, necessarily involve social action beyond the potentially highly individual process of changing personal beliefs and actions. Part of each unlearning workshop I facilitate must address how, as individuals and groups, we can use new insights, information, and attitudes to address the social, structural, and institutional nature of homophobia and heterosexism. What unlearning suggests, therefore, is not that social change at the societal level is unnecessary (clearly it is essential), but rather that it may in fact be predicated on individual change. Trinh Minh-ha (1986/7) points to the always dialectical nature of this process:

> One cannot really 'give voice' to others without unlearning one's privilege as speaking/making subject, or as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak puts it, without 'learning how to speak, so that to those women we will not seem like yet another wave of missionaries coming to develop them into humanhood or femmisthood. (p.6)

I have made the above points in order to make clear that I seek to avoid the trap of defining the solutions to political and social problems in individual terms alone. The tendency to fall into this trap is, I believe, not entirely innocent. It is often far easier to believe that if only a few homophobic individuals could change their attitudes, then the problem would be solved, than it is to acknowledge the very structural and societal nature of the problem. I draw on 'unlearning' because it so crucially identifies the shifting and contingent relationship between individual and societal change.

1.4 CONSTRAINTS AND LIMITATIONS

Clearly there exists a variety of important related areas not within the scope of this thesis. Some of these have been excluded because of their tangential or peripheral relationship to the main body of this work, others because, although they may be highly relevant, they would stretch this work into a far longer and more detailed project than is currently possible. In the latter category falls, on the one hand, a discussion of the effects of homophobia and heterosexism, and on the other hand a focus on gay/lesbian/bisexual culture.[10]

As I will detail further below (in a discussion of methodology), the main theoretical focus of this work is feminist pedagogical theory. In addition to my strong commitment to educating against homophobia, my use of the Unlearning Homophobia workshop in this thesis reflects two distinct needs: on the one hand, the need to draw in a practical component through which I can further assess the theory, and on the other my desire to assess and improve my practice with the help of the theory. Thus any detailed examination of homophobia or heterosexism, or any study of gay/lesbian/bisexual culture, although of importance and interest, would have brought in another vast area of theory to be assessed. I cite this limitation to this work with regret

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[10] The desire (and perhaps necessity) to present a more pro active and positive side of gay/lesbian/bisexual life (other than solely the negative experience of homophobia) will be addressed in my re-reading (in Chapter IV) of the workshop. It is for this reason that I feel a discussion of the positivity and diversity of gay/lesbian/bisexual experience would greatly enhance this work. Unfortunately this kind of examination is beyond the scope of this project.

and refer the reader to a variety of excellent sources on these topics.[11]

In the former category of areas of interest but which appear to be only of tangential relevance to the aim of this research, fall such topics as the psychology of prejudice, the history of gay/lesbian/bisexual culture, and the historical development of homophobia and heterosexism. Within the confines of this work, these topics have not been touched upon. The history, development, and current themes of critical pedagogy have been drawn on only in as much as they are necessary for an understanding of feminist pedagogical theory. Critical pedagogy, as well as its roots in critical theory, constitute a vast arena of study in and of themselves and such study is beyond the scope of this thesis.[12]

The tremendous impact of postmodern and poststructuralist theory on feminist pedagogical theory calls for a certain examination of these schools of thought. I have, unavoidably, drawn on these theories, and have attempted to explain their often abstract and complex notions. I am aware of the incomplete nature of my discussion and my

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[11] See particularly: Margaret Cruikshank (1992) The Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement; Lillian Faderman (1991) Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: a History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth Century America; Diana Fuss, ed. (1991) Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories; Suzanne Pharr (1988) Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism.

[12] Some of the significant work in the area of critical pedagogy include the many works by Henry Giroux (1992, 1991, 1988b, 1988c, 1983) as well as: Peter McLaren (1989) Life In Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education; Ira Shor (1992) Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change; Roger Simon (1992) Teaching Against the Grain: Texts for a Pedagogy of Possibility; as well as work by others such as Stanley Aronowitz, Michael Apple, and of course Paulo Freire.

assessment of these theories and of the particular relations between them. However a thorough study of them lies outside of the parameters of this work.

Finally, I feel one of the contradictions and limitations of this work to be the very dense theoretical discussion within Chapter III, on feminist pedagogical theory. I share Kathleen Weiler's observation that much writing about education has tended to shy away from theory, eschewing abstract language and debate in the name of pragmatics and practicality. Weiler (1988) suggests:

> This distrust of abstract theory can be valuable, particularly when we are faced with some of the more abstruse concepts in social theory. But a critical and pragmatic stance should not lead to a rejection of all theoretical analysis. That rejection can leave us limited in our ability to analyze the relationship between the actions of individuals and the social totality which has so profoundly shaped and influenced them. (p.2)

I cite Weiler here because although I agree strongly with the need for critical and complex educational theorizing, I am also aware of the elitism and power imbalances that are perpetuated when theory, because of rarefied and jargon-like language, is rendered accessible to only a select few. I am not certain how this contradiction can be resolved. In order to adequately describe and examine feminist pedagogy I am compelled to use the language, terms, and ideas used by its own theoreticians. Like many feminist pedagogues, I have sought to ground the theory in everyday experience[1], thus

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[1] I use here 'everyday experience' as opposed to 'practice' in an attempt to avoid static and rigid opposition between theory and practice. Gilles Deleuze (quoted in Foucault, 1977a) writes of the relationship between the two: "Possibly we're in the process of experiencing a new relationship between theory and practice. At one time practice was considered an application of theory, a consequence; at other times, it had an opposite sense and it was thought to inspire theory, to be indispensable for the creation of future theoretical forms... Practice is a set of relays from one theoretical point to another, and theory is a relay from one practice to another. No theory can

rendering the many possible meanings more accessible and providing the concrete examples to help give broader meaning and relevance. I do, however, see the contradictions in discussing theory in a way that is accessible only to those in the field.[11] I cite this limitation in the hope that as I become more familiar with the theory I will be better able to render it accessible to a wider variety of readers.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

> Given the way universities work to reinforce and perpetuate the status quo, the way knowledge is offered as commodity, Women's Studies can easily become a place where revolutionary feminist thought and feminist activism are submerged or made secondary to the goals of academic careerism. Without diminishing in any way our struggle as academics striving to succeed in institutions, such effort is fully compatible with liberatory feminist struggle only when we consciously, carefully, and strategically link the two...
> Where feminist struggle is the central foundation for feminist education, Women's Studies and the feminist classroom (which can exist outside the domain of Women's Studies) can be places where education is the practice of freedom, the place for liberatory pedagogy. (hooks,1988:51)

These words by bell hooks reflect most clearly my methodological concerns in the writing of this thesis. As I have mentioned above, through citing Kathleen Weiler, theory is a crucial element of developing new methods and practices, and those who eschew it entirely give up exciting, challenging and important new areas of learning. However, theory separated from practice tends to lean toward a kind of inaccessible and

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develop without eventually encountering a wall, and practice is necessary for piercing this wall" (p.205/6).

[11] For a discussion of the insularity of feminist pedagogical discourse see Jennifer Gore's (1992b) The Struggle for Pedagogies.

elitist insularity, leaving those seeking to generate social change through new and radical practice far behind.

This concern with theory and practice, and the particular relationship between them, has been central to both feminist scholars and activists for decades. "Feminism," writes Patti Lather (1991b:27), "is the site where the theory/practice nexus is being most creatively interrogated". What this thesis aims to do is take up the methodological concerns of feminist pedagogues, by bringing together, as they almost always do, the realms of theory and practice.

A methodology that draws on personal experience and practice to enrich and engage theory is certainly not a new concept in feminist research. There currently exists a vast array of what have come to be know as 'feminist methodologies,' generated because women, including their voices, subjectivities, and priorities, have long been excluded from traditional academic research.[15] In response to this imposed silence, many women in the humanities and social sciences have begun to generate new kinds of methodologies which are based in feminist analyses of society, and which seek to redress the imbalances existing in academic and other arenas. Feminist methodologies characteristically refute traditional notions of 'objectivity' in research, attempt to account for the complexity and multiplicity of human experience, and ground themselves in women's personal experiences of oppression and its resistance. Feminist methodologies

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[15] The number of sources in the area of feminist methodology is quite extensive. Some of significance are: Dorothy Smith (1987) The Everyday World as Problematic A Feminist Sociology; Sandra Harding (1987) Feminism and Methodology. Social Science Issues; Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith Cook (1991) Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research.

seek crucially to ask *new* questions, grounded in women's experiences and concerns, thus not only changing how research is carried out, but what in fact, is researched. Sandra Harding (1987) suggests:

> Defining what is in need of scientific explanation only from the perspective of bourgeois, white men's experiences leads to partial and even perverse understandings of social life. One distinctive feature of feminist research is that it generates its problematics from the perspective of women's experiences. It also uses these experiences as a significant indicator of the 'reality' against which hypotheses are tested. (p.7)

The structure of this thesis is one which reflects many aspects of feminist methodologies. Although feminist pedagogical theory is at the heart of the work, I precede my discussion of the theory by situating myself and my interest in feminist pedagogy within my practical experiences of educating women for social change. The first part of Chapter II thus outlines the epistemological approaches and assumptions of the two feminist organizations mentioned above (the Montreal Assault Prevention Centre and the Peterborough Rape Crisis Centre), with an aim of assessing in what ways their methods attempt, and to what degrees they succeed, in challenging unjust social practices, specifically violence against women. My assessment of these issues is at best partial, intended neither to conclusively represent, nor objectively evaluate the successes of these organizations. I examine the PRCC and the MAPC through my partial and personal experiences working in these settings because it is from here that my search for feminist educational theory grew, that I began to look for a way of further explaining and theorizing my 'practice'.

The second part of Chapter II goes further in engaging theory and practice by outlining a very specific 'pedagogical instance,' the Unlearning Homophobia workshop

I have designed and led on a variety of occasions. Chapter III deals in detail with the literature on and theories of feminist pedagogy, with its history and current preoccupations, specifically with a number of central 'themes' which arise consistently in the literature. The final chapter of this work is, perhaps most importantly, a theoretical 're-working' of the Unlearning Homophobia workshop as outlined in Chapter II. After the detailed examination of feminist pedagogical theory in Chapter III, assumptions, problems, contradictions, and oversights of the workshop are raised for examination and are engaged with through the lens of how feminist pedagogical theory might be able to enrich the workshop. With the aim of both improving my practice and enriching feminist pedagogy, I 're-read' my workshop, looking for ways in which theory and practice can work together and intensify each other.[16]

Clearly my research approach is one which is "...openly committed to a more just social order" (Lather,1991b:50). My interest in relating theory and practice is not abstract, but rather reflects my desire to make my research into a kind of praxis (Lather,1991b:51). My hope is that this thesis is not simply a 'study of' feminist pedagogy, but is also an 'example of' feminist pedagogy in process - an example which may help infuse such pedagogy with further meaning.

Feminist pedagogy is inherently and overtly political. 'Truth' is not the main item on the agenda, but rather the search for ways to transform our marginal and

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[16] This methodology of 're-reading' has some interesting precedents in the realm of feminist research. Particularly see: Patti Lather (1991) Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy With/In the Postmodern; and Michael Chervin (1991) "Travels of North American postmodern feminism: its influence on feminist pedagogy".

oppressed status in education and elsewhere.

> ...the questions an oppressed group wants answered are rarely requests for
> so-called pure truth. Instead they are queries about how to change its
> conditions: how its world is shaped by forces beyond it; how to win over,
> defeat, or neutralize those forces arrayed against its emancipation, growth,
> or development; and so forth. Consequently, feminist research projects
> originate primarily not in any old 'women's experience,' but in women's
> experiences of political struggles. (Kate Millet and others remind us that
> the bedroom and the kitchen are as much the site of political struggle as
> are the board room or the polling place.) It may be that it is only through
> such struggles that one can come to understand oneself and the social
> world. (Harding,1987:8)

I write this thesis from my own personal places of struggle, particularly as both

a woman student and educator: I write to learn, to enrich my practice, to engage my

theory, and to go on visioning and imagining more truly equitable worlds for us all.

Chapter II

Feminist Pedagogy in Practice

2.1 GROUNDING / CONTEXT

How do we create an oppositional world-view, a consciousness, an identity, a stand-point that exists not only as that struggle which opposes dehumanization but as that movement which enables creative, expansive, self-actualization? **Opposition is not enough. In that vacant space after one has resisted there is still the necessity to become - to make oneself anew.** (hooks, 1990:15) [emphasis mine]

To oppose something is to maintain it. They say here "all roads lead to Mishnory." To be sure, if you turn your back on Mishnory and walk away from it, you are still on the Mishnory road. To oppose vulgarity is inevitably to be vulgar. **You must go somewhere else; you must have another goal; then you walk a different road.** (Leguin, 1969:153) [emphasis mine]

Over the years I have had the opportunity of working in a variety of feminist educational positions within the broader Canadian women's movement. Through my earlier work as both a rape crisis counsellor and later as public education coordinator for the Peterborough Rape Crisis Centre (PRCC), and more recently through my work as educational staff and instructor of self-defense for women at the Montreal Assault Prevention Centre (MAPC), I have had the opportunity to experience varying strategies and approaches to feminist education. My personal path from the first to the second of these two organizations has offered me experiences with which to situate myself within and make sense of the theoretical developments of feminist pedagogy.

The move from a more 'reactive' to a more 'proactive' approach to women, power, and education reflects a paradigmatic shift in feminist theorizing which holds tremendous implications in relation to the use of education as a tool for social change.

The shift in focus between the PRCC and the MAPC could be described in very general terms as a decline in the influence of Critical Theory's 'negative critique'[17] and a subsequent rise in the influence of a more affirmative, pro-active, post-dialectical cultural theory drawing on the post-structuralism of French theorists such as Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze.[18]

The work carried out by the Rape Crisis Centre reflects the earlier of these two approaches, carrying with it accompanying notions of education and change. In this organization, feminist therapy or counselling (for survivors of sexual assault) is viewed as a way of dispensing radical knowledge through consciousness raising concerning the position of the oppressed in society. That is, feminist counselling is seen to be far more than supplying a sympathetic ear; it is also a process of making explicit and political the act of sexual violence, of helping women see that what happened to them is part of a structure of power (which generally-speaking men wield over women). A depth-model[19] approach is here explicit, suggesting that normally the world is seen according to a dominant ideology which obfuscates the true nature of privilege and oppression. If only, through the education of individual women, one could reveal the truth of

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[17] See for example: Susan Buck-Morss (1977) The Origin of Negative Dialectics; Herbert Marcuse (1964) One-Dimensional Man.

[18] North American educational theory's use of French thought appeals almost exclusively to the work of Foucault. However, I include Deleuze because of the important affinities which these two authors share. Also because Deleuze's work is particularly important to conceptualizing the difference between negative and positive critique. See for example Gilles Deleuze (1983) Nietzsche and Philosophy.

[19] On the postmodern critique of depth-models see Frederic Jameson (1991:12) Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.

oppression, could expose the myth of the apparently equal and just society, then necessarily the whole would come tumbling down. Change is generated by educating people about the 'truth' of our society (i.e., its internal contradictions), as society only continues to function by hiding this truth. For this organization, as for all who function according to this model, change and political action are based on revealing true knowledge, revealing ideology as deception. Thus consciousness-raising and a negative critique of the world as it is constitute the extent of educating for change. According to this approach, these actions are in fact *enough* in themselves to generate change, enlightenment is the radical project, revolution will follow true knowledge. Of equal importance is the formulation of power as a rigid dichotomy between powerful and powerless (read: men and women, whites and blacks, heterosexuals and gays/lesbians/bisexuals). Thus consciousness-raising and 'revealing the truth' are the only educational tools available to the oppressed to challenge society's unequal divisions of power.

Despite the radical goal of seeking to eradicate violence against women, all of the PRCC's activities, from highly individualized counselling of survivors to public education (via political demonstrations, speaking engagements in schools and community groups), were aimed solely towards educating women about the structural nature of their victim status. All of the PRCC's educational activity was thus trapped within this particular epistemological model. Despite the ultimately 'positive' and proactive goal of ending violence against women, PRCC methods remained, at a fundamental level, 'negative' and reactive. bell hooks (1988) writes of this tendency:

Using contemporary feminist movement as an example, we can look at
ways feminist activists try to educate for critical consciousness. Within
contemporary feminist movement, the process of consciousness-raising
was at one time a central framework for the development of critical
consciousness. Yet often the focus was solely one of naming one's
oppressor, naming the pain. That powerful slogan, 'the personal is
political,' addresses the connection between the self and political reality.
Yet it was often interpreted as meaning that to name one's personal pain
in relation to structures of domination was not just a beginning stage in
the process of coming to political consciousness, to awareness, but all that
was necessary. In most cases, naming one's personal pain was not
sufficiently linked to over-all education for critical consciousness of
collective political resistance. Focusing on the personal in a framework
that did not compel acknowledgement of the complexity of structures of
domination could easily lead to misnaming, to the creation of yet another
sophisticated level of non- or distorted awareness. (p.32)

The approach of the Montreal Assault Prevention Centre reflects a move to a

different notion of power and of the process of educating for change (or as Magda Lewis

(1990) terms it 'interrupting patriarchy'). This approach challenges notions of power as

static, as something possessed or owned by individuals, and suggests instead a more

Foucauldian notion of power as something which flows and is exchanged in *relations*.

That is, power exists in the relations between people, not in people themselves. This

approach acknowledges that we participate in relations of power, so that in particular

situations if we have skills and information, we may be able (even as the 'oppressed'),

to interrupt the flow of power and transform relations-as-usual.

Patti Lather suggests that discussion about how we are unwittingly victimized may

not be what is most useful for women. To address our own involvement, our own

(unwilled) complicity in our oppression is to open the door to our agency, to be able to

posit the ways in which we can resist, interrupt our subjugation and generate positive

change:

U.S. feminism historically has valorized coercion as the truth of
oppression (victimization theories) over *consent* as a political factor... Yet,
what I heard students in this study wanting to know/tell had something to
do with resisting victimization and passivity. How an individual sustains
a society's givens..., how we are inscribed in dominant discourse..., how
we can come to understand our own collusion - this was the information
they found most powerful. To begin to understand how we are caught up
in power situations of which we are, ourselves, the bearers, is to
foreground the limits of our lives and what we can do within those
boundaries. (Lather, 1991b:143/44)

The radical aspect of this different approach is reflected in the example of self

defense. At the Rape Crisis Centre, self-defense was an issue wrought with difficulty

To suggest that women could in fact fight back when faced with an assault situation,

seemed also to suggest that they *could have* done something to prevent the assault. To

suggest this was to feed into the dominant blame-the-victim ideology so well known to

survivors of sexual violence. The result of this catch twenty-two was that self defense

and assault prevention could not be introduced into rape crisis programming in any

integral way. At the Montreal Assault Prevention Centre, teaching women and children

to fight back is the central project. A clear acknowledgement is made that although we

can all 'take back' power and fight back, it is unusual for women and children to have

the information or skills to know how to do so, or to even believe they *can* do so. If one

has experienced assault and not fought back, this is not to blame the victim. However

the radical project is to learn these skills for next time. In this way, the entire

parameters of the debate on power are challenged.

This 'positive' approach of the MAPC insists that we address the ways in which

we are implicated in our own subjugation. This is a tenuous task. It is crucial to

acknowledge the real and political concerns regarding victim-blaming, which has long

been a powerful tool of patriarchy. However, this approach also helps us to see that one of the ways in which victim-blaming remains most effective is by scaring feminism away from discussion of dangerous and volatile issues. This has resulted within certain feminisms in a self-imposed silencing which profoundly limits us. If, for example, we can't talk about what a woman *could have* done to fight off an attack, how can we talk about what she *can do* in the future? In effect, this silencing ensures that the most basic and fundamental constructs of power remain unchallenged. Further, refusing to recognize our complicity (which isn't necessarily conscious or willed) in our own subjugation does not in the end free us from these relations. The task of 'positive critique' is to show how the previous model perpetuates this complicity by ensuring that the 'victim' remains ignorant of his/her own agency, and of the tools to enact that agency.

I identify the two approaches outlined above as negative and positive critique respectively. Negative critique is commonly associated with the dialectical approach of the Frankfurt School's Critical theory. Positive critique is not simply an apolitical validation of popular culture or of the status quo, but rather relates to a post-structuralist (Deleuzian/Foucauldian) affirmation of difference. Negative critique is so termed because this approach is grounded in the notion of envisioning change through a negation of what is, thus defining itself negatively. In relation to the question of power, the negative critique sees dominant society as power*ful*, and is thus obliged to define non-dominant society (the 'other') negatively in relation to the first, as power*less*. It must be noted that the opposition between the positive and negative approaches is not a

symmetrical one. While the negative is properly the opposite of the positive (i.e., it takes its definition according to the terms of the other), the positive is *not* the opposite of the negative. It defines itself on its own terms and recognizes no essential relationship to the negative:

> If we understand affirmation and negation as qualities of the will to power we see that they do not have a univocal relation. Negation is *opposed* to affirmation but affirmation *differs* from negation. We cannot think of affirmation as 'being opposed' to negation: this would be to place the negative within it. Opposition is not only the relation of negation with affirmation but the essence of the negative as such. Affirmation is the enjoyment and play of its own difference, just as negation is the suffering and labour of the opposition that belongs to it. (Deleuze,1983:188/89)

Clearly therefore, the re-theorizing of power, and the conceptualizing of a positive rather than negative critique, has tremendous implications for feminist education and pedagogy. Despite the diversity of the theory, feminist pedagogy in its myriad of forms and styles deals consistently with these issues, and addresses how the theorization and conceptualization of them profoundly effect pedagogy: the teacher, the student the knowledge, and the process of learning.

The move from negative critiques to more proactive methods has been taken up by radical educational theorists across the board. Jennifer Gore (1992b) suggests speaking of critical pedagogy specifically:

> There has been a self-proclaimed shift from 'a language of critique' to 'a language of possibility'... This differentiation is connected with the shift from conceptions of power as repressive to power as productive, and with a shift from an emphasis on ideology and structure to an emphasis on agency. Resistance theories can be located at the transition between critique and possibility... 'Empowerment' has been constructed in ways that take this productive moment of power further, and so go 'beyond resistance'. (p.64)

Although Gore goes on to develop a critique of both critical and feminist pedagogy's conceptualization of power (and specifically of empowerment), she has accurately identified a crucial theoretical shift in feminist pedagogical theorizing.

Patti Lather (1991b), in the introductory pages of Getting Smart underlines that:

> ...Lyotard writes 'oppositional thinking...is out of step with the most vital modes of postmodern knowledge'... Hence, my central movement in the book is a turning away from focus on dominant power to a focus on oppositional discourses of criticism and resistance (p.xvii)

Lather, while heeding Lyotard's warning to move beyond oppositional thinking, and while certainly moving towards "ways of knowing which interrupt relations of domination and subordination" (Ibid), has not quite abandoned the language of negative critique her discourses are still termed 'oppositional' despite her goals of criticism, and crucially, resistance. Donna Haraway (1992) has recently taken this effort a step further by suggesting the use of the term 'differential' (a radical alternative strategy that is not oppositional) to replace 'oppositional' altogether (p.297).

What is of particular importance to feminism in the notion of positive versus negative critique is the likelihood, when thinking in solely oppositional terms, of ultimately bolstering the very structures one seeks to challenge. When we "...buy another ticket for women of the world on the merry-go-round of feminine constructions...rather [than getting] off the merry-go-round and [running] away" (Alcoff,1988:414), we risk undermining our very efforts for radical change, by generating thought that is constantly *in relation to* the status quo, and which is always negative, which ultimately cannot move beyond the very structures we are trying to change. "The master's tools,' writes Audre Lorde (1984:112), "will never dismantle the

master's house" (Lorde,1984:112). As Alcoff (1988) suggests:

> ...you cannot mobilize a movement that is only and always against, you
> must have a positive alternative, a vision of a better future. (p 418/19)

bell hooks (1988) writes of the disillusioning effect of educating for social change

via negative critique alone:

> Naming the pain or uncovering the pain in a context where it is not linked
> to strategies for resistance and transformation created for many women the
> conditions for even greater estrangement, alienation, isolation, and at
> times grave despair. Rather than aiding the process for self recovery,
> many women felt a sense of disintegration as though their lives were
> becoming all the more fragmented and broken... Longing for self
> recovery, not simply the description of one's woundedness, one's
> victimization, or repeated discussion of the problems, many women
> simply became disillusioned and disinterested in feminism, uncertain about
> whether feminism was really a radical movement. (p.32/33)

To posit social change only in terms of negating what is, is to deny women the

very real tools for generating positive change, now, in the world as we know it, not

merely in some utopian future. The difference between the articulated ultimate goals of

the PRCC and the MAPC highlights this issue. For the PRCC, 'eradicating violence

against women and children' was the project. What this meant was that until that day

of revolution arrived (due to consciousness-raising about our oppressed status), violence

would continue to be visited upon us. Concrete change in the quality of our lives was

only to come in the utopian future which held no violence. At the MAPC, the goal is

articulated differently. Although still utopian, it crucially is termed not in a negation of

the status quo (i.e., we will end the violence that now exis s), but rather in a positivity,

we desire a world in which we will all be 'safe, strong, and free'. We don't have to

wait until there is no more violence to end rape and sexual assault; rather we can learn

strategies and tools, in our present (violent) world, which will help us to be safe, strong, and free. Change is immediate, and is not only personal (in that as individuals the quality of our lives may improve), but political in that we are forging new, positive ways of thinking and acting upon our power and strength.

Feminist pedagogy strives towards this positivity. Its theories are for use now, not later, and its authors attempt consistently to produce pro-, not reactive theory. Lather (1991b) writes, "My desire is to construct a non-agonistic narrative which proceeds otherwise than thinking via oppositions" (p.20). In seeking to tread the 'different road' of Legum (1969:153), feminist pedagogues are part of a new and vital movement toward social change.

I leave, now, this discussion of different ('positive' and 'negative') approaches to educating for social change. I have outlined and given examples of these two different approaches in the hope that they will serve as a backdrop for the second half of this chapter. The narrative to follow, in which I will turn to a specific instance of feminist pedagogy, describes an Unlearning Homophobia Workshop I have designed and facilitated, and can be read, in part, in terms of its relation to the two approaches to education outlined above. In my 're-reading' of this narrative (in Chapter IV) the role that the negative and positive approaches currently play in the workshop, and the roles they might more appropriately or effectively play, will be addressed.

2.2 DOING FEMINIST PEDAGOGY:
AN UNLEARNING HOMOPHOBIA WORKSHOP

What we can say is that gays and lesbians are not just a minority in need of rights, but an oppressed group whose liberation implies the liberation of *all* people from gender stereotypes. (Valverde,n.d.:38)

Racism, the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance. Sexism, the belief in the inherent superiority of one sex over the other and thereby the right to dominance Ageism Heterosexism. Elitism. Classism.
It is a lifetime pursuit for each one of us to extract these distortions from our living at the same time as we recognize, reclaim, and define those differences upon which they are imposed. (Lorde,1990:282)

Clearly, 'doing' feminist pedagogy has meant many things for me, even if at the time of the 'doing' I would not have called upon the term (feminist pedagogy) to describe my actions. Both my work as a rape crisis counsellor, and later as an assault prevention instructor were part of my learning to 'do' feminist pedagogy, within, as we have seen, vastly different frameworks. Assessing these experiences and the organizational structures in which they developed has helped to delineate different (albeit both feminist) approaches to educating for social change. Through examining what I have referred to as 'negative' and 'positive' approaches to educating for social change (reflected in the approaches of the PRCC and the MAPC respectively) I have been able to situate myself in relation to feminist pedagogy's positive and proactive approach. The details of feminist pedagogical theory will be addressed in Chapter III, however my discussion of the PRCC and the MAPC serve to provide both myself and the reader with a concrete frame in which we might better understand some of the implications of feminist pedagogy.

Despite these concrete settings outlined above which help us to situate feminist

pedagogy I turn now to a more tightly-defined and specific 'instance' of practice, outside of these two organizations, which I hope will help more concretely illuminate the goals and promises of a feminist pedagogy. My purpose in taking this turn is to provide an instance of 'pedagogy in practice'. Following the initial description of this 'instance' and an examination of feminist pedagogical theory, I will return to this 'instance' in an attempt to put my theoretical learnings into practice.

The 'instance' I will examine is an Unlearning Homophobia workshop which I designed long before my 'discovery' of feminist pedagogical theory. As we shall see in Chapter IV, much of this workshop grew out of the political assumptions and epistemological positions of the PRCC. Although I have implemented the workshop in a variety of different settings, I will focus on three specific instances in which the workshop remained more or less consistent: firstly, in June 1992 for participants of a course entitled 'Feminist and Critical Approaches to Valuing Diversity,' in the Faculty of Education at McGill University in Montreal; secondly, in October 1992 for employees training to animate the Child Assault Prevention Project (CAPP) under the auspices of the Montreal Assault Prevention Centre (again in Montreal); and finally in February 1993 for employees training to animate CAPP under the auspices of the *Centre de Santé Communautaire du Niagara*, in Hamilton, Ontario. I will term these workshops the 'McGill,' 'Prevention Centre,' and 'Hamilton' workshops respectively.

For descriptive purposes, I will draw most heavily on the most recent of these workshops (Hamilton), however the workshops were similar in nature (both in terms of the exercises followed in the workshop and in the kinds of participant responses to the

exercises). As such, although I am describing one particular moment, this description is relatively relevant for the other two workshops as well. Each workshop lasted approximately three hours, and with minor variations, each consisted of the same exercises. I facilitated each workshop alone, and the McGill and Hamilton workshops each had approximately fifteen participants, while the Prevention Centre workshop had five.

2.3 BACKGROUND INFORMATION TO THE HAMILTON WORKSHOP

I was invited to facilitate an Unlearning Homophobia workshop by the two coordinators/trainers who were responsible for implementing CAPP for the first time in the Niagara Region. The participants in the workshop would be all those undergoing an intensive training to implement CAPP in Niagara Region schools. Thus the Unlearning Homophobia workshop would constitute only one small part of a much larger training program. The workshop was scheduled to take place on the afternoon of the first day of participant training, after the participants had received a general description and explanation of the CAPP program they would eventually be implementing. Although the coordinators and I agreed that this was not the ideal time to implement the workshop (before participants knew each other well, before they had received complete training on the nature of the work they would be doing), it appeared to be logistically the only possible time that I could be in Hamilton. We decided it would be better for the participants to experience the workshop at a less than ideal time than not to experience it at all. There were fifteen participants, twelve women and three men, as well as the

two coordinators who also participated in the workshop along with the 'trainees'.

2.4 THE WORKSHOP: FEBRUARY 23, 1993

The workshop participants filed back into the cramped and windowless room after their lunch break. They appeared to me to be tired (perhaps from an already intense morning dealing with the difficult topic of child abuse) and slightly wary, although not entirely unwelcoming, of an outsider coming in to address an uncomfortable topic.

Introduction. I began the workshop with a brief introduction of myself, stating that I worked over the last couple of years at the Montreal Assault Prevention Centre (where the two coordinators came from). I also discussed language barriers: most of the participants were francophone, and I was conducting the workshop in English. Translators were organized for those who needed them, and I suggested that although I would speak in English, those who felt more comfortable in French should speak in that language. I acknowledged that homophobia was a difficult topic to deal with and that it might be uncomfortable or scary for some of us, and that I hoped that over the course of the workshop we could create a space that was safe enough for people to feel able to share experiences and participate in the process. I addressed the fact that not everyone would necessarily know what the term 'homophobia' meant, and that part of what we would be doing together would be to try to understand the term and what it might mean for the program they would be implementing. I pointed out that the agenda for the three hours was tight, but that the workshop would be participatory in nature, and that during the times when I was presenting in a slightly more formal way, participants should feel

fine to stop me with questions, disagreements, discussion, etc.

Trust Exercise. I talked briefly about how homophobia was a particularly difficult topic because it often involved issues of safety. I suggested we might be better able to learn if we felt safe enough to reflect on our own experiences and feelings about homophobia, but that this might not be easy for us all to do. I led the group in a visualization in which I asked the participants to feel themselves to be a closed group going through the afternoon together, to vision ourselves safe, in a room able to share experiences and feelings, and I talked about the importance of not taking personal information disclosed in the workshop out of the room without specific permission to do so.

Definitions. I asked participants to split into groups of two or three and to spend a few minutes brain-storming about what homophobia meant to them, how they might define it for someone who didn't know the term. Each group was asked to write their thoughts on chart paper and they were hung up around the room. Each group presented briefly what they had come up with. Most responses centred around notions of 'fear' (phobia) of 'sameness' (homo). Homophobia was understood by most participants to be the fear/dislike of gays and lesbians. Some groups suggested it might also include the discrimination which resulted from that fear. Most participants appeared to understand the term in at least a broad and general way. We made analogies to racism and sexism which seemed to help some of those having trouble with the concept. The participants appeared to take this discussion easily in stride, speaking quite openly and comfortably about definitions, helping each other out as opposed to relying on me when some were unclear. Was homophobia the same as racism? What about heterosexism? Lively but

comfortable discussion ensued, those more familiar with the issue spoke openly, others to whom the issue appeared to be new, remained more silent, apparently listening and absorbing.

Kinds of Homophobia. I briefly presented different 'kinds' of homophobia, or different ways homophobia might manifest itself in society. I told participants I was using a way of categorizing discriminatory behaviour that I myself had learned in an Unlearning Racism workshop I had participated in several years ago. We discussed 'overt,' 'covert or institutional,' 'unaware,' and finally 'self-righteous,' homophobia (or racism). Participants discussed their interpretations of these categories, and we suggested kinds of behaviour that might be typical of each category. In this way we explored a range of homophobic behaviours and were able to imagine how homophobia might manifest itself in the day to-day lives of gays and lesbians.

Again participants were engaged, suggesting ways homophobia might 'look', they appeared to like the 'categories' I generated, with realizations lighting up their faces as we added examples to the lists of different kinds of homophobia.

Relationship of Unlearning Homophobia to the Child Assault Prevention Project. (This exercise was not part of the McGill workshop). We discussed how work as a CAPP animator involved modelling behaviour for children in the classroom. For example, animators modelled respect, empowerment, women in assertive roles, and men in caring roles. I suggested that as well, animators have a responsibility to model behaviour that is respectful of differences between people (we discussed other manifestations of difference which carried with them certain power imbalances, i.e., those based on race,

gender, class, ability, etc.). In this case, we focused specifically on how we could model respect around issues of sexuality. We discussed two different ways in which animators might do this. One was what I termed 'reactive' modelling. When students asked questions about sexuality, when they used derogatory terms for gays or lesbians, when they made fun of gays or lesbians (all of which happens often in the CAPP classroom), animators needed to have a way to respond, not to let these moments slip by. We agreed that not to respond might appear to be tacit support of homophobic attitudes and behaviours. Secondly, we discussed 'proactive' modelling. I suggested that this meant being able to model awareness and caring for people's different sexualities. This might mean acknowledging overtly that lesbian and gay relationships exist, that not all teens want to date members of the opposite sex, or it might mean acknowledging that younger children might not have a mom and a dad, but rather two moms. Discussion of the difference of these two approaches (reactive and proactive) ensued, and we went on to discuss how either of these responses would be difficult if we ourselves, as animators had not worked through some of these issues. We suggested it might be hard to discuss lesbian parenting with youngsters if we didn't feel lesbians could/should be mothers, or we would have difficulty addressing gay/lesbian dating if we didn't believe in the rights of gays and lesbians.

Unlearning Model. I then spent about fifteen minutes presenting, in a slightly more formal way, a model on 'unlearning' designed by Ricki Sherover-Marcuse. I introduced the model with an explanation of what I feel to be the limitations of models, that they sometimes mean that we see things only according to the model and thus they ultimately

may limit rather than broaden our vision. I gave my reasons for finding this particular model useful, but also suggested that participants see it as only one model, and while I have found it to be useful, they might not, in which case I suggested they discard it. I encouraged participants to find their own ways of thinking about the issue of homophobia and other areas of power imbalances. I explained that I like the model for two reasons. On the one hand, from my position of oppression (or lesser power) such as being a woman or a Jew, it helped give me hope. It helped me understand the behaviour that might hurt me, and helped me understand the history of that behaviour. On the other hand, from my position of privilege, or greater power (as a white or middle-class person), it helped me to work through and discard the immobilizing guilt which often stops me from acting, either to change my own behaviour or other's behaviour. I suggested that from both of these positions (which we all occupy in different ways) of privilege or oppression, this model helped to empower me. My presentation of the model was based on the following sketch:

The Model

The divisions between groups of people we have talked about are divisions based on power (race, class, gender, sexuality, age, etc.). While not exactly opposites they represent categories in which one group has advantages, power, privilege, in relation to the other group.

I call these groups target and non-target groups (although lots of other terms could be used: privileged and oppressed, dominant and subordinate, etc.)

Target groups are groups which different from the 'norm'. They are singled out and oppressed/discriminated against for their differences from the norm (both individually and institutionally as we have seen). They are seen to be 'other' in our society. Because of their status, people in target groups are often acutely aware of their identification with that group.

Non-target groups on the other hand are taught to see themselves as the norm. Everyone different from them is 'other,' somehow outside of the norm. People in non-target groups don't get targeted for who they are,

but rather they get rewards for who they are, their reality is confirmed every day by society. Often, they don't identify as part of a non target group, there is no need to, they are simply 'normal,' just people. Often people in non-target groups know little about people in target groups.

What the model proposes is that whichever group you belong to (and usually we all belong to both at different times), you get trained from childhood to be part of this group. If you're in a target group you get 'victim training,' and if you're in a non-target group you get 'perpetrator training'.

There are two important things about this training:
1) We had no choice in receiving this training. Therefore we are not responsible for the training we got. We are responsible for 'unlearning' our training, but not for having received it in the first place.
2) Whatever training we got, it was painful. It is painful to learn to hate as well as to be hated. Not to compare the two pains, they are very different experiences, and this is not a way to 'excuse' or 'forgive' those who may hurt people different from them. However it is a way of helping us understand that behaviour.

Ultimately it also means that when we get involved in trying to change our oppressive behaviour or that of other people, we are doing so not simply out of a kind of altruism ('black people will be better of if I fight racism'), but because we (in this case white people) have something to gain by unlearning that behaviour. The goal is personal, not just political. This leads to the idea of 'allies,' and how we can be good allies to people in target groups.

Following the presentation of the model, there was considerable discussion. Some points were clarified. Considerable time was spent discussing if it was useful or not to see non-target group members as experiencing 'pain' in learning to hate. "Does that mean we should forgive them, not be angry at them?" asked the only woman of colour in the group. The group discussed this, and although consensus was not met on the usefulness of the model, I felt that most participants were able to see how understanding how non-target groups learn oppressive behaviour and attitudes might be useful for us as animators of CAPP. We identified the fact that we would be better able to deal with

the homophobia of children in the program if we could react not simply with anger (although we certainly might feel that), but also with empathy and caring, with an understanding of how they might have learned that behaviour, and with an understanding of the advantages to unlearning that behaviour.

What we learned. I led the group in a visualization where we tried to remember the first time in our childhood or young adulthood when we had heard the word gay or lesbian. We tried to focus on that memory, remember what the situation had been. Had we learned it from friends, t.v., a book, a joke, overhearing a conversation? We also tried to remember our feelings at the time: had we felt upset, happy, scared, relieved?

After visualizing that moment, we did an exercise on the board in which participants listed 'what they'd learned' about homophobia, 'where they'd learned it,' and finally, 'what they know now about that information'. The discussion which ensued, much of which was quite personal as participants remembered their early experiences in learning about gays and lesbians and about the (mostly) homophobic way in which they had learned this information, was punctuated by silences, and in general was accompanied by laughter and giggling.

Overwhelmingly, the sources of that information were school yard stories as well as jokes told by peers, information received in church, and from family (usually parents). The information participants had acquired was at best neutral, usually biased and derogatory. In identifying what participants knew about that information now, it was revealed that much of the information they had received as children and teenagers was based on myths and stereotypes. Participants identified these myths and we discussed

why they were inaccurate representations.

Despite a general air of uncomfortableness (reflected in laughter and jokes), participants seemed to be saying that they had in fact learned that the information they had received as children was inaccurate and biased.

What can we do with this information? The final exercise of the workshop consisted of brainstorming how CAPP animators might respond to homophobic comments when they came up in the classroom (or in the case of the McGill workshop, how we might use the information from the workshop to generate change in our work or other daily environments). The group participants, who themselves admitted they had rarely if ever discussed the topic of homophobia before, generated five or six concrete responses they might make. I suggested role-playing some of these situations, but participants were reluctant, and we agreed that it was difficult to do before they were familiar with the program they would be implementing.

Closing rounds. We concluded the workshop with a final go-around in which each participant commented on how they were feeling. Most participants admitted to feeling tired and slightly overwhelmed with the amount of information they had received. They were concerned with not 'remembering' everything we had talked about. Some said they would need time to absorb and think about the workshop, others said they felt worried about how they would respond to homophobic comments in the CAPP workshop Almost unanimously, participants said that much of the material was new to them

My own feelings upon conclusion of all three workshops were both positive and negative. On the one hand, I felt that participants had benefitted and learned from the

workshop I felt that my style of facilitating was respectful and caring of participants and that I had generated and facilitated discussion which raised new ideas for many of the students. On the other hand, I was left each time with a certain dis-ease. Had we in fact 'unlearned' together? Would participants leave the workshop thinking in any significantly new or different ways about issues of homophobia and heterosexism? Had students been seriously challenged and supported in rethinking their relationship to homophobia and heterosexism? These questions nagged at me. In Chapter IV I will 're-read' this workshop description in an attempt to uncover some of the sources of these concerns. For the moment, however, let us turn to a more indepth examination of feminist pedagogic theory.

Chapter III

Feminist Pedagogy: Theory and Literature

3.1 INTRODUCTION

> We do not think of the ordinary person as preoccupied with such difficult
> and profound questions as: What is truth? What is authority? To whom do
> I listen? What counts for me as evidence? How do I know what I know?
> Yet to ask ourselves these questions and to reflect on our answers is more
> than an intellectual exercise, for our basic assumptions about the nature
> of truth and reality and the origins of knowledge shape the way we see the
> world and ourselves as participants in it. They affect our definitions of
> ourselves, the way we interact with others, our public and private
> personae, our sense of control over life events, our views of teaching and
> learning, and our conceptions of morality. (Belenky et al.1986:3)

Feminist pedagogy is a disrupting force. As a field, it aims both to identify and

critique the limitations of mostly male-defined radical pedagogies, and simultaneously to

propose new pedagogies. These new pedagogies, diverse, complex, even contradictory,

make no claim to unity other than their shared desire to generate truly counter-hegemonic

discourse and pedagogy. While feminism and feminist theory stands at the core of

feminist pedagogies, an analysis of how all marginalized groups are theoretically and

concretely identified as 'other' and thus devalued and excluded from participating equally

in educational (and other) settings, is of central importance to feminist pedagogues. The

understanding that women are not just gendered beings, but are also positioned in many

other relations of power is central to feminist pedagogy. Any pedagogy which seeks to

benefit *all* women, will thus address *all* relations of power.

Feminist pedagogy is a hybrid discipline, its roots stretch from feminist theory,

to postmodernism and poststructuralism, to radical educational theory. Thus, when

engaging with feminist pedagogies, one is brought face to face with, as Maxine Greene

(1992) writes, "some of the great questioners and demystifiers of our troubled time:

Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Gayatri Spivak, Cornel West, and a

number of others" (p.x).

Both feminist and postmodern theory are in fact, integral to feminist pedagogical

theory. It is impossible to move through the concepts of a feminist pedagogy without

stumbling over ideas and theories that are central to these two movements, and as such

description and discussion of feminism and postmodernism will surface throughout this

chapter. Of equal importance are the radical/critical educational theories that have

provided an important backdrop for feminist pedagogy, most immediately, the range of

approaches and theories termed critical pedagogy.[20] Although I will forgo a detailed

description or analysis of critical pedagogy here, I believe that the approaches loosely

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[20] Critical pedagogy has an important and rich history, arising out of a tradition of critiques of traditional educational theory. Although this background is beyond the scope of this work, and thus I will not attempt to cover it, it will be helpful to say a few words about it. Critical education theory (or the new sociology of education as it is termed in Britain), is grounded in a critical analysis of schooling and society. Working from reproduction or production theories respectively, critical educational theorists suggest that schools transmit and reproduce societal inequalities of race, class, and gender, through the transfer of knowledge, or that individuals can and do resist the meanings and ideologies imposed upon them by the educational system. Although not all critical educational theories would define themselves as Marxist, most draw heavily on Marxist theorizing to provide a language of critique against the hegemony of traditional positivist educational theory. Critical pedagogy, while emerging from these approaches, has attempted to move beyond the reproduction/resistance models of past educational critique to reinstate personal agency, hope, and possibility at its core, while continuing to address the structural limitations that work against these attempts. For detailed discussion of this background to current critical pedagogical theorizing, see: Kathleen Weiler (1988) Women Teaching for Change, and also Henry Giroux (1983) Theory and Resistance in Education.

collected under its name offer one of the major radical critiques of current education, and as such they hold a significant place in the history of critique from which feminist pedagogy may be seen to emerge (as mentioned above, along with feminist theory and practice, and postmodern and poststructuralist theory).

Patti Lather (1992) describes critical pedagogy "as that which attends to practices of teaching/learning intended to interrupt particular historical, situated systems of oppression" (p.121). Certainly critical pedagogical theories suggest that changing classroom dynamics from a tacit support of the unjust status quo, to a challenge of societal inequalities, a site where student experience is valued, oppressions (racism, classism, sexism) addressed towards their elimination, and cultural critique engaged, will transform schools and by extension society at large, into sites of critical democracy.

Many critical pedagogues (the 'fathers' of the school most often cited are Henry Giroux, Ira Shor, Stanley Aronowitz, Peter McLaren, and Roger Simon), begin explanations of the field by going back to philosopher John Dewey and re posing his old question: is school to be a function of society, or society to be a function of school? (McLaren,1989:158, Giroux,1992:18). Are schools to act as reproducers of social norms or as challengers of the status quo? The challenge of critical pedagogy, its core driving force, seems to be to identify and develop schools as dialectical sites of reproduction and resistance.

Critical pedagogy owes theoretical debts to both the Frankfurt School and traditional Marxist notions of empowering the traditionally powerless to transform societal injustices (i.e., to generate revolutionary change at a societal level). As Giroux

(1992:13) himself acknowledges, critical pedagogy draws heavily on Marxist ideology, Marxism having provided one of the central languages of critique of the twentieth century. Yet Giroux (Ibid) also clearly distances himself from the Marxist reproduction theory of early radical educators, citing a variety of other sources from which critical pedagogy draws its goals and values. Among these is the work of Paulo Freire (1970), one of the first to popularize, for North American students and educators, the notion of a pedagogy for the oppressed. Freire's work can perhaps be seen as the jumping off point for the range of educational philosophies now known as critical pedagogy. Current theorists draw on Freire's critique of 'banking education', on his notion of 'conscientization', as well as his view of education as an instrument for liberation. Although direct references to Freire are no longer common in current critical pedagogy literature, the notions of helping the disenfranchised to analyze their positions within social relations of power and oppression, and of educating with them for radical social transformation have become the very core concepts of critical pedagogical theorizing.

Peter McLaren (1989), in one of the clearest articulations of critical pedagogy (designed to make the central ideas of the field accessible to teachers), identifies two central tasks or aims of critical pedagogy. The first, he suggests, is to critically examine schools in terms of race, class, and gender inequalities. The presentation of schools as value-free environments is to be challenged and schools are to be exposed as sites of inequality, as places where the injustices of society are played out in the transmission of knowledge. McLaren (1989), and many other critical pedagogues are thus involved in rendering problematic the usually "uncontested relationship between school and society,

unmasking mainstream pedagogy's claim that it purveys equal opportunity and provides access to egalitarian democracy and critical thinking" (p.163).

On the other hand, critical pedagogues are careful to move beyond the negative critique discussed in the previous chapter of this work. As well as critiquing and exposing current pedagogical practices (that is, as well as simply 'exposing the truth'), critical pedagogy has as its simultaneous goal to help empower students to become agents for self- and social transformation. Giroux (1988b:203-215) has come to label the tendency to remain stuck in the mode of negative critique as anti-utopian, or anti intellectual. He, as well as others (Aronowitz and Giroux,1985; Simon,1987), propose instead a 'pedagogy of possibility' whereby one aims not simply to critique but also to transform current educational practices. He suggests that critical pedagogy must engage with both a 'language of critique' and a 'language of possibility' (Giroux,1992:10) Interestingly, Roger Simon (1988) aptly points out, "beyond its emphasis on deconstruction of dominant knowledge forms...a project of possibility requires practices that do not simply advocate possibility, but also enable it" (p.2).[21]

Thus critical pedagogy has two simultaneous goals, on the one hand to expose and explain the harmful effects of schooling on those traditionally disenfranchised and disempowered members of society, but secondly, and of equal importance, to create classrooms and schools as sites of resistance, to generate personal empowerment and agency in such a way as to increase the possibility of *social transformation*

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[21] The feminist critique of critical pedagogy as a pedagogy often too abstracted from praxis is one which will be addressed later in this chapter.

(McLaren, 1989:163).

In this sense, critical pedagogy aligns itself most clearly with 'the social', suggesting that individual empowerment is the path to creating a more just and equal society. Giroux (1992) particularly, writes extensively on the need to educate for critical citizenship, to construct a "critical pedagogy for democratic struggle" (p.43). Thus although at times drawing on Dewey's aforementioned question, he also suggests that one needs to look beyond the limitations of the reproduction/resistance model of schooling to ideas of schooling as a process of,

> production and legitimation of social forms and subjectivities as they are organized within relations of power and meaning that either enable or limit human capacities for self and social empowerment. (Giroux,1992:180)

In a similar way, Ira Shor (1992) calls for, in his words, an empowering education. In his recent work by that title he, much as Giroux and others, suggests that radical education "is a critical-democratic pedagogy for self and social change" (Shor,1992:15). "What educational values," he asks, "can develop people as citizens who think critically and act democratically?" (Ibid). For Shor (Ibid), the ultimate aim of this education is to "relate personal growth to public life," to institute student-centred, critical, radical educational processes as ways of generating social change outside of the classroom and even of the learning institution. Finally, Roger Simon (1987) says, "If we are to develop a pedagogy in support of a project of possibility, [individual empowerment] cannot be our sole nor primary orientation. An education that empowers for possibility must raise questions of how we can work for the reconstruction of social imagination in the service of human freedom" (p.375). Clearly then, the project is large-

scale social transformation. "Pedagogical empowerment," Giroux (1988b 202) emphasizes, "necessarily goes hand in hand with social and political transformation"

Although I have felt it necessary to present this brief outline of critical pedagogy, I stress, as I now turn to focus on feminist pedagogy, that while feminist educational theorizing has to a certain extent arisen out of, and against critical pedagogy theorizing, it owes equal debts to very separate theoretical sources as well particularly feminism and postmodernism/poststructuralism. Perhaps what critical and feminist pedagogical approaches currently share most is a critique of the logical positivism that continues to attempt to exert control over educational theory and practice. Both of these approaches have arisen during a time of "crisis in social theory" (Giroux, 1992:10), the 'crisis of legitimation' (Lyotard, 1984), into which new players are stepping, providing radical challenges to hegemonic control over the production and legitimation of knowledge Lather (1991b) refers to traditional educational theory as consisting of "a *dinosaur culture* of master narratives struggling to retain dominance against what is perceived as the splintering, disintegrating, and fragmenting effects of partiality and plurality of contesting voices" (p.xvi).

Despite the sharing of a common societal context, many common goals, and a similar critique of Western rational, phallocentric, 'objective' notions of knowledge and learning, critical and feminist pedagogues have maintained an uneasy relationship This is illustrated, in part, by the serious critiques some feminist pedagogues have levelled against critical pedagogy (Ellsworth, 1989; Luke and Gore, 1992a), and the often scathing responses these critiques have received (Giroux, 1992; McLaren, 1988b; Aronowitz and

(Giroux, 1991). Although I seek not to simplistically or unproblematically pit feminist and critical pedagogy against each other, some of their points of disjuncture will necessarily arise and be addressed later in this chapter.

The attempt to 'define' feminist pedagogy is a project that feminist pedagogues, in all their diversity, have themselves resisted. Feminist pedagogy is profoundly contextual. It is theory inextricably tied to practice. To speak of it outside of a specific context or outside of specific conditions, goals, desires, is to fall into the trap of grand-theorizing that postmodernists and many feminist pedagogues argue so cogently against. The attempts to simply define, linearly trace, and uncontextually yet logically explain concepts such as 'feminist pedagogy' have historically led to the totalizing 'grand narratives' critiqued by Lyotard (1984) and other postmodern theorists. As Fraser and Nicholson (1990) explain,

> The postmodern condition is one in which 'grand narratives of legitimation' are no longer credible. By grand narratives [Lyotard] means overarching philosophies of history like the Enlightenment story of the gradual but steady progress of reason and freedom, Hegel's dialectic of Spirit coming to know itself, and, most importantly, Marx's drama of the forward march of human productive capacities via class conflict culminating in proletarian revolution. (p.22)

Most feminist pedagogues would likely want to talk of context and environment, and would be unwilling or unable to provide a universal definition of the concept. Magda Lewis (1990) comments on this:

> While in this paper I explore the context of my teaching practice and the politics of the classroom, it is not my intention to offer prescriptive and generic feminist teaching strategies abstracted from the particular situations of feminist classrooms. Although it might be possible to employ suggestive approaches, we cannot artificially construct pedagogical moments in the classroom to serve as moments of transformation toward

a critical political perspective. Nor can we predict how such moments
will be responded to when they arise in particular situations, given the
personal histories of the students and instructors involved. (p.470)

As I have mentioned earlier, this approach is one I seek to take up in the research
of this thesis, and my study of feminist pedagogy seeks to remain consistent with a
critique of acontextual definitions or grand summaries. As such the following makes no
claim to being a 'comprehensive' overview or 'summary' of feminist pedagogy, but
rather consists of an examination of several themes that seem to arise consistently in the
diversity of literature and theory that fall under its heading. I, of course, seek to make
clear that these themes are ones that have struck me as significant, and that they are not
intended to completely address the vast array of ideas and theories that have been
generated under the title of feminist pedagogy. I have also chosen these particular
themes, in part, because they speak to my practice, that is they bear some relation to the
work |at the Peterborough Rape Crisis Centre and the Montreal Assault Prevention
Centre| I have previously outlined, to my experiences 'doing' feminist pedagogy.

Consistent with feminist pedagogical theory, I also suggest that while examining
the four themes I have identified as particularly significant within feminist pedagogical
theory (subjectivity; feminist epistemology; a politics of differences; and classroom
process), my study of these themes remains necessarily partial and limited. Although I
have tried to represent as accurately as possible the range of thinking on feminist
pedagogy, and although I have attempted to do so in a way that is both academically
rigorous and true to the voices of feminist pedagogues, I suggest that my reading of the
theory constitutes for me only a first step in grappling with what are very complex

issues. I raise this point because one of feminist pedagogy's concerns, as previously mentioned, is to address theory always in the light of practice. For this reason, my approach to the theory comes from my particular stand-point, my practice 'doing' feminist pedagogy, my experiences as a woman student and feminist educator, as well as the other interrelated locations from which I speak and research (outlined in chapter one). As such, my reading of feminist pedagogical theory will necessarily remain partial, an epistemological position which is embraced rather than eschewed by most feminist pedagogues.

Feminist pedagogy arises out of a history of (feminist) critiques of education. Its current stance/s are only possible because of many earlier efforts to bring issues of gender into the educational spotlight. The 1970's saw the rise of feminist demands upon a patriarchal education system. 'Gender-inclusive curriculum', 'equal representation' in terms of female teacher and student presence and voice, and the 'feminization' of teaching were the buzz-words of this era of educational reform. Adrienne Rich (1979a) provides an interesting bridge between this earlier era of feminist critique of education and the beginnings of feminist pedagogical theory that emerged in the 1980's. In one of her most well-known works on women and education, "Claiming an Education," Rich (1979a) describes, within the same paragraph, not only the reformist nature of early feminist critiques of education but also, with considerable foresight, what will become the core issues of critique in the approaching decade. First she writes:

> One of the devastating weaknesses of university learning, of the store of knowledge and opinion that has been handed down through academic training, has been its almost total erasure of women's experience and thought from the curriculum, and its exclusion of women as members of

the academic community. (Rich,1979a:232)

And then:

> But the most significant fact for you is that what you learn here, the very
> texts you read, the lectures you hear, the way your studies are divided
> into categories and fragmented one from the other--all this reflects, to a
> very large degree, neither objective reality, nor an accurate picture of the
> past, nor a group of rigorously tested observations about human
> behaviour. What you can learn here...is how *men* have perceived and
> organized their experiences, their history, their ideas of social
> relationships, good and evil, sickness and health, etc. When you read or
> hear about 'great issues', 'major texts,' 'the mainstream of Western
> thought,' you are hearing about what men, above all white men, in their
> male subjectivity, have decided is important. (Ibid)

Because of her obvious ability to see beyond the somewhat 'liberal'[22] (albeit important)

feminist educational demands of the time, Rich's words are still frequently cited as

relevant by feminist pedagogues.

By the 1980's, feminist pedagogy was becoming a more widely used term among

feminist academics, and the focus of this theorizing had turned from reform, from

'bringing women into' the existing educational system by way of content and numbers

(what is now commonly referred to as the add-and-stir method), to examinations of

gender identity and subjectivity in the patriarchal educational system, the need for an

incorporation of gender studies into the university, and the critique of apparently and

apparently emancipatory educational practice which still tended to exclude an analysis of

gender. During this decade, three important anthologies were published, Learning Our

Way: Essays in Feminist Education (Bunch and Pollack,1983), Gendered Subjects: The

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[22] See Alison Jaggar's (1989) typology of 'liberal,' 'traditional Marxist,' 'radical,'
and 'socialist,' feminisms in Feminist Politics and Human Nature.

Dynamics of Feminist Teaching (Culley and Portuges,1985), and a special issue of Women's Studies Quarterly entitled "Feminist Pedagogy" (Shniedwind and Maher,1987), bringing together articles identifying themselves as part of feminist pedagogical theory. These texts, setting the trend for much of the theory to follow, were grounded solidly in practice, examining concrete classroom situations and frequently avoiding the system-building common to other totalizing education philosophies.

Towards the end of the 1980's however, a new set of feminist academics began writing and theorizing about feminist pedagogy, often within academic settings. Although maintaining its ties to praxis, feminist pedagogy began to emerge as a range of theoretical perspectives that moved beyond the sometimes isolated and highly individualized cases presented in the works from earlier in the decade. In this shift to more clearly articulated (if diverse) theory, feminist academics and teachers began to critically assess critical and emancipatory pedagogies (a grounding from which many of them attempted to operate) and to posit the need/desire for a feminist pedagogical 'place' from which to work.

In the introduction to one of the most recent compilations of articles on feminist pedagogy, Carmen Luke and Jennifer Gore (1992a) suggest that although many women academics have tried to take up the discourse of critical pedagogy - have attempted to design classroom process based on its theory - they have found themselves problematically situated in relation to it:

> In the process of trying to create 'emancipatory' classrooms, we have
> come up against 'uneasy' readings: our own readings of the texts of
> emancipatory pedagogy, our readings of our students' reactions to us and
> to each other, and our readings of where feminist educational work stands

in relation to male-authored critical pedagogy. (p.1)

Feminist teachers and academics began to identify their continued position as 'other', even within such apparently gender-conscious discourses as critical pedagogy. Thus, particularly, although not exclusively, within women's studies departments and schools of education, a collection of voices, dissatisfied with their once again marginal status, began to demand not simply inclusion *within* the confines of mostly male defined critical and radical pedagogical theorizing, but rather to postulate new approaches towards education.

I seek here to emphasize that although, for the pragmatic purpose of study and description, the range of voices and approaches naming themselves feminist pedagogy are being grouped together, they are voices which are often contradictory, and which resist these groupings. The reasons for this are more than academic pretention to 'difference' and other current buzz-words. By the end of the 1980's, as French poststructuralist or postmodernist theory began to circulate among North American audiences, feminist pedagogues had begun to take up these discourses and draw on them heavily in their theorizing. It would perhaps not be out of place to say that along with feminist theory and practice and radical educational theories, postmodernism has taken a place at the core of much feminist pedagogical theorizing.[23] Although this paper will not attempt any kind of description of the complexities of postmodernist theories (surely

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[23] Those feminist pedagogues who are incorporating poststructuralism and postmodernism into their work in significant ways are Elizabeth Ellsworth, Diana Fuss, Patti Lather, as well as most of the authors in Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy edited by Carmen Luke and Jennifer Gore (1992).

enough for a thesis in itself), they certainly must be addressed in as much as many of their basic tenets have profoundly effected and influenced feminist pedagogy.

The link between feminist pedagogy and postmodern theory is made apparent and explicit in much of the recent writing of feminist pedagogues, however I do take seriously Luke and Gore's (1992a) warnings about subsuming feminist educational theorizing under another, again mostly-male, domain:

> Through our engendered thinking and situated knowledges (de Lauretis, 1990), as women in education, our positions are feminist. Poststructuralist or postmodernist theoretical tenets have been helpful to the extent that they fit with our feminist political project(s) and our attempts to construct pedagogies. Through the naming of our feminisms as primary...we adamantly resist the hidden agenda of erasure that drives much current postmodernist theory and analysis--one that drives attempts to parcel off work such as ours under yet another label that has been thrust upon us. (p.5)

What is it, then, about postmodernist thought that has become so significant and useful to many feminist pedagogues? How are feminist pedagogues travelling through the discourses of postmodernism without drowning in the 'sea of indeterminacy' they fear the theory may purport? The first issue that arises most commonly in the feminist pedagogical literature is that of an anti-foundational epistemology. The writings, of authors like Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, have attempted to deconstruct[24] the 'master narratives' of the modernist era. What this has meant for feminists and other theorists on the left, is the end of the unitary concepts of 'truth' and

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[24] I am using this term in the more vernacular sense in which American cultural theory has appropriated it; ie., as expressing its ideological presuppositions, or revealing its social construction. I am not following Jacques Derrida's original and much more technical use of 'deconstruction'. See for example: Michael Ryan (1982), "Deconstruction: A Primer, A Critique, the Politics Of" in Marxism and Deconstruction.

'reason', and the demise of the belief in one overarching version of history. The assumed progression of 'man' and society towards an ever-more advanced, rational, and scientific state is examined as only one interpretation of historical processes, an interpretation made by those with the power to create the grand narratives we come to see as 'truth', namely a small elite of white men. In place of one reductive, meta discourse, postmodern theorists describe a multiplicity of discourses, multiple truths and realities, as well as historical specificity and contextuality as sources of truth and legitimation.

The second area of significant impact of postmodern theory upon feminist pedagogy is that of decentred subjectivity, or the rejection of the unitary, rationalist, universal subject. Retheorizing subjectivity is a central project of much feminist theory and has crept into pedagogical theorizing about student and teacher subjectivity, the role of identity and experience in learning and knowledge creation, and issues of difference in the classroom. All those writing under the loose label of poststructuralism or postmodernism (Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, Lyotard, Baudrillard) critique the traditional notion of the 'subject' and problematize the unitary 'I' which generates its counterpart the 'other'. Linda Alcoff (1988) writes, "Disparate as these writers are, their (one) common theme is that of the self-centred, authentic subject conceived by humanism to be discoverable below a veneer of cultural and ideological overlay is in reality a construct of that very humanist discourse" (p.415). Kenway and Modra (1992) write of the results of postmodern theorizing of the subject:

> According to this view, students' identities are not rational and unitary;
> they are seen to be shifting and fragmented, multiple and contradictory,

displaced and positioned as students are across the various discourses which historically and currently constitute their lives in and out of school. (p. 146)

The feminist adoption of these and other postmodern ideas is certainly at times guarded. and. as I explore in more detail some central feminist pedagogical themes. points of disjuncture as well as of commonality will arise and be addressed.

I turn now to a detailed examination of these themes. I am compelled to mention that I cover feminist pedagogical theory in such detail not simply (or only) for its own sake. but primarily to provide the background necessary for the 're-reading' of my initial narrative of the Unlearning Homophobia Workshop outline in Chapter II. As such. I will draw on the details of feminist pedagogical theory with the aim of enriching my practice.

3.2 SUBJECTIVITY

Concerns over subjectivity have become central to almost all social and intellectual movements of our time. As Rosi Braidotti (1991) explains in her critical feminist intervention within poststructuralist theory:

> Several voices within the structuralist generation in France from Lacan to Foucault by way of Lévi-Strauss - have taken up the challenge of developing a critique of the notion of the subject and his/her place in the history of Western philosophy, and have traced the sources of this issue back to Descartes's *Meditations*. (p.23)

Cogito ergo sum is thus the starting point for these debates surrounding the subject Descartes' discovery that in doubting everything, the only thing left indubitable to him was that "*I think*", has persisted for centuries as the very core of Western philosophy and subjectivity.

> The *cogito* is the founding moment in the modern philosophy of the subject, the turning point at which the subject is posited as the focus of all knowledge: it is clarity of thought, thought transparent to itself, which legitimates all the sciences. (Braidotti,1991:23)

And so the centred, unified, rational subject becomes the foundation of all thought and action. But like all foundations, as Nietzsche was perhaps the first to show, the subject achieves this status only through a metaphysical abstraction. The 'I-think' constitutes an alliance of the thinker-thought, and the doer-deed (subject-action). Nietzsche (1969) condemns this formulation of the subject through his example of the lightning flash When one witnesses a flash of lightning, he argues, "the popular mind separates the lightning from its flash and takes the latter for an *action*, for the operation of a subject called lightning..." (Nietzsche,1969:45). But, he goes on to insist, "there is no 'being' behind doing, affecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed the

deed is everything" (Ibid). Thus the 'I' of the Cartesian 'I-think' is indeed dubitable, a mere grammatical convenience rather than a true ontological foundation.

Critiques of the rational unified subject emanate from diverse fields such as psychoanalysis, postmodernism, and feminism. The critique of the *cogito*, which sits at the centre of philosophy, prior to the body, to the world, to all context, is in fact the critique of rationality, of the early Enlightenment project, and it is in fact only rationalist philosophy which has any vested interest in the rational unified subject. Therefore any movement which seeks to challenge the underpinnings of rationalist philosophy and the Enlightenment, usually and perhaps unavoidably seek to undermine the Cartesian subject.

The psychoanalytic discovery/invention of the unconscious dealt an important death blow to the reified status of a purely rational subjectivity:

> Psychoanalysis places a question mark beside the hard kernel of the philosophical equation of subjectivity with consciousness, by emphasizing the paradox of unconscious thought. This implies a view of consciousness which is animated by effects beyond its control, and of thought which paradoxically has no thinker. The idea of unconscious signifying structures throws down a fundamental challenge to the sovereignty of the subject. The inevitable consequence of this is that the identification of the subject with consciousness, *stricto sensu*, is a radical misunderstanding of human subjectivity. (Braidotti,1991:18/19)

Thus Lacan suggests that the Cartesian *cogito*, "must be replaced by the Freudian subject...whose ontological status does not exceed the rather precarious certitude of 'it |ça| speaks'" (Braidotti,1991:24).

Postmodern philosophy has likewise been based in a fundamental critique of the foundations of rationality (subjectivity). As mentioned earlier, all postmodern thinkers deal extensively with the need to 'decentre' if not completely destroy, the modernist

notion of the subject. In its various attempts to construct an anti-foundationalist philosophy, postmodernism places the subject in flux, groundless and drifting.

Feminism as well, of course, has had a vested interest in critiquing subjectivity as *cogito*, in exposing rationality as a power tool of patriarchy to be deconstructed, decentred, and ultimately dismantled. The legacy of Cartesian mind-body dualism has left women associated with the irrational body (and later the emotions), and men with the rational, thinking, mind. Thus women have effectively been denied subjectivity a la *cogito* model, denied access to reason. The status of Cartesian subjectivity as a tool for the further disempowerment of women has inspired a variety of feminist critiques." Rejecting Cartesian subjectivity knocks a huge hole in Western philosophy and epistemology, leading feminist theorists to ask the question 'what will fill that hole,' or even, 'will it in fact be filled?' Feminists are faced with the challenge of theorizing some sort of fractured or decentred subject, or else, if their rejection is more insistent, deciding who or what comes after the subject.[26]

Feminists are nonetheless ambivalent towards both the modern and postmodern

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[25] The most conservative of these has been what Sandra Harding refers to as feminist empiricism, to which I will not devote much time. This approach has been to demand women's access to the cogito, to demand acknowledgement of women's rationality, to attempt to join in the Enlightenment project, thus not in any way questioning the basic tenets of the rationalist, scientific, epistemology. For a more complete discussion of this topic see Sandra Harding's (1990) "Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critiques," in Feminism/Postmodernism, ed. Linda J. Nicholson.

[26] For a series of interesting responses to this question, posed to a number of poststructuralist theorists, see Eduardo Cadava et al, Ed. (1991) Who Comes After the Subject?. Note also the two essays in the collection by feminists Luce Irigaray and Sarah Kofman.

conceptions of subjectivity. We have seen that Cartesian subjectivity has institutionalized

the subjugation of women and denied them agency. Yet as well, feminists in general are

not completely comfortable with the idea of the death of the subject.

In response to postmodern claims for the end of subjectivity, bell hooks (1990)

writes:

> Considering that it is as subject one comes to voice, then the
> postmodernist focus on the critique of identity appears at first glance to
> threaten and close down the possibility that this discourse and practice will
> allow those who have suffered the crippling effects of colonization and
> domination to gain or regain a hearing... It never surprises me when black
> folks respond to the critique of essentialism, especially when it denies the
> validity of identity politics by saying, 'Yeah, it's easy to give up identity,
> when you got one.' Should we not be suspicious of postmodern critiques
> of the 'subject' when they surface at a historical moment when many
> subjugated people feel themselves coming to voice for the first time.
> (p.28)

In refiguring a non-Cartesian subjectivity, Adrienne Rich (1986) and Jane Gallop (1988)

have hinted at an embodied, thinking subject through their phrase, "thinking through the

body." As with the critique of subjectivity, the revaluation of corporality is a project that

feminism shares with psychoanalysis and certain poststructuralisms (such as that of

Deleuze and Foucault). But as Gallop (1988) cautions,

> Lest [critical thinking connected to the body] become a universal human
> issue, beyond gender, let us remember the ways in which it is both harder
> and easier for men. Harder because men have their masculine identity to
> gain by being estranged from their bodies and dominating the bodies of
> others. Easier because men are more able to venture into the realm of the
> body without being trapped there. Men who do find themselves in some
> way thinking through the body are more likely to be recognized as serious
> thinkers and heard. Women have first to prove that we are thinkers,
> which is easier when we conform to the protocol that deems serious
> thought separate from an embodied subject in history. Rich is asking
> women to enter the realms of critical thought and knowledge without
> becoming disembodied spirits, universal man. (p.7)

Gallop. Rich and others are positing not the death of the subject, but rather a new model of subjectivity, which is not based on the rational, disembodied *cogito*. "I am convinced," writes Rich (1986:283/4), "that 'there are ways of thinking that we don't yet know about.'[27] I take those words to mean that many women are *even now* thinking in ways which traditional intellection denies, decries, or is unable to grasp"

It is upon this contradictory and complex backdrop that feminist pedagogues attempt to theorize subjectivity and assess the effects of that theorizing on students, teachers, learning, curriculum, indeed the whole project known as pedagogy. While this discussion of subjectivity may appear abstracted, broad, linked as it is not only to broader feminist theory, but to the psychoanalytic and postmodern movements as well, it is worth examining how these concerns about the complicated nature of subjectivity translate into specifically feminist pedagogical concerns. In examining the notion of 'student voice,' we see most clearly the central importance to feminist pedagogy of theorizing the subject.

The notion of student voice is at once simple and complex, posing difficult questions for feminist educators. In its most simple incarnation, allowing for, encouraging, empowering students to 'voice' is the notion of providing voting rights to the disenfranchised. All those of us experiencing life on the devalued side of patriarchal and Enlightenment hegemonic binarisms (man/woman, subject/object, theory/practice

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[27] In the internal quotation, Rich is referring to a passage from Susan Sontag's Styles of Radical Will. It is interesting to note that Sontag, an important American literary critic who has had strong affiliations with French theory, has often been cited as a proto or early American postmodernist.

teacher/student, etc.) know what it is to be 'without voice,' to be silenced in a system
in which our experiences, beliefs, thoughts, and actions are posited as secondary to those
of our so called 'opposites'. Prioritizing student voice is, most simply, the "[attempt]
to recover each of [the binarisms'] second terms, to find out what has been erased,
silenced, and rejected in their names" (Orner,1992:78). For many women and other
overlapping minorities, coming to voice in the classroom (and elsewhere) is a new and
often exciting process.

The concept of student voice is not unique to feminist pedagogy alone (and in fact
we shall see that it is within a postmodern feminist pedagogy particularly that the idea
is most seriously questioned and problematized), but rather forms a central focus in the
discourses of most recent emancipatory and critical pedagogies. Giroux, McLaren,
Simon, Shor and others write consistently of the emancipatory possibilities of
empowering students to voice. This is in fact probably one of the very core concepts of
a critical pedagogy. "This means," writes Roger Simon (1987), "finding ways of
working with students that enable the full expression of multiple 'voices' engaged in
dialogic encounter" (p.375). In Border Crossings Giroux (1992) writes:

> By being able to listen critically to the voices of their students, teachers
> become border-crossers through their ability to not only make different
> narratives available to themselves and other students but also by
> legitimating difference as a basic condition for understanding the limits of
> one's own voice. (p.170)

In Postmodern Education, Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) describe a
"radical theory of voice" in which student experience, dreams, thoughts, histories, and
stories are accounted for in the teaching/learning process. The authors point to complex,

shifting voice (neither static nor unitary) as "constitut[ing] forms of subjectivity" (Aronowitz and Giroux,1991:100), as placing students in the role of subjects and agents, rather than objects, of learning.

> [V]oice provides a critical referent for analysing how people are made voiceless in particular settings by not being allowed to speak, or by being allowed to say what has already been spoken, and how they learn to silence themselves. At the same time, voices forged in opposition and struggle provide the crucial conditions by which subordinate individuals and groups reclaim their own memories, stories, and histories as part of an ongoing attempt to challenge those power structures that attempt to silence them. (Aronowitz and Giroux,1991:101)

Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) discuss specifically the use of minority texts, texts written from positions of opposition and resistance, written in the voices of those on the margins, excluded from the "traditional literature that constitutes the official cannon" (p.102), as a way of allowing the voice of the 'other' to be heard. The experiences and locations of the 'other' in the classroom can thus be heard and validated, and non minority students can have the experience of hearing and critically debating the texts which are most often denied a space in the traditional learning environment.

Feminist concerns with the 'silenced other' are not new. In 1871, for example, George Elliot wrote beautifully and eloquently:

> If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. (Elliot quoted in Belenky et al,1986:3)

In fact, few feminist theorists have ignored the silencing of the 'other,' the non subjects (although it wasn't until the mid-1980's that a significant number of feminist theorists began to address the silencing of the 'other' as any other than gendered beings). bell

hooks (1988) writes of,

> the feminist focus on coming to voice--on moving from silence into speech as revolutionary gesture. Once again, the idea of finding one's voice or having a voice assumes a primacy in talk, discourse, writing, and action. As metaphor for self-transformation, it has been especially relevant for groups of women who have perviously never had a public voice, women who are speaking and writing for the first time, including many women of colour. Feminist focus on finding a voice may seem clichéd at times... However, for women within oppressed groups who have contained so many feelings--despair, rage, anguish--who do not speak, as poet Audre Lorde writes, "for fear our words will not be heard nor welcomed," coming to voice is an act of resistance. Speaking becomes both a way to engage in active self-transformation and a rite of passage where one moves from being object to being subject. Only as subjects can we speak. As objects, we remain voiceless--our beings defined and interpreted by others. (p.12)

Thus allowing for student voice is not only a method for enriching classroom content, for bringing the silenced women's experience to light, but it is also seen as a way of generating subjectivity among those for whom it has traditionally been denied. hooks (1988) adds, "awareness of the need to speak, to give voice to the varied dimensions of our lives, is one way women of colour begin the process of education for critical consciousness" (p.13). While the call for voice via subjectivity is certainly valid to the extent that it addresses the 'need to speak,' it nonetheless shares the limitations of feminist empiricism (identified by Harding (1986)), as long as it leaves the status of the subject unquestioned. That is, it calls for inclusion ('voice') within the limited subject-object structure, while not simultaneously questioning the limitations of such a structure. In calling for voice through subjectivity, there is no allowance for voice that may exist outside of the subject-object dualism we intend to critique. In accepting these dualistic parameters ("only as subjects can we speak"), we foreclose on the possibility of a third

voice coming from somewhere outside.

Teresa de Lauretis (1987) writes of the differing views women's traditionally silenced voices bring to feminism, of the need "to define the terms of another perspective - a view from 'elsewhere'" (p.25). She suggests that not only have women been silenced, but that when we speak, our voices are often unrecognizable, coming as they are from the margins, from a place hegemonic discourse has feared to tread:

> [I]f that view is nowhere to be seen, not given in a single text, not recognizable as a representation, it is not that we--feminists, women--have not yet succeeded in producing it. It is, rather, that what we have produced is not recognizable, precisely, as a representation. For that 'elsewhere' is not some mythic distant past or some utopian future history: it is the elsewhere of discourse here and now, the blind spots, or the space-off, of its representations. I think of it as spaces in the margins of hegemonic discourses, social spaces carved in the interstices of institutions and in the chinks and cracks of the power-knowledge apparati. (de Lauretis, 1987:25)

Because women have so long been denied subjectivity, their voices, opinions, thoughts, and beliefs have been denied any status in a rationalist, positivist educational system. As feminism has moved into the academy, has in a broader sense impacted on all of our learning institutions, women's voices are being revalued, heard, acknowledged, especially and particularly in sites such as women's studies classes.

In the early moments of feminist pedagogical theorizing, hearing the voices of girls and women was perhaps one of the ultimate goals of feminist retheorizing of education. Interestingly, as feminist pedagogy has grown, changed, transformed into feminist postmodern stances, the apparently simple notion of empowering the silenced to speak has been reassessed and questioned in a new light.

Perhaps most well-known of this new 'deconstructing' of student voice is the

article by Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) in which she challenges not only emancipatory or critical pedagogy's use of the concept of student voice, but also of 'empowerment', 'dialogue', and the very term 'critical' (p.298). However, as much as her article has drawn considerable and certainly warranted attention, Ellsworth does not stand alone among feminist pedagogues in her assessment that encouraging the silenced to speak is in fact a project wrought with tensions and contradictions.

Kathleen Weiler (1988), in her ethnographic study Women Teaching for Change, draws attention to the complications of subjectivity and student voice. She describes a classroom situation in which the white, female teacher has assigned a passage from The Autobiography of Malcolm X to her students. Weiler's description focuses on a black, male student whose reading of the text is clearly different from that of the white teacher. While the teacher is attempting to use the passage to discuss the process of identity and self-image formation, the student is focusing on (and identifying with) the prejudice and racism being discussed in the excerpt. His language and attitude, both verbal and non-verbal (naming the prejudice in the passage, sighing, finger-tapping) was read by the teacher as 'disruptive and aggressive', and she was relieved when he dropped the class. Weiler (1988) assesses the situation:

> The conflict in this case is based on race, and the conflict is between the authority of the white woman teacher and the resistance of the black male student. The text from Malcolm X's autobiography was being read in two different ways by teacher and student. For the teacher, the text was part of a discourse she had clearly established in her own mind... But for John, the passage had meaning out of his own experience of racism as a black boy in a racist society. His discourse was one of lived racism, not an academic discourse. (p.141)

Weiler (1988) suggests that this incident is not so much an example of personal failure

by an isolated or individual teacher (who was attempting to address race, gender, and other related issues in her class), but rather,

> this incident illuminates the ways in which texts and classroom discourse are read from the perspectives of different socially defined subjectivities. For the teacher, this incident illustrates the complexities and difficulties of mediating and recognizing conflicting meanings in the midst of classroom discourse. This incident could be and was read differently and had different meaning depending on the subjectivity and interests of those involved. (Ibid)

In a perhaps simplified form, this example points to the complications in Aronowitz and Giroux's suggestion of using marginal texts to validate the voice of 'others', both as text and as student in the classroom. Ellsworth (1989) writes of this complication:

> In a racist society and its institutions, such debate [concerning racism] has not and cannot be 'public' or 'democratic' in the sense of including the voices of all affected parties and affording them equal weight and legitimacy. Nor can such a debate be free of conscious and unconscious concealment of interests, or assertion of interests which some participants hold as non-negotiable no matter what arguments are presented. (p.302)

Thus Ellsworth suggests activating student voice is not as simple as turning a switch, giving the go-ahead, simply *creating the space* for voice to move into. Instead, as is aptly illustrated in Weiler's example, teacher as well as student subjectivity must be factored into the equation. To unproblematically expect teachers to facilitate student voice, to 'help' minority or alienated students to find their 'authentic' voices, is to ignore the complex subject positions the teachers themselves occupy. As Weiler's example highlights, that particular teacher's ability to name her student's behaviour, to 'help' him to voice, was very clearly infringed upon/acted upon by her position as a white women whose experience and knowledge of racism was likely theoretical and academic rather

than lived and experiential.

Ellsworth (1989) suggests that this has been one of critical pedagogy's great failings. its refusal to render problematic the contradictions in the role of a raced. classed. gendered (etc.) teacher in acting as a "disinterested mediator on the side of the oppressed group" (p.310). She claims that in ignoring this contradiction. critical pedagogues are in fact reproducing "the category of generic 'critical teacher' - a specific form of the generic human that underlies classical liberal thought" (Ibid).

Mimi Orner poses a crucial question for feminist pedagogues attempting to create sites of resistance and learning that are safe and accessible to all. "How," she asks. "do we speak as teachers and as members of various social groups?" (Orner,1992:75). Feminist pedagogy attempts. in part. to pursue this question - certainly not to find easy or unitary answers. but to keep the question alive and open at any pedagogical moment. For the teacher to 'disappear' behind a veil of invisibility inevitably recreates the neutral 'provider of knowledge' that alternative pedagogies are seeking to escape.

In 1985. in one of the three 'originating' feminist pedagogical anthologies. Margo Cully wrote:

> In all the important material written about teaching in the 1960's and
> 1970's - liberal. progressive. even radical; from Carl Rogers to Paulo
> Freire. Kozol to Katz - one crucial dimension is missing. None of the
> discussions of teacher. student. facilitator or learner is gender- or race-
> specific. (p.209)

By the mid-eighties. feminist pedagogy was concerning itself with the raced. classed. and gendered teacher as well as student. From this perspective. the focus on student voice must be examined for its denial of the necessary questioning of teacher

voice. In asking students to speak, feminist pedagogues point to the risk of a kind of voyeurism, bringing the 'other' into the classroom for the silent, abstracted teacher (and other students) to hear. As Gayatri Spivak (1988) aptly suggests, perhaps "the putative centre welcomes selective inhabitants of the margin in order better to exclude the margin" (p.107). I am not suggesting that critical pedagogy really harbours such intentions, but regulated inclusion of the 'other' is a common-place occurrence in mainstream society, and there is nothing inherently liberatory in the process. The 'critical' edge of this critical pedagogy strategy is thus open to question. Feminist pedagogues must therefore ask whose purpose does student voice serve? The liberation of the now-voiced student? The teacher as voyeur? Perhaps both? Without a problematized teacher-voice, the process of listening to students speak remains a one sided project in which old relations of domination are reproduced. Ellsworth (1989) refers to the old feminist tenet that "women's speech and voice have not and should not be constructed primarily for the purpose of communicating women's experience to men" (p.312). Certainly the same must be true for students in the student/teacher relationship "I am suspicious," she writes, "of the desire by mostly white, middle class men who write the literature on critical pedagogy to elicit 'full expression' of student voices Such a relation between teacher/student becomes voyeuristic when the voice of the pedagogue himself goes unexamined" (Ibid).

Echoing concerns articulated by Ellsworth, Greta Nemiroff comments on a passage from Aronowitz and Giroux's (1985) Education Under Seige, in which the authors discuss giving voice to students as a method for generating a language of

possibility providing students the "opportunity to become agents of civic courage and therefore citizens who have the knowledge and courage to take seriously the need to make despair unconvincing and hope practical" (p.37). Nemiroff (1992) comments:

> It appears here that one contradiction in which the authors find themselves
> is that under the rubric of 'empowerment,' they still perpetuate the notion
> of the balance of power being on the side of the 'transformative
> intellectual.' It is he or she who 'gives' or bestows upon the students
> their 'active voice.' Consistent with their own notions of empowerment,
> should not the intellectual create a situation where the students' active
> voices come forward of their own volition? In the latter situation,
> however, the 'intellectual' who must 'come to grips' with the 'ideological
> and material aspects of the dominant society' might find that the students
> do not speak in one voice but in many. The model suggested by the
> authors does not allow students the option to refuse 'civic courage.' In
> a world where people disappear for much less than public critiques of the
> state, it is trivializing to assume that all it takes is 'knowledge and
> courage' to render 'despair unconvincing and hope practical'. (p.67)

Clearly for feminist pedagogues the path to working through this dilemma is not to abandon the notion of student voice altogether. Rather, it appears that feminist pedagogues need to insist on the primacy of teacher subjectivity and voice as a way of continually rendering problematic the construct that students are disempowered and need to be helped to voice where teachers have already come to voice. In a recent issue of Radical Teacher (1992), focusing specifically on feminist pedagogies, two teachers include their 'assumptions and ground rules' about learning and classroom trust:

> This teaching demands a high degree of openness on the part of the
> teacher. We need to be ready to talk about our own struggles to
> overcome our racism, sexism, homophobia, class bias, etc. And we need
> to be ready to apologize for things we say or do that either don't work
> well in the course, or that hurt people. (Thompson and Disch,1992:5/6)

Thus feminist pedagogues seek to avoid, even in the name of emancipatory education, the process in which,

> Educators stand above their students and guide them in their struggle for 'personal empowerment' and 'voice'. [In which] the only call for change is on the part of the student. The only people who get 'worked over' are the students. The only call is for student voice. Critical and feminist teachers, we are to assume, have already found and articulated theirs.
> (Orner,1992:87)

It seems likely that feminist pedagogues' assertion that teachers have often not come to subjectivity and voice is precisely because they are not simply trying to empower the 'other' disenfranchised, but are themselves, as women, living life on the margins and thus intimately understand that gaining power in one instance (as teacher) does not bring unified, centred voice to them completely, as women they may continue to be silent

Thus Orner (1992) and other feminist pedagogues do not advocate the abandonment of student voice, but rather the addition of teacher-voice:

> In education, the call for voice has most often been directed at students. Where are the multiple, contradictory voices of teachers, writers, researchers and administrators? The time has come to listen to those who have been asking others to speak. (p.88)

Certainly it would seem there is an obvious contradiction in demanding student voice when teachers themselves are loathe to disclose their own lived experiences. In Madiha Didi Khayatt's (1992) study of lesbian teachers, the complexities of this issue are brought to light:

> Despite the willingness to answer questions, some teachers considered them intrusive, not just because they potentially pried into intimate details of their lives, but also because, as lesbians, most of the respondents felt ill at ease having to dodge, evade, or avoid some students' enquiries. One young woman indicated the tensions between how far she was willing to go and what was demanded of her: "I talk about the fact that I live with a woman, that my roommate's a woman, and that I spend a lot of time with women. The kids know that. They've seen a lot of my friends come and give presentations to them. I feel that's enough. You know what I mean. I feel like I'm presenting myself as honestly as I can safely

go...It's a terrible thing to have to hide part of yourself. I hate it".
(p. 176/7)

The complicated implications of disclosure for teachers helps to render problematic the notion that students will necessarily feel safe and/or comfortable speaking their stories in the feminist or critical classroom. In the study of lesbian teachers quoted above. Khayatt (1992) discusses the very real dangers and difficulties of coming out as a lesbian teacher:

> Often, young girls want to know the names of their teacher's child(ren), husband, or boyfriend...These types of questions are easily answered, although not all with the same ease. A married teacher is more likely to give information about her husband or children, whereas a young teacher might be more reticent about the name or the existence of a lover. However, when the teacher is heterosexual, her choice is whether or not she wants to safeguard her privacy...When the teacher is a lesbian, her concerns are more for her whole career, in addition to freedom from harassment and potential violence. (p. 182/3)

> For a teacher to come out in the school where she is teaching is not just having to contend with whether she is likely to lose her job, but also with the antagonism of her colleagues and her students. It was a fear expressed by almost every teacher I interviewed. (p.184)

Perhaps the case of coming out as a gay, lesbian, or bisexual represents one of the most extreme difficulties in disclosing one's own life as a teacher (because of the very real threat of losing not simply one's job but one's profession), however, it certainly poses questions about the power dynamic involved in a pedagogue's attempts to draw out student voice without simultaneously acknowledging their own voice and experience. Some of Khayatt's quotes from her extensive interviews with lesbian teachers illustrate the complex contortions teachers (and students) experience when they are unable or strategically chose not to give voice to their identities and subjectivities. One teacher,

in responding to questions from her students about feminists and women who love other women says, "'No, they're [lesbians] quite nice people.' All the while I'm thinking, I'm talking about myself--I'm calling myself 'they'" (Khayatt, 1992: 181).

I address the issue of teacher-voice here not to suggest that lesbian/gay/bisexual teachers are to be faulted in not disclosing their lives. Clearly the implications and risks of disclosure are widespread and profoundly serious, and the choices these teachers make must be respected. However, an examination of these issues provides a reflection on the complexity of voice in the classroom for both teacher and student. The perhaps naive and simplistic request for student voice, albeit with the best of emancipatory intentions, must be seen in the light of very real complications and complexities.

As well as generating the notion of 'teacher-voice', there are several other ways in which feminist pedagogues render problematic voice as it relates to subjectivity. One of these is to address the problem of an assumed fixed, unitary, consistent, and stable subjectivity that the concept of 'voice' might suggest. Again, feminist pedagogues are not suggesting the denial of voice, but rather the acknowledgement that voices are complex and contradictory, shifting, layered, and above all, changing. The postmodern decentring of the subject has challenged the idea of a unitary identity. Most of us tread in uncharted waters, our subjectivities complex and multidimensional. Thus a female student may speak in the voice of one who has experienced the devastating effects of sexism and misogyny in her life and learning, and yet will speak from a different place as a white woman who gleans privilege in a racist society or educational system. To acknowledge the complexities and very real contradictions of various voices is a project

which opens rather than closes doors for feminist pedagogues (and indeed, more recently, most critical pedagogues as well address the complexities of the shifting, groundless subject). To do so profoundly challenges the rigid frames which have traditionally surrounded our sense of self and others. Not to do so appears to be essentially impossible. As feminist pedagogues become increasingly aware of the divided and multilayered nature of our 'selves' it becomes apparent that:

> subjectivities split between the conscious and unconscious will necessarily render each expression of student voice partial and predicated on the absence and marginalization of alternative voices. It is impossible to speak from all voices at once, or from any one, without the traces of the others being present and interruptive. (Ellsworth, 1989:312)

Mimi Orner (1992) suggests that,

> instead of framing the slipperiness of identity as a problem to be solved or an obstacle to be avoided, feminist poststructuralists regard the inability to fix our identities and to be known through them in any definitive way as a powerful means through which we can 'denaturalize' ourselves and embrace change. (p.74)

Thus to lend credence to a complex and changing subjectivity/identity is not only to acknowledge shifting voices, but also to question the epistemological project of defining and categorizing which has so often been forced upon the excluded 'other'. The project of self-definition can be the acknowledgement of our own complex/contradictory selves, rather than the externally imposed silencing of our differing selves in the name of one single apparent slice of who we are/may be.

Another way the concept of voice is taken up by feminist pedagogues involves the very nature of voice and silence. One might question whether the idea of 'sharing' behind much of the discourse on voice doesn't in fact render politically benign the often

very intentionally disruptive nature of voicing experience. Sharing involves some notion of commonality, some equal or common starting place from which to tell the stories and experiences of one's life - a common concern with the rights of the disempowered, the belief in the creation of a 'better world', the desire to generate more 'fully human' potential in all of us. Yet Ellsworth (1989) suggests that rather than a spirit of sharing, oppositional student voices may in fact consist of what bell hooks has called, "'talking back,' a 'defiant speech' that is constructed within communities of resistance and is a condition of survival" (p.310). Thus student voice is not asserted to provide a shared learning experience for teacher and other students, but rather it may in fact be a question of survival.

As well, when purporting to 'bring students to voice', one must address the implied suggestion that students have, in fact, not already found and articulated their voices. Orner (1992) points out that in the call for student voice it is often,

> [taken for] granted that students do not already value their own language, background and personalities prior to being 'empowered'...to do so. It is as if students have no communities outside of school where they are appreciated and validated. Those of us who are members of marginalized groups know how we validate our own languages, backgrounds and personalities. (p.86)

If students come to the learning environment apparently voiceless, although that silence may reflect a disenfranchised and disempowered subjectivity, might it not equally well reflect a kind of resistance, a cognisant strategy to remain silent in a space that is neither comfortable nor safe? And might there not conceivably be other interpretations? Conceptualizing voice and silence in a multifaceted way, disallowing one (or another) imposed interpretation of student participation or withdrawal is part of a postmodern

feminist pedagogy. Thus,

> Those who would 'read' student silence simply as resistance or
> ideological-impairment replicate forms of vanguardism which construct
> students as knowable, malleable objects rather than as complex,
> contradictory subjects. (Orner,1992:82)

Issues of safety in the feminist classroom are therefore paramount, and as
Ellsworth (1989) concludes as a result of her anti-racist course, "Acting as if our
classroom were a safe space in which democratic dialogue was possible and happening
did not make it so," (p.315).

How to make a safe space in which all students feel comfortable in choosing voice
or silence (or some combination of the two) is a problem that feminist pedagogues are
compelled to grapple with. This marks one of the important ways in which their
theorizing tends to differ from that of critical pedagogy. For while critical pedagogy
concerns itself with student voice, with helping the silenced to speak, the literature rarely
addresses how in fact one might create the necessary environment for such a process.

The problems posed by this questioning of safety in the classroom are not easily
answered, however in their theorizing of subjectivity and epistemology, and in their
analysis of classroom process, many feminist pedagogues attempt to work with and
through these concerns. In advocating, for example, teacher as well as student voice,
feminist pedagogues point to the fact that when teachers fail to address their own
subjective positions and imagine themselves to be disinterested, neutral mediators, they
are in fact prevented from approaching the ideal of safe space from which they and their
students might speak. In ignoring or denying the very complex contradictions in being
(for example) a white male teacher trying to help a black female student to voice, one

is not able to create an environment in which difference, power gain and loss, and above all risk, are truly supported and made safe. As a white woman teacher I have something to gain and something to lose by trying to create a safe space from which women students of colour might speak. In order to create that safety, those gains and losses must be acknowledged and examined for how they will inevitably play into my classroom practice.

Ellsworth (1989) concludes her article with some surprisingly simple and concrete methods for generating safety in the classroom:

> By the end of the semester, participants in the class agreed that commitment to rational discussion about racism in a classroom setting was not enough to make that setting a safe space for speaking out and talking back. We agreed that a safer space required high levels of trust and personal commitment to individuals in the class, gained in part through social interactions outside of class - potlucks, field trips, participation in rallies and other gatherings. Opportunities to know the motivations, histories, and stakes of individuals in the class should have been planned early in the semester. (p.316/17)

She goes on to discuss how teachers and students can help generate safety by acknowledging/addressing/acting on their own privilege:

> Furthermore, White students/professor should have shared the burden of educating themselves about the consequences of their White skin privilege, and to facilitate this, the curriculum should have included significant amounts of literature, films, and videos by people of colour and White people against racism - so that the students of colour involved in the class would not always be looked to as 'experts' in racism....(Ellsworth,1989:317)

Teachers arriving in the class with a belief that they already possess all the knowledge required to teach not only shut down the possibility for their own learning, but unwittingly create an environment where the risk-taking involved for many minority

students or 'others' to participate is not encouraged/valued.[28] If I, as a teacher, do not

take the risk, do not feel safe enough to risk acknowledging what I don't know, what I

have to lose and gain by sharing my experiences, then why would I expect my students

to do so?

3.3 EPISTEMOLOGY

A discussion of how epistemology relates to feminist pedagogical theorizing must

necessarily include a rather detailed discussion of epistemology and broader feminist

theory. As Luke and Gore (1992b) state:

> Others might ask what do feminist theorists such as Donna Haraway, Luce
> Irigaray, Carol Gilligan, Andrea Nye or Sandra Harding have to do with
> gender issues in educational institutions? And what practical relevance
> can postmodernist or poststructuralist theories possibly have for the
> everyday practices of schooling? We would claim in response that
> classroom practice is ultimately linked to theories of the subject, the
> social, learning and teaching...And what some might call the more
> esoteric concerns of poststructuralist feminism form the very work which
> has opened up questions of representation, of voice, difference, power and
> authorship-authority which are central to the politics of classroom
> practice. The theoretical position educators take on the subject, on voice
> or on power ultimately has significant political and ethical consequences
> for how teachers treat students, and how educational policy defines the

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[28] Although on the surface this concern is shared by critical pedagogues as far back as Freire, there is an important difference between more traditional, Freirian notions of 'dialogic' teaching and the kind of risk-taking which feminist pedagogy is addressing. While notions of learning as a 'collaborative process' 'shared' by student and teacher alike do provide an alternative to traditional notions of 'banking education,' and do suggest that teachers actually 'dialogue' with their students rather than didactically lecture, it does not address the *nature* of teacher participation in the pedagogical process. In the traditional Freirian and critical pedagogy approach, dialogue in teaching is concerned with allowing the traditionally silenced students a voice, it is not about the nature of teacher disclosure. For an explanation of dialogic teaching see Shor and Freire (1987), "What is the 'Dialogical Method' of Teaching?"

pedagogical subject. Feminist theory, therefore, is vital not only to effect political change for girls and women in schooling at both theoretical and practical levels, but is also important in formulating an agenda for change with relevance for groups that have been contained and subjugated in discourses that mark their differences as negative. (p.193)

In its broad and most general sense, epistemology attempts to delineate the modes and manners by which we 'make sense' of the flood of stimulation and information which we encounter on a continual basis. It is the study of the criteria by which 'raw data' are selected, constructed, ordered, interpreted, evaluated, and finally processed as that which we 'know' as knowledge. Simply put, epistemology is a field of study comprised of knowledge about knowledge.

But epistemology is also often perhaps more commonly used in a much narrower sense to refer to the specific *contents* of a particular *theory of knowledge*. Thus, we can speak of *an* epistemology or epistemolog*ies* consisting of defined elements or knowledge rules. These rules establish an opinion with regards to the nature of knowledge and define its limits. For the most part, feminist theory has been concerned with this narrower sense of the term. Specifically, feminism has worked to critique the dominant and dominating scientific epistemology and to postulate alternative theories of knowledge

For an examination of how feminist theory in general and feminist pedagogical theory in particular have responded to epistemological concerns, the following definition is instructive:

> An epistemology is a theory of knowledge. It answers questions about who can be a 'knower' (can women?); what tests beliefs must pass in order to be legitimated as knowledge (only tests against men's experiences and observations?); what kind of things can be known (can 'subjective truths' count as knowledge?), and so forth. (Harding,1987:3)

Clearly the approaches feminists have taken to epistemological questions differ from the approaches taken by traditional philosophy. This is because feminist approaches are conditioned and directed by the relationship that women have had through the ages to traditional forms of knowledge.

Feminists have argued that consistently, traditional epistemologies have "systematically excluded the possibility that women could be 'knowers' or *agents of knowledge*;...that history is written from only the point of view of men (of the dominant class and race)" (Harding,1987:3). Western civilization has conspired for centuries to debase women's rational capacities, and in so doing, to exclude women from science, philosophy, and other forms of dominant knowledge production. Genevieve Lloyd (quoted in Di Stefano,1989) states that "rationality has been conceived as transcendence of the feminine," and that "women cannot easily be accommodated into a cultural ideal which has defined itself in opposition to the feminine" (p.104). Consequently, the bulk of feminist epistemological interventions have been attempts either to debunk the myth of the 'Man of Reason' (Lloyd) and/or to reclaim the long-denied rational capacity of women.

These two projects (devaluing male Reason and revaluing female reason) do not necessarily need to be seen as contradictory, although to many the re-establishment of a 'female reason' is problematic. Some theorists, feminist and otherwise, have advocated the abandonment of reason altogether as a hegemonic and mystifying force (Lloyd,1989; Jaggar,1989). Others claim that reason need not (and perhaps cannot) be abandoned (Harding,1986; Keller,1985). Rather, the goal is to rid reason of its current

unreasonableness and to explode the enlightenment and positivist myths of the dominant

scientific epistemology so that reason is revealed not as a quantifiable set of thinking

rules which strive to exclude subjective experience, but as the 'essential human gift'

which allows us to admit into consideration a complex of elements and arrive at

contextualized decisions.

In general, and perhaps simplified terms, feminists have sought to destroy the

thinking-laws of capital 'R' Reason, while advocating the importance of women's role

and women's experience in a more open arena of reasonable thought. Certainly

feminism has exposed the dispassionate, objective, observer - the cornerstone of the

modern scientific epistemology - as a racist, classist, sexist myth. From this view, the

primary function of the dominant epistemology is not related to 'truth', but rather to

power and social control. The myth of the dispassionate investigator functions,

> to bolster the epistemic authority of the currently dominant group,
> composed largely of white men, and to discredit the observations and
> claims of the currently subordinate groups including, of course, the
> observations and claims of many people of colour and women. The more
> forcefully and vehemently the latter groups express their observations and
> claims, the more emotional they appear and so the more easily they are
> discredited. The alleged epistemic authority of the dominant groups then
> justifies their political authority. (Jaggar, 1989:142)

The feminist critique of the hegemonic implications of the existing scientific

method and the dominant positivist epistemology has led to the creation of alternative

feminist epistemologies, which aim to transfer control of the means of knowledge

production into the hands of those oppressed groups who had formerly been alienated

from 'official knowledge'. Feminist epistemologies serve as theoretical legitimation for

many of the knowledge claims of subordinate groups of people. Feminist epistemological

theory aims to destroy the false consciousness instilled in people by the dominant scientific epistemology and pave the way for social change. Finally, feminist epistemologies justify particular political goals, while claiming to make knowledge 'more true'.

The feminist critique of dominant science and epistemology was complemented, and then surpassed, by the anti-enlightenment critique put forward by postmodernism. Postmodern theory concurred with feminism in its critique of positivism and the paradigm of objective rationalism. It too aimed to destroy the knowledge temples of the modern period which enshrined their 'truth' in stone. However, where feminism attempted to reconstruct from the rubble its own 'improved' epistemologies and theories of science, postmodernism was more comfortable with knowledge in ruins.

Rather than attempting to 'fix' epistemology, to make it less false, postmodernism questioned whether this wasn't simply the wrong approach; whether it wasn't the nature of all epistemologies to construct false stories. If epistemology was simply an ideological reification of knowledge, then could alternative epistemologies really be 'less false'? Postmodern theory implies that it was epistemology itself, the quantification of knowledge-rules into a reified system, which imbued knowledge with falseness. Postmodernism insists that knowledge must be kept local, contingent upon each situation and historical context. An epistemological knowledge system on the other hand aims to make knowledge transhistorical and intersubjective.

As feminism and feminist pedagogy have begun to take postmodernism seriously and evaluate its philosophical implications with respect to feminist and educational

practice and theory, the epistemology question has come up for renewed debate. As Sandra Harding (1990) identifies, "At the centre of an emerging controversy in U.S. feminism lies the question of whether there should be feminist sciences and epistemologies" (p.83). And Luke and Gore (1992b) argue for the significance of discussions of epistemologies when trying to improve the experience of schooling for girls and women:

> Of particular concern to many feminist educators who take seriously the plight of 'women and girls in schooling' is the ongoing opposition to and undermining of feminist work through sexist, patriarchal and phallocentric knowledge systems which militate against women in the academy. (p.193)

Many feminists, influenced by postmodern theory, have wondered if the ideological implications of epistemology don't, in the end, threaten to undermine the real political goals of feminism? Do feminist epistemologies simply alter the content while leaving the form of knowledge systems unchanged? Does feminist practice *need* the backing of feminist epistemologies? Are feminist epistemologies simply the 'left-overs' of an incomplete break with an oppressive modernist past? Do feminist epistemologies offer reforms which promise only to subvert the possibility of revolution?

In many respects, the argument against feminist epistemologies and the argument against the institution of women's studies as a 'discipline' within the university are parallel arguments. Obviously, women's studies constitutes a change to the content of the university curriculum, but one might question if it does anything to address the power inherent in the structure of the institution, or does it not rather become a guardian of the institution, acknowledging and reinforcing its dominance (as with Spivak's example quoted earlier) where a select few from the margins are allowed in to further bolster the

centre?

These questions are not easily answered. The problem lies firstly in the fact that the answers are *no fixed answers* (i.e., do women's studies departments further feminist goals?: well...yes *and* no); any 'solution' for feminism involves political compromise As Adrienne Rich (quoted in hooks,1990) writes: "'This is the oppressor's language, yet I need to talk to you'" (quoted by hooks,1990:146).

All of the questions above are contextualized within the historical reality of women's debased status in relation to knowledge. Within this context, these questions take the form of a double-bind. This is the nature of the modern/postmodern dilemma for feminism. The historical field of western philosophy since the Enlightenment constitutes a continuum stretching from the modern to the postmodern and to fix an answer to the above questions is to locate a position for feminism upon that continuum, to choose a position somewhere between the limits of a modern feminism and a postmodern feminism. To these ends, two very different quotes:

> Contemporary Western feminism is firmly, if ambivalently, located in the modernist ethos. (Di Stefano,1990:64)

> ...despite an understandable attraction to the (apparently) logical, orderly world of the Enlightenment, feminist theory more properly belongs in the terrain of postmodern philosophy. (Flax,1990:42)

I have already commented upon how, as postmodernism has come to influence intellectual discourse, feminist and feminist pedagogical theorists have begun to investigate the implications of a meeting of feminist and postmodern theory and the possibility/desirability of a feminist poststructuralism/postmodernism, or a

poststructuralist/postmodern feminist pedagogy.

The modern/postmodern debate in feminism is a contentious one, in large part because the political and epistemological stakes are so high. Even to many of its most generous supporters, postmodernism appears as a mixed blessing for feminism, possibly creating as many problems as it promises to solve. As previously stated, the postmodern project can be seen to complement feminism and feminist pedagogy to the extent that it levels a devastating critique of the complex underpinnings of phallogocentric[24] power structures which have served as the locus of oppression and domination over women (and all other marginalized peoples). At the same time, however, it has thrown into suspicion many (if not all) of the strategies employed by women in their struggle for equality. Many even feel that postmodernism inclines towards post-feminism. Consequently we now find tentative and cautionary statements to be commonplace in much of the feminist theory which addresses postmodernism, suggesting a tentative and only partial use of postmodern theories and approaches:

> First, that postmodernism expresses the claims and needs of a constituency (white, privileged men of the industrialized West) that has already had an Enlightenment for itself and that is now ready and willing to subject that legacy to critical scrutiny. Secondly, that the objects of postmodernism's various critical and deconstructive efforts have been the creations of a similarly specific and partial constituency (beginning with Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle). Third, that mainstream postmodernist theory...has been remarkably blind and insensitive to questions of gender in its own purportedly politicized rereading of history, politics, and culture. Finally, that the postmodernist project, if seriously adopted by feminists, would

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[24] Phallogocentricism is the descriptor with which French feminists such as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous have described Western rationalist philosophy, in an effort to highlight the fundamental affinity between phallocentrism and logocentrism. See for example, Irigaray (1985) This Sex Which Is Not One.

> make any semblance of a feminist politics impossible. To the extent that feminist politics is bound up with a specific constituency or subject, namely, women, the postmodernist prohibition against subject-centred inquiry and theory undermines the legitimacy of a broad based organized movement dedicated to articulating and implementing the goals of such a constituency. (Di Stefano,1990:75-76)

A certain degree of ambivalence or caution is perceptible in practically all feminist theory which addresses postmodernism. However, the degree of this 'ambivalence' ranges widely from slight to near or total mistrust.

Jane Flax feels that despite the potential dangers, postmodernism provides the proper theoretical tools to deal with the sorts of problems feminism has begun to recognize over the last decades. Foremost among these problems was the narrowness of vision exhibited by most feminist theory, the continual exclusion of women of colour, lesbians, working-class women, and others, even while building a movement based on a critique of patriarchal society as excluding and oppressing women. Both Flax (1990) and Linda Nicholson (1990) suggest that this tendency was in large part the result of a methodological legacy inherited from modernity in which knowledge and power were intimately mingled. This legacy has tended towards universalizing theories without universalizing input and therefore towards control and domination.

If we examine the work of Sandra Harding (1986) we find she appears to take up a 'middle ground' position in relation to the

modern/postmodern debate:

> Feminist analytical categories *should* be unstable at this moment in history. We need to learn how to see our goal for the present moment as a kind of illuminating 'riffing' between and over the transformations of them, rather than as a revision of the rhythms of any particular one (Marxism, psychoanalysis, empiricism, hermeneutics, postmodernism ..)

> to fit what we think at the moment we want to say. The problem is that we do not know and should not know just what we want to say about a number of conceptual choices with which we are presented -- except that the choices themselves create no-win dilemmas for our feminisms. More accurately, the problem is that there is no 'we' of feminist theorizing -- and recognition of that fact can be a great resource for our politics and knowledge-seeking. (p.244)

Harding thus advocates a 'theory of ambivalence'[20] which recognizes elements of value to feminism in both modernist and postmodernist approaches, but which further recognizes feminism's precarious position in the battle which rages between the two. A theory of ambivalence suggests that what is most useful to feminism often emerges from the continuing tension between modernism and postmodernism, and the insight that the prospect of a resolution of that tension (a total feminist alliance with one 'team' or the other) threatens to limit the options currently kept open. It is, for Harding (1990), the recognition of the omnipresent tensions between modernism and postmodernism that leads her to postulate this strategy:

> ...both the feminist science thinkers and their feminist postmodernist critics stand with one foot in modernity and the other in the lands beyond. Moreover, that link to the past has problematic and fruitful aspects for both projects. The tensions between Enlightenment and postmodernist tendencies occur between them, but they also occur in different ways within each project. (p.100)

Certainly Harding's position is open to criticism. While ambivalence may retain the opportunity for the best of both worlds, it also remains more susceptible to the dangers

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[20] Harding generalizes feminist epistemological responses into three categories: feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint, and feminist postmodernism, all of which provide potential tools for feminist theorizing which she tries to keep available through her theory of ambivalence. For a discussion of these categories see Harding (1990), "Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critiques," in Feminism/Postmodernism ed. Linda J. Nicholson.

of both. It is not necessarily clear how 'embracing the paradox' would allow feminism to escape the double-bind in any real way. However, what it appears Harding is arguing is that an ambivalent posture ensures that feminism doesn't fall into the dangerous habit of relying on the theorizing of white western men. She is resisting the tendency to define feminism as a subsection of a larger metatheoretical project, the tendency for feminism to be subsumed within a larger (and inhospitable) whole.

Harding's theory of ambivalence is foremost an attempt to resist these tendencies. Linda Alcoff and bell hooks have also done important work around the modern/postmodern debate and the consequences for feminist politics. Rather than attempting to locate a place for feminism *within* that debate, they have instead constituted feminism as a *location* - as a field upon which the modern/postmodern debate is played out and evaluated.

By creating feminism as a location or position (albeit a constantly shifting one) feminism takes charge of its own game rules. In other words, for feminism to partake of modernist and/or postmodernist strategies does not necessitate the kind of location *within* the boundaries of one or the other. The question of positioning is fundamentally connected to the process of evaluation. Establishing a location organizes a point of view; it defines a situated and organizing principle.

Feminism as Location

> We resist hegemonic dominance of feminist thought by insisting that it is
> a theory in the making, that we must necessarily criticize, question, re-
> examine, and explore new possibilities. (hooks,1984:10)

> My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous,
> which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we
> always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to
> a hyper- and pessimistic activism.
> I think that the ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to
> determine which is the main danger. (Foucault,1984:343)

> Some differences are playful; some are poles of world historical systems
> of domination. Epistemology is about knowing the difference.
> (Haraway,1990:202-3)

When we consider the question 'should there be feminist epistemologies?', we

must first ask ourselves 'from where do we pose this question?', 'what is our location?'

In the absence of an archimedes point--some positionless space outside of the system in

question--we can assume that our positioning will strongly affect the answer at which we

arrive.   As we have already seen, those who locate themselves within the modern

tradition are likely to insist on the necessity of feminist epistemologies, while those who

locate themselves within postmodernism are more likely to be sceptical about their

usefulness.   Within the terms of this debate, feminism is neutralized--it becomes

irrelevant.   Eliminating feminism from the question 'should there be feminist

epistemologies?' would have no serious effect on the debate as it is played out between

modernism and postmodernism.   Feminism is content, the debate is about form.

However, when feminism is constructed as a *location*, when it is theorized as the

position from which the questions are posed, all the terms of reference undergo a radical

shift. Feminism is no longer subsumed and eclipsed by the debate, engaged merely as a 'rhetorical accessory'--one more example to prove the larger and predetermined rule.

As stated above, location deals with assumptions, first principles, and values. For hooks (1990), these are always flowing, shifting, ever in-the-making:

> I am located in the margin. I make a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as a site of resistance--as location of radical openness and possibility. This site of resistance is continually formed in that segregated culture of opposition that is our critical response to domination... We are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world. (p.153)

A feminist politics which conceptualizes itself as a counter-hegemonic force constitutes a location as a strategic point of resistance. It is a position assumed in a given situation; not assumed arbitrarily, but in relation to the entire range of contextual specificities of a particular situation; not assumed permanently but in a temporary fashion, contingent on the shifting circumstances of every situation. In the same way, Alcoff (1988) suggests:

> When the concept 'woman' is defined not by a particular set of attributes but by a particular position, the internal characteristics of the person thus identified are not denoted so much as the external context within which that person is situated...The positional definition...makes her identity relative to a constantly shifting context, to a situation that includes a network of elements involving others, the objective economic conditions, cultural and political institutions and ideologies and so on... The position of women is relative and not innate, and yet neither is it 'undecidable' Through social critiques and analyses we can identify women via their position relative to an existing cultural and social network. (p.433/4)

Subjective positioning and subjective experience *do* have a place amidst all the other situational conditions involved in knowledge production. However, this shouldn't

result in a reified 'standpoint theory' which assumes that the experience of oppression bestows a more direct or 'true' view of reality. But neither should it be assumed that oppression always results in a damaged view or that its effects are always irrelevant and undecidable. In her essay "The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspective from a Nonwestern Feminist," Uma Narayan (1989) effectively clarifies this point,

> Our commitment to the contextual nature of knowledge does not require us to claim that those who do not inhabit these contexts can never have any knowledge of them. But this commitment does permit us to argue that it is *easier and more likely* for the oppressed to have critical insights into the condition of their own oppression than it is for those who live outside these structures. Those who actually *live* the oppressions of class, race, or gender have faced the issues that such oppressions generate in a variety of different situations. The insights and emotional responses engendered by these situations are a legacy with which they confront any new issue or situation. (p.264)

While stressing the significance of the notion of an epistemic advantage afforded by oppression in certain circumstances (a phenomenon she calls 'double vision'), she insists that it should not be reified into a metaphysical doctrine which would substitute for the hard work of concrete social analysis. Finally she stresses that, while 'double-vision' can be valuable, "the thesis that oppression may bestow an epistemic advantage should not tempt us in the direction of idealizing or romanticizing oppression and blind us to its real material and psychic deprivation" (Narayan,1989:268).

Epistemology in the Classroom

In the introduction to Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy, Luke and Gore (1992a) point to the kind of feminist epistemology they see to be relevant to feminist pedagogies:

A poststructuralist feminist epistemology accepts that knowledge is always

> provisional, open-ended and relational. Our treks through language and
> master narratives on the way to this kind of knowing are located in
> historical and cultural context. This contextual character of all knowledge
> and knowing suggests that there can be no finite and unitary truths. (p 7)

In the concluding chapter of the same book, they continue:

> ...knowledge productions always occur in specific sites, historical
> trajectories and socio-cultural contexts. Unlike many of the (rationalist,
> objectivist, positivist) master discourses, feminist epistemology sees
> knowledge as contextual and political. We therefore consider it important
> not to divorce 'experience' from theoretical knowledge, but to foreground
> the conditions and relations of production within which feminist work is
> generated. (Luke and Gore,1992b:194)

For most feminist pedagogues, it is the notion of deeply contextual and

provisional knowledge which forms the understanding from which they may work. The

notion of a stable and fixed truth is no longer conceivable in the feminist classroom; it

has been replaced by the understanding that our knowledges are different, informed as

they are by our multiple and often contradictory experiences and locations. This must

not, and does not, mean that feminist pedagogical theorizing about knowledge in the

classroom slides into a sea of indeterminacy, an endless relativism in which everyone

simply 'knows what they know' and no knowledge is more rigorous or certain than any

other. Ellsworth (1989) comments:

> ...I saw the necessity to take the voices of students and professors of
> difference at their word - as 'valid' - but not without response. Students'
> and my own narratives about experiences of racism, ableism, elitism, fat
> oppression, sexism, anti-Semitism, heterosexism, and so on are partial
> partial in the sense that they are unfinished, imperfect, limited; and partial
> in the sense that they project the interests of 'one side' over others.
> Because those voices are partial and partisan, they must be made
> problematic....(p.305)

Thus an understanding that all knowledge is limited and partial is coupled with

an insight that we must render problematic our own voices and not fall back onto an essentialist notion of experience from which we have access to the 'real' truth. Feminist concerns with the validation of girls' and women's experience and subjectivity are of central importance to feminist pedagogues. They have in many cases fostered a revaluing of the silenced experiences of the other, and have at times even imbued them with a reified status, the new source of truth. Most early feminist pedagogical theory in fact called on 'female experience' as the very source of a new kind of education in which female experience, traditionally denied, was revalued and even reified:

> ...feminist scholar[s] and teacher[s]...[have] invested much of [their] career[s] in the battle to validate 'female experience'--in university classrooms, in academic textbooks, in curricular offerings, and even in institutional infrastructures. The category of 'female experience' holds a particularly sacrosanct position in Women's Studies programs, programs which often draw on the very notion of a hitherto repressed and devalued female experience to form the basis of a new feminist epistemology. Virtually all the essays in one of the few volumes devoted entirely to questions of feminist pedagogy, *Gendered Subjects: The Dynamics of Feminist Teaching* (Culley and Portuges), uphold experiences as the essential difference in the Women's Studies classroom. (Fuss, 1989:113/14)

However, Fuss (1989) goes on to say:

> The appeal to experiences, as the ultimate test of all knowledge, merely subtends the subject in its fantasy of autonomy and control. Belief in the truth of Experience is as much an ideological production as belief in the experience of Truth. (p.114)

Narayan's cautions must therefore be heeded. While opening up space for the traditionally silenced, including themselves, to speak, feminist pedagogues must guard against generating a new epistemological hierarchy where the old terms are simply reversed, female experience now outweighing masculinist ideology. "Exchanging

positions... " writes Lather (1991b:82), "does not disrupt hierarchy and 'What feminism and deconstruction call for is the displacement of hierarchicization as an ordering principle'". Belief in experience, therefore, as the new source of 'truth', still acknowledges that there is a 'truth' to be found. Fuss (1989) sums up these concerns in the opening paragraph of *Essentialism in the Classroom*, an chapter in her book Essentially Speaking:

> I am primarily concerned with the way in which essence circulates as a privileged signifier in the classroom, usually under the guise of 'the authority of experience.' Exactly what counts as 'experience,' and should we defer to it in pedagogical situations? Does experience of oppression confer special jurisdiction over the right to speak about that oppression? Can we only speak, ultimately, from the so called 'truth' of our experiences, or are all empirical ways of knowing analytically suspect? Finally, what is the pedagogical status of empiricism in the age Alice Jardine labels 'the demise of experience'? How are we to handle our students' (and perhaps our own) daily appeals to experiential knowledge when, with the advent of poststructuralist thought, experience has been placed so convincingly under erasure? (p.113)

Chris Weedon (1987) elaborates on the effect of poststructuralist feminism on 'experience':

> Poststructuralist feminist theory suggests that experience has no inherent essential meaning. It may be given meaning in language through a range of discursive systems of meaning which are often contradictory and constitute conflicting versions of social reality, which in turn serve conflicting interests. This range of discourses and their material supports in social institutions and practices is integral to the maintenance and contestation of forms of social power, since social reality has no meaning except in language. (p.34)

Certainly many women, myself included, who have participated in women's studies classes, have known the unique and sweet joy of choosing to be an 'expert' on femaleness, Jewishness (or whatever is valued in that particular setting) The freedom

to 'speak one's life' as though it mattered, as though it counted as valid knowledge and truth can be an exhilarating experience, for those who live on the margins of academic discourse. After the intimidation and silence which academia has so consistently imposed on the 'other', the freedom to speak without having to justify, rationalize, quote external sources, or be 'objective', can be a moment of deep learning. Magda Lewis (1990) comments on the difference between more traditional classrooms and those which are feminist:

> Within the confines of traditional academic practices, the politics of personal experience are often seen to be irrelevant. In contrast, the feminist classroom can be a deeply emotional experience for many women, offering the opportunity to claim relevance for the lives they live as the source of legitimate knowledge. (p.485)

And yet often coupled with this new-found freedom and voice is an essentialized identity, the assumption that one might or could speak for all women, all Jews. Feminist pedagogy thus faces a kind of double bind: a desire to acknowledge and validate the repressed experience of the 'other', and yet the concurrent desire to claim all experience and knowledge as partial, as located at the interstices of the multiple trajectories making up an individual life. As Fuss (1989) affirms, "'female experience' is never as unified, as knowable, as universal, as stable as we presume it to be" (p.114).

Fuss furthers this dilemma by pointing to how the use of experience as an authoritative basis for knowledge has another more limiting side to it. If we are to admit that only women can speak intimately, 'truthfully' of the experience of 'being woman', one is then forced to acknowledge that men cannot ever truly know or understand that experience. Fuss cautions that this kind of appeal to experience thus serves not only to

open dialogue for some in the classroom, but to close down dialogue for others. Thus knowledge is further hidden and withdrawn from some, rather than further opened up to all. "Experience, then, while providing some students with a platform from which to speak can also relegate other students to the sidelines" (Fuss,1989:115).

As experience is reified, a certain hierarchy develops between those 'in the know', and those who fall outside of the realm of experience. The very notion of knowledge-hierarchies, of the desire to attain any unitary 'truth', goes unchallenged, and instead a reversal occurs, depending upon the specific context (thus women's experience is valorized in the women's studies classroom, gay/lesbian experience in the gay/lesbian studies classroom, etc.).[31]

The epistemological question which thus faces feminist pedagogues is how to bring women's (and other marginalized) experiences into the feminist classroom without recreating the male-defined framework they have so consistently critiqued - a framework which obfuscates the discursively-constructed/subjective nature of that experience. Feminist pedagogues are faced with the task of valuing student experience while simultaneously demonstrating how these knowledges are partial and contextual. To these ends, Fuss (1989) suggests that,

> ...in terms of pedagogical theory, such a position permits the introduction of narratives of lived experience into the classroom while at the same time challenging us to examine collectively the central role social and historical practices play in shaping and producing these narratives. 'Essentially speaking,' we need both to theorize essentialist spaces from which to speak and, simultaneously, to deconstruct these spaces to keep them from

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[31] For an interesting discussion of this phenomenon see Mary Louise Adams (1989) "There's No Place Like Home: On the Place of Identity in Feminist Politics".

solidifying. Such a double gesture involves once again the responsibility to historicize, to examine each deployment of essence, each appeal to experience, each claim to identity in the complicated contextual framework in which it is made. (p.118)

Ellsworth's (1989) conclusion to *Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering?* suggests that feminist educators 'embrace' the uncomfortable concept of 'unknowability,' acknowledging that neither they, nor their students, can ever know completely, even drawing upon their very real, lived experience:

> The experience of Coalition 607 has left me wanting to think through the implications of confronting unknowability. What would it mean to recognize not only that a multiplicity of knowledges are present in the classroom as a result of the way difference has been used to structure social relations inside and outside the classroom, but that these knowledges are contradictory, partial, and irreducible? They cannot be made to 'make sense'--they cannot be known, in terms of the single master discourse of an educational project's curriculum or theoretical framework....(p.321)

Thus again, responses to the very complex concerns of epistemology and its role in feminist pedagogy are at once answers and *not answers*. While authors such as Fuss, Ellsworth, and others propose means and tools for dealing with knowledge in classrooms, the means and tools they suggest are so contingent and changeable as to be almost ungraspable. Fuss' 'theorizing and simultaneously deconstructing,' or Ellsworth's 'embracing unknowability' suggest to us that feminist pedagogy, in truly postmodern fashion, is only knowable in relation to practice, is only meaningful in specific instances of praxis.

3.4 DIFFERENCE

A feminist pedagogy does not disclaim foundation; instead, it grounds its epistemology on a foundation of difference. (Luke,1992:48)

Feminist pedagogues have tended to not give up epistemology or theories about knowledge; what they have attempted to do instead is to find an epistemology which grounds itself in diversity, not in any single approach, but in the very notion of *multiple* approaches. One of the founding claims of the women's movement (and particularly of the feminist critique of education) was that women's voices and experiences had been *excluded* from the public sphere, educational or otherwise. The call for the deconstruction of apparently 'universal' and 'neutral' methods of knowledge production to be named for what they in reality were (male-defined methods inscribed with the interests of maintaining a sexist status quo), was and continues to be a project central to many feminisms (thus the feminist tenet that 'objectivity' is in fact male subjectivity).

> Feminism is, among other things, a response to the fact that women either have been left out of, or included in demeaning and disfiguring ways in what has been an almost exclusively male account of the world. And so while part of what feminists want and demand for women is the right to move and to act in accordance with our own wills and not against them, another part is the desire and insistence that we give our *own* accounts of these movements and actions. For it matters to us what is said about us, who says it, and to whom it is said: having the opportunity to talk about one's life, to give an account of it, to interpret it, is integral to leading that life rather than being led through it; hence our distrust of the male monopoly over accounts of women's lives. (Lugones and Spelman,1983:573)

The critique of male hegemony has influenced almost all areas of public life; in particular, Carol Gilligan's work on moral development provides an apt example of both the feminist critique of androcentrism in research, and simultaneously of the limits of that

critique.[*] Gilligan's work is particularly interesting because the problems uncovered in her work are perhaps symptomatic of 'trouble' in the broader women's movement. In her book, In a Different Voice (1982), Gilligan critiques male psychological theory, specifically the theory of moral development articulated by Lawrence Kohlberg. Kohlberg's study, postulating stages of moral development, although based entirely upon male college students, was extrapolated to represent a universal picture of moral development. The fact that women rank consistently lower than men in Kohlberg's model led Gilligan to a study of her own. Her work is based in large part upon the theory of Nancy Chodorow who, in critiquing Freud's negative and derivative theory of female psychology, postulates a theory of psychological development explaining what she sees to be nearly universal differences between the personality roles of men and women. Grounded in Chodorow's postulating of fundamental difference between men and women, and on her own extensive study of women choosing to have abortions, Gilligan puts forward a theory of moral development which theorizes men's morality as being based in an 'ethic of justice', whereas women's morality is based in an 'ethic of care'.

> [Gilligan] sets herself the...task of exposing and redressing androcentric bias in the model of moral development of psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg. Thus, she argued that it is illegitimate to evaluate the moral development of women and girls by reference to a standard drawn

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[*] Gilligan's work has generated intense and interesting debate within the women's movement about her postulation of a women's 'ethic of care'. Broad participation in this debate has made it a rallying point for the controversy between philosophies of difference and identity. For interesting discussion of her work see Seyla Benhabib (1987), "The Generalized and the Concrete Other: The Kohlberg-Gilligan Controversy and Feminist Theory," in Feminism as Critique, ed. Benhabib and Cornell. See also Fraser and Nicholson (1992), "Social Criticism Without Philosophy," in Feminism/Postmodernism ed. Linda J. Nicholson.

exclusively from the experience of men and boys. She proposed to examine women's moral discourse on its own terms in order to uncover its immanent standards of adequacy. (Fraser and Nicholson,1990:32)

Certainly Gilligan's work played an important role in exposing the androcentric bias of apparently 'neutral' scientific research in psychology and many other fields. The implicit adoption of male life as the norm, and the subsequent categorization of women as deviant, Gilligan (1982) argues, has traditionally been seen as objective science when in fact it "reflects a consistent observational and evaluative bias" (p.6).

However, Gilligan's model has also fallen under serious and well-founded critique. Fraser and Nicholson comment that Gilligan has, in fact, not challenged the structural limitations of Kohlberg's original model. They suggest that instead she has merely "sought to develop gynocentric alternatives to mainstream androcentric perspectives...but not fully..[abandoning] the universalist pretensions of the latter" (Fraser and Nicholson,1990:32). Gilligan's critique of Kohlberg's model as exclusionary, and that it falsely universalizes on the basis of solely male experience, comes into question when one sees that she has fallen into the very same exclusionary and universalizing trap she sought to avoid. While she has critiqued Kohlberg's theory as excluding women and has, by creating a kind of 'counter-model', challenged the idea of any single universal development model, she has no difficulty positing a universal voice for women, the so-called 'different voice'. While her aim is to challenge the universal claims of Kohlberg's study, Gilligan ultimately does not move away from universalizing tendencies herself. To posit a female voice is still to suggest that we might be able to identify a universal voice relating to all women (instead of to all people

as Kohlberg has contended). Besides the fact that her universalizing is as exclusive as

Kohlberg's (that is, he excludes all women, she excludes all 'other' women, i.e., those

not white, middle-class, heterosexual, etc., as well as those differences between and

among such relatively privileged women), Gilligan's 'voice' is not in fact based on

'difference,' but rather on constructing a reductive category (female voice) which erases

rather than includes difference. In positing a distinctly female model of moral

development Gilligan has ignored the vast array of differences *among* women:

> Thus, vestiges of essentialism have continued to plague feminist
> scholarship, even despite the decline of grand theorizing. In many cases,
> including Gilligan's, this represents the continuing subterranean influence
> of those very mainstream modes of thought and inquiry with which
> feminists have wished to break. (Fraser and Nicholson,1990:33)

It is interesting to note these contradictions and complexities in Gilligan's work

because they raise two important and related concerns in feminist theory: first, the

theorization of difference, and second, the exclusivity that the (relatively privileged)

women's movement has had such trouble confronting.

Trinh Minh-ha (1986/87) addresses the complexities in the theorization of

difference in her essay "Difference: 'A Special Third World Women's Issue'". She

suggests that we must,

> ...succeed in making a distinction between difference reduced to identity-
> authenticity and difference understood also as critical difference from
> myself. The first induced an attitude of temporary tolerance...which
> serves to reassure the conscience of the liberal establishment and gives a
> touch of subversiveness to the discourse delivered.
> Differences that cause separation and suspicion therefore do not threaten,
> for they can always be dealt with as fragments. (Trinh T. Minh-
> ha,1986/87:26)

Difference that marks groups as 'special,' and always 'other,' renders them always

relational to the 'norm,' and therefore always ultimately discardable by those at the 'centre'. Trinh Minh-ha elaborates on what she means by "a critical difference from |one|self" (Trinh T. Minh-ha:27).

> The differences made *between* entities comprehended as absolute presences -- hence the notions of *pure origin* and *true* self -- are an outgrowth of a dualistic system of thought peculiar to the Occident... They should be distinguished from the differences grasped *both between* and *within* entities, each of these being understood as multiple presence. Not One, not two either. 'I' is, therefore, not a unified subject, a fixed identity or that solid mass covered with layers of superficialities one has gradually to peel off before one can see its true face. 'I' is, itself, *infinite layers*. (Ibid)

Theorizations of difference that remain *relational* do not celebrate the *positivity* of difference, but rather place it always in relation to what it is *not*, within the walls of the masters house (Lorde cited in de Lauretis,1987:2). To these ends, Teresa de Lauretis (1987) discusses how feminist theorizations of gender based on sexual *difference* in fact maintain the hierarchical and dualistic structure in which women are not men:

> With its emphasis on the sexual, 'sexual difference' is in the first and last instance a difference of women from men, female from male; and even the more abstract notion of 'sexual differences' resulting not from biology or socialization but from signification and discursive effects...ends up being in the last instance a difference (of woman) from man--or better, the very instance of difference *in* man. To continue to pose the question of gender in either of these terms, once the critique of patriarchy has been fully outlined, keeps feminist thinking bound to the terms of Western patriarchy itself, contained within the frame of a conceptual opposition.... (p.1)

In attempts to theorize 'others' as special or unique (people of colour, gays/lesbians/bisexuals, Jews, poor people, etc., etc.) difference is not only rendered (paternalistically) romanticized, but ultimately it also assumes a unitary, stable meaning, as though there is 'woman' or 'Jew' or 'lesbian' that has some consistent, universal

meaning in relation to man, or gentile, or heterosexual -some essential characteristic that serves as the basis for exclusion from the centre. This kind of theorizing "makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to articulate the differences of women from Woman, that is to say, the differences among women or, perhaps more exactly, the differences *within women*" (de Lauretis, 1987:2).

> Difference as uniqueness or special identity is both limiting and deceiving. If identity refers to the whole pattern of sameness within a human life, the style of a continuing me that permeates all the changes undergone, then difference remains within the boundary of that which distinguishes one identity from another. This means that *at heart*, X must be X, Y must be Y, and X *cannot* be Y. Those running around yelling X is not X and X *can* be Y usually land in a hospital, a 'rehabilitation' centre, a concentration camp, or a res-er-va-tion. (Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1986/87:29)

It is important to distinguish, therefore, between that difference distinguished by Trinh Minh-ha (and other authors), and that kind of difference which is, in reality, based on sameness, which serves to bolster the power-structures (even of the privileged women's movement), which in its fictional attempts to discuss difference really only reinforce the dominance of those defining who is different by maintaining categories of difference as stable and universal.

Gilligan's work illustrates that stumbling block in feminist theory related to issues of difference, and that is the women's movement's continual inability to confront its own exclusivity:

> From the late 1960s to the mid-1980s, feminist theory exhibited a recurrent pattern: Its analyses tended to reflect the viewpoints of white, middle-class women of North America and Western Europe. The irony was that one of the powerful arguments feminist scholars were making was the limitation of scholarship which falsely universalized on the basis of limited perspectives. Moreover, feminists were becoming increasingly aware that a problem with existing scholarship was not only that it left out

women's voices; rather, the voices of many social groups had been silenced. Yet, even in the context of this growing awareness of the oppressive politics of traditional scholarship and a sincere commitment to ensure wide-ranging inclusiveness in their own work, the tendency persisted. (Nicholson,1990:1)

Over the past two decades, a wide array of work has come forth in North America, produced primarily by working-class women, women of colour, lesbian and Jewish women, and others outside the mainstream of what has been a primarily white, Christian, heterosexual and middle-class women's movement.[33] These women have critiqued feminism for reproducing the very exclusivity it seeks to repudiate. As Trinh Minh-ha points out, feminist theory risks creating an alternative exclusivity which retains many of the same exclusionary and reductive characteristics as androcentrism. She specifically addresses the use of language to construct the 'norm' and the exclusivity of the usage of the word 'woman' (taken always to be white, middle-class, heterosexual, etc.), much in the way feminists have rendered problematic the use of the generic 'man':

> 'Wo-' appended to 'man' in sexist contexts is not unlike 'Third World,' 'Third,' 'minority,' or 'colour' affixed to woman in pseudo-feminist contexts. Yearning for universality, the generic 'woman,' like its counterpart, the generic 'man,' tends to efface difference within itself (Trinh Minh-ha,1986/87:97)

Trinh Minh-ha is only one of many who have critiqued feminism's continued reliance on grand narratives and its continued ignoring or reification of difference. Theorists such as bell hooks, Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, Marilyn Frye, Gayatri

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[33] Examples of some of the ground-breaking work in this area are: Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua eds. (1981) This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Colour; bell hooks (1981) Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism; Elly Bulkin, Minnie Bruce Pratt and Barbara Smith (1984) Yours in Struggle; and Barbara Smith ed. (1983) Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology.

Spivak and many others have had to consistently push an elitist women's movement to address difference within and beyond women as 'gendered' beings:

> The production of grand social theories, which by definition attempt to speak for *all* women, was disrupted by the political pressures put upon such theorizing by those left out of it--poor and working-class women, women of colour, lesbians, differently-abled women, fat women, older women. For example, the work of women of colour documents resistance to the universalizing tendencies of feminist theorizing, resistance that grew out of desire not for better theory but for survival. (Lather,1991b:27)

The notion of 'difference' is central to feminist pedagogy. Again, this 'theme' has an important history in broader feminist theory. It is important to note the process taken by the (North American) women's movement in regards to its gradual incorporation and theorization of 'difference'. Many years of work by women of colour spoke forcefully of the need to address differences among women. Not coincidentally, the ability of many in the broader women's movement to 'hear' and engage with what women of colour had been saying and theorizing for years, coincided with the poststructural valorization of difference which offered them the theory that made the margins acceptable, even desirable. This is not to deny or belittle in any way the powerful practical and theoretical work done by women of colour, but rather to note the irony that the majority of white women were not able to 'hear' the voices of women of colour until white men furnished them with the language and theory to do so. It is also not to simplistically suggest that it is due only to poststructuralist theorizing that difference was accepted as an important notion by the women's movement. The on-going struggle by women of colour, the difficult and painful work of articulating their lives and their theories over and over, is, of course, what was ultimately responsible for

white women being forced to 'hear' about and incorporate difference into their work, both practical and theoretical.

It is important to note as well that if one reads, for example, the introduction and a sampling of articles in the anthology Home Girls, edited by Barbara Smith, one finds a very sophisticated theorization of difference which holds great affinities with much poststructuralist theorizing on that subject (i.e., difference which is non-essentializing, complex, and positive). While today texts by women of colour are increasingly valorized and validated in the women's movement, it is difficult at this late stage to speculate on the historical chain of events, if indeed such a chain exists, bringing theories of difference by women of colour and poststructuralist theories of difference to the centre of feminism at more or less the same moment. However what certainly is clear is that women of colour had early on, out of their own life struggles, provided much of the theorizing on difference which is now considered to be so central to feminism.

In an important critique of the mainstream women's movement Lugones and Spelman (1983), while acknowledging that it is a central project of feminism to 'demand that the woman's voice be heard', comment that:

> ...the complaint [that women's voices have been silenced] is very misleading, insofar as it suggests that it is women as women who have been silenced, and that whether a woman is rich or poor, Black, brown or white, etc. is irrelevant to what it means for her to be a woman. For the demand thus simply made ignores at least two related points: (1) it is only possible for a woman who does not feel highly vulnerable with respect to other parts of her identity, eg. race, class, ethnicity, religion, sexual alliance, etc., to conceive of her voice simply or essentially as a 'woman's voice'; (2) just because not all women are equally vulnerable with respect to race, class, etc., some women's voices are more likely to be heard than others by those who have heretofore been giving -or silencing the accounts of women's lives. (p.574)

This perhaps now well-known and even commonly-accepted critique of the western women's movement among those of this movement, has had a deeply significant impact on feminist pedagogical theorizing. Audre Lorde (1990) comments:

> Ignoring the differences of race between women and implications of those differences presents the most serious threat to the mobilization of women's joint power. As white women ignore their built-in privilege of whiteness and define *woman* in terms of their own experience alone, women of Colour become 'other,' the outsider whose experience and tradition is too 'alien' to comprehend. An example of this is the single absence of the experience of women of Colour as a resource for women's studies courses. The literature of women of Colour is seldom included in women's literature courses and almost never in other literature courses, nor in women's studies as a whole. (p.283)

As a result of the persistent work of those marginalized by mainstream feminism, many of those within the latter identifying themselves as feminist pedagogues now call on difference to be at the heart of their work. Thus a feminist pedagogy does not concern itself only or even primarily with the experience of sexism, misogyny, and androcentrism in education, but also with the broader experience of marginality, of positing education which is not primarily 'woman-centred,' but rather which is more broadly 'counter-hegemonic'. In <u>Claiming an Education</u> Gaskell, McLaren, and Novogrodsky (1989) insist:

> Feminism has meant trying to give a voice to women, and allowing women to examine their own experiences, instead of always examining men's experiences. It has meant an effort to see the world from the 'standpoint of women,' in Dorothy Smith's phrase, and to make that part of the public discourse. While doing this we must keep in mind the diversity of women's experiences, and not allow white, middle-class women's experience to stand for the experience of all women. (p.39)

Thus, the authors continue, education must be changed to incorporate the experiences of all marginalized and oppressed groups, not only women as 'gendered' beings alone. In

this way feminist pedagogical theory has followed in the footsteps of more general feminist theory, understanding that fighting for a changed world (and more specifically, changed education systems) involves fighting for the end of oppression for all overlapping marginalized groups. Education as counter-hegemonic, is based on an understanding that no one oppression can be isolated from the next, and ultimately that, "any struggle against oppression lightens the load on all of us." (Walker,1983:354).

Theorizing about difference as a core concept for feminist pedagogy is one thing, to relate that theory in tandem with day to day pedagogical practice is another struggle for feminist pedagogues. In an attempt to generate practice as theoretically grounded in notions of difference, Ellsworth (1989) proposes the idea of "working together across differences" (p.314). She and others struggle concretely, rather than solely in the often highly-abstracted language of other emancipatory pedagogues, with how to address the complexities of difference in the classroom. For Ellsworth (1989) this has meant the acknowledgement and embracing of a "pedagogy of the unknowable" (p.110) the acknowledgement that those thrown together in any classroom can never completely know each other:

> Realizing that there are partial narratives that some social groups or cultures have and others can never know, but that are necessary to human survival, is a condition to embrace and use as an opportunity to build a kind of social and educational interdependency that recognizes difference as 'different strengths' and as 'forces for change'. (Ellsworth,1989:319)

Interestingly, in the closing paragraph of her article, Ellsworth (1989) confides that the next class she is planning to teach is one which doesn't focus on any one experience of marginality (as her anti-racist course did), but rather:

This time...we are engaging with each other and working against oppressive social formations on campus in ways that try to find commonality in the experience of difference without compromising its distinctive realities and effects. (p.324)

The important notion that differences cannot always be unified into

simplistic harmony is made clearer when she continues:

Right now, the classroom practice that seems most capable of accomplishing this is one that facilitates a kind of communication across differences that is best represented by this statement: 'If you can talk to me in ways that show you understand that your knowledge of me, the world, and 'the Right thing to do' will always be partial, interested, and potentially oppressive to others, and if I can do the same, then we can work together on shaping and reshaping alliances for constructing circumstances in which students of difference can thrive. (Ellsworth,1989:324)

Thus Ellsworth and other feminist pedagogues continue to address difference at the heart

of both their theory and practice. They struggle to find ways to render difference visible

rather than invisible, and positive rather than relational.

While defining difference has come to be a central project for feminist pedagogy,

its authors have come under attack by several theorists of critical pedagogy for the

separatism that their theorizations of difference are seen to engender:

...differences among students are not merely antagonistic as Liz Ellsworth (1988) has argued. She suggests not only that there is little common ground for addressing these differences, but that separatism is the only valid political option for any kind of pedagogical and political action. Regrettably, this represents less an insight than a crippling form of political disengagement. (Giroux,1988a:177)

In response to Giroux's critique of Ellsworth's rendition of the problematic of difference

in the classroom, Patti Lather (1992) attempts to show how Ellsworth in fact, "evokes

ways to work with rather than be paralysed by the loss of Cartesian stability and unity"

(p.126).

> Ellsworth also begins to give a feel for the political possibilities of the multiply-sited subject of poststructuralist theory, a subject characterized by heterogeneity, irreducible particularities, and incalculable differences. Her focus on different differences or Derrida's *différance*, the condition of differences *and* identity...is radically other than the separatism of which Giroux accuses her. Rather than speaking to Ellsworth's intervention as 'a crippling form of political disengagement,' I read his accusation as saying more about his own continued investments in the liberal struggle for equality and identity politics via the mediations of critical pedagogy. (Lather,1992:128)

Ellsworth problematizes difference in her anti-racist course for the purpose of theorizing

how dialogue and voice were limited in the classroom by less-than-adequate pedagogical

theory. She suggests the acknowledgement and embracing of difference (and even the

occasional splitting up into 'affinity groups' of those who share certain experiences of

oppression) as a strategy for improving rather than limiting communication. It is hard

to justify Giroux's 'mis-reading' of Ellsworth, and I concur with Lather that perhaps it

is Giroux's own lack of concrete discussion of difference (at anything other than a level

highly-abstracted from practice) or his inability to deal with the unsettling implications

of Ellsworth's comments for him as one personally invested in traditionally white, male

defined critical pedagogy, that lead to such an interpretation.

Giroux's critiques of Ellsworth's work suggest an understanding of difference as

ultimately divisive (and undesirable), despite the rhetoric of celebrating difference which

he embraces. To identify temporary forays into working together with those one shares

particular experiences of joy and pain as 'separatism' is to reveal the underlying belief

that we should immediately and easily be able to move 'beyond' the complexities of our

differences to create (what could only be a fictional) unity. Trinh Minh ha (1986/87)

seems to aptly characterize Giroux's view when she affirms the dynamic of:

> Words manipulated at will. As you can see, 'difference' is essentially
> 'division' in the understanding of many. It is no more than a tool of self-
> defense and conquest. You and I/i might as well not walk into this
> semantic trap which sets us up against each other as expected by a certain
> ideology of separatism. (p.14)

It appears that Giroux's concerns with difference consistently end in the desire to

create unity from difference, rather than to understand difference in and of itself and only

then to theorize its relation to a call for 'unity'. Difference is important and useful to

Giroux in the way that it helps bring together a multiplicity of voices which can only

strengthen the common call for the common good. Differences must be addressed,

suggests Giroux (1988a:177):

> for the pedagogical possibilities they contain for helping students to work
> with other groups as part of a collective attempt at developing a radical
> language of democratic public life.

Giroux's notion of difference here is clearly *not* based on positivity as articulated

by Trinh Minh-ha, but rather on notions of differences as *helpful* or *useful*; as something

that can be used pedagogically, to be learned from. When differences cannot be

reconciled, and must therefore remain at least temporarily 'antagonistic' (thus leading to

Giroux's 'separatism'), their usefulness in the pedagogical project appears to be lost for

Giroux. In this sense, the positivity of difference for Giroux is its 'helpfulness', its

'pedagogical possibilities', rather than the positivity of difference *in itself* (as Trinh

Minh-ha suggests). Giroux theorizes, in my reading, a weak notion of difference, one

which draws its positivity not from its essential self, but from elsewhere, from its use-

value to others, ultimately from its service to an externally defined (and apparently

unifying) cause, Giroux's 'democratic public life'. As we shall see in more detail in the concluding section of this chapter, critical pedagogues' tendency to function in the public sphere (which necessarily requires certain unities and reconciliations between difference), where feminist pedagogy focuses more consistently at the micro level, may in fact be easier for white men, for whom the disjuncture between private and public is less problematic or complex.

For feminist pedagogues, difference is not something to simplistically move 'beyond'. Working together across difference cannot in fact, always be done 'together' While difference is 'positive', it is not always or necessarily friendly or welcoming. Friendships have to be constructed, as Ellsworth suggests, and coalition building has to be done with the knowledge that not all differences are, as Giroux appears to desire, immediately reconcilable. This may mean, as Sally Hacker (1990) suggests, living with unreconcilable differences without seeing that as a "crippling form of political disengagement" (Giroux,1988a:177).

> But given our humanness, there are also the abuses of power of which we
> are capable. We have to figure out the best arrangements, structures, and
> processes to minimize such excess, *those that bring out the best in us
> without expecting ever to eliminate the worst*. This is what continuing
> revolution is all about. (Hacker,1990:221) [Italics mine]

In a powerful discussion of coalition politics, Bernice Johnson Reagon (1983) addresses the advantages and disadvantages of 'affinity groups':

> Now every once in awhile there is a need for people to try to clean out
> corners and bar the doors and check everybody who comes in the door,
> and check what they carry in and say 'Humph, inside this place the only
> thing we are going to deal with is X or Y or Z.' And so only the X's or
> Y's or Z's get to come in. That place can then become a nurturing place
> or a very destructive place. Most of the time when people do that, they

> do it because of the heat of trying to live in this society where being an X or Y or Z is very difficult to say the least. The people running the society call the shots as if they're still living in one of those little villages. where they kill the ones they don't like or put them in the forest to die... When somebody else is running a society like that, and you are the one who would be put out to die, it gets too hard to stay out in that society all the time. And that's when you find a place, and you try to bar the door and check all the people who come in. You come together to see what you can do about shouldering up all of your energies so that you and your kind can survive.... But that space while it lasts should be a nurturing space where you sift out what people are saying about you and decide who you really are. (p.357/8)

'Working together across difference,' despite being a goal towards which many of us aspire, may in fact not be everyone's agenda all of the time. Ultimately, acknowledging the need to break into 'affinity groups' addresses the fact that multiple strategies are necessary because, with all our differences, there will always be multiple agendas.

Certainly Ellsworth and other feminist pedagogues are not willing to throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater. While embracing the complexity of difference may render problematic many taken-for-granted assumptions of radical and even feminist educational theories, this may in fact be cause to further examine the theories, rather than to deny or dismiss the unsettling source.

As Audre Lorde (1990) suggests, if we cannot embrace difference then we are continually forced to choose one small part of ourselves to represent our whole selves. Without the room for all of our selves in the classroom, learning will remain a silencing and dominating process:

> As a Black lesbian feminist comfortable with the many different ingredients of my identity, and a woman committed to racial and sexual freedom from oppression, I find I am constantly being encouraged to

pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful
whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of myself. But this is a
destructive and fragmenting way to live. My fullest concentration of
energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of who I am,
openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back
an forth freely through all my different selves, without the restrictions of
externally imposed definition. Only then can I bring myself and my
energies as a whole to the service of those struggles which I embrace as
part of my living. (Lorde,1990:285)

3.5 PROCESS

One of the striking differences between feminist and critical pedagogies are their

very different levels of focus. Upon reviewing much of the critical pedagogy literature,

it appears that critical pedagogues focus most consistently on the 'macro' level of social

change. Their concern is on educating for 'critical citizenship', on examining "the

terrain of schooling as a struggle over particular ways of life" (Giroux,1992:180). The

concern overwhelmingly appears to be with generating social change *by way of*

schooling, that is, schools become "an important battleground around which to advance

emancipatory democratic interests" (Giroux,1988b:8).

Feminist pedagogues on the other hand, focus more consistently on what I term

the 'micro' level of schooling. Their focus is most often on classroom and teaching

practice. Their concerns are often centred around personal relationships within the

classroom, both among students, and between students and teacher. Although the goals

of a more just and equitable society through a changed education system are shared by

feminist and critical pedagogues alike, the means they choose to generate this change are

glaringly different. In her book Reconstructing Education, Greta Nemiroff (1992)

examines what she considers post-Freirian critical pedagogy, commenting that:

> It is no coincidence that the 'discourse' of critical pedagogy is essentially
> articulated by men. The emphasis on the 'public spheres' are consistent
> with the acculturation of males in our society. Focusing on the
> interpersonal may render them uncomfortable and complicate their
> assertions of the empowering possibilities of their ideology. To date there
> appears to be little room in this pedagogical theory for the positive effect
> of a direct relationship with the student or for a refined and empathic
> knowledge of a particular student's life experience separated from the
> fairly crudely and statistically defined norms attributed even to gender,
> ethnicity, class, and race. All relationships with the students seem to be
> theoretically mediated by a complex and inaccessibly articulated
> educational theory that could lend itself to overt political posturing by the
> teacher, to be taken up with gusto by those students who have been
> trained that 'doing well' in school consists of pleasing the teacher. (p.67)

One of the clear differences stemming from these two approaches is that while

critical pedagogues often articulate their theories at high levels of abstraction, feminist

pedagogues are more likely to connect their theory to concrete instances of practice, thus

rendering the theory more accessible towards praxis:

> While much of what the critical |pedagogues| say is interesting and
> provoking, and even rings true, I find them frequently caught within a
> great contradiction, especially when, in the name of the accessibility of
> education and critical reflection to all, they develop a highly rarefied yet
> dense vocabulary that is dauntingly circumlocutory even to experienced
> readers like myself. By the creation of a specialized and often contrived
> vocabulary, and by the dubbing of even their most random ruminations
> with the catchword 'discourse,' they create a closed circuit of
> communication, totally removed from the ideology of their inspiration,
> Freire. (Nemiroff, 1992:65)

Although I hesitate to completely condemn critical pedagogues for their often

unnecessarily abstracted and jargon-like language (a tendency after all, shared by many

feminist pedagogues as well), Nemiroff's concern with rarefied and insular writing is an

important one.[34] Recent writings by critical pedagogues themselves have not failed to

address this issue. In the introduction to Border Crossings, Giroux (1992) writes:

> I make no apology for the language used [in this book]. I believe that
> creating a new language is both an urgent and central task today in order
> to reconstitute the grounds on which cultural and educational debates are
> to be waged. (p.3)

In a somewhat more compassionate and nuanced way, Roger Simon (1992) in his

book Teaching Against the Grain, devotes an entire chapter to what he terms the 'fear

of theory' felt by some of his students at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Unlike Giroux's rather flippant dismissal, Simon, while like Giroux not advocating for

the demise of complex theory, attempts to understand, explain, and validate the concern

of inaccessibility, doing so in the belief that, "...expressions of the fear of theory are

quite legitimate and worthy of intense scrutiny, [for what] they can teach us...about

pedagogical practice that we need to understand" (Simon,1992:81). Simon (1992) writes:

> ...the fear of theory is quite warranted and at least double. First of all,
> one may be excluded from access to a particular theoretical discourse.
> There are many possible sources to such an exclusion. Not the least of
> these is that the comprehension and assessment of a new discourse takes
> time. Students whose lives are lived amid the responsibilities of raising
> children, earning an income, food shopping, taking care of ailing parents,
> and so on--in other words, positioned within relations of class and gender
> to take on responsibilities because there is little choice--engage in a host
> of actions which sap their energies and leave little time for study. Equally
> important, however, is the fact that the range of language practices seen
> as acceptable in a university setting often excludes those whose expressive
> patterns have been derogated as inadequate or unacceptable. (p.92/3)

Simon's understanding of the fear that abstract theory can generate does not lead

him to the conclusion that abstracted theory is unequivocally negative, but rather that it

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[34] Note my discussion of these issues in Chapter 1.

is necessary to "...[modify] pedagogic action to reduce its implication in the production of fear" (p.94). Giroux's (1992) tact seems to be to engage only with other 'intellectuals' who accuse him of inaccessibility:

> Moreover, the production and accessibility of language cannot be divorced from its readership; there are many reading publics, and I hope it can be understood that books are read differently by diverse audiences. My one caveat is that I don't believe that teachers are 'too dumb' to read theoretical books. I suggest that those critics who claim they can read theoretical literature but that public school teachers are either too busy or incapable of engaging a critical discourse may be suffering from an overdose of the kind of vanguardism that underestimates and undermines the basic intelligence of most teachers. (p.3)

Certainly, it appears that in ignoring the individuals who *themselves* claim not to understand, Giroux is writing-off very real concerns and does not take seriously enough the consequences of inaccessibility, notwithstanding the need for an (apparently) new language. bell hooks (1990) comments, in a similar vein (though not specifically addressing Giroux's work) on the inaccessibility of some postmodernist discourse:

> It is sadly ironic that the contemporary discourse which talks the most about heterogeneity, the decentred subject, declaring breakthroughs that allow recognition of Otherness, still directs its critical voice primarily to a specific audience that shares a common language rooted in the very master narratives it claims to challenge. (p.25)

Complex theory needs to be rendered problematic, although not dismissed. The line between the necessity of articulating complicated theory, and the need to minimize inaccessibility needs to be carefully tread. Feminist pedagogues, while certainly embracing theory, remain conscious of walking that fine line, attempting to address and maintain the tension between complexity and accessibility. They attempt, as hooks (1990) has articulated in a somewhat different context, to:

...[cultivate] habits of being that reinforce awareness that knowledge can
be disseminated and shared on a number of fronts. The extent to which
knowledge is made available, accessible, etc. depends on the nature of
one's political commitments. (p.31)

One of the strategies feminist pedagogues use in walking this fine line is to focus

on everyday life, on what I have called the 'micro' level of concrete classroom practice.

I hesitate to call this 'grounding theory in practice,' for as I have mentioned in Chapter

1, I intend both to avoid pitting theory and practice against each other, and to avoid

perpetuating a kind of reverse hierarchy in which practice is valorized over theory. As

Foucault suggests, theory and practice are relational, reciprocal, they work together

rather than in opposition to each other. Foucault (1977a) cautions:

Do not use thought to ground political practice in Truth; nor political
action to discredit, as mere speculation, a line of thought. Use political
practice as an intensifier of thought, and analysis as a multiplier of the
forms and domains for the intervention of political action. (p.xiv)

Feminist pedagogical writings consistently and self-consciously explain that their

theory is not relevant when presented in a 'context-less' way. The way that postmodern

knowledge has been taken up by most feminist pedagogues is profoundly contingent and

contextual. Perhaps because of their experience in the broader women's movement of

the past decades, which has focused so centrally on women's experience (however

problematic that has become) and on issues of actual political struggle, feminist

pedagogues have taken the contextuality and contingency of knowledge to heart

Feminist pedagogues relate theories to the everyday lives of students and teachers:

The challenge of feminist teaching lies for me in the specifics of how I
approach the classroom. By reflecting on my own teaching, I fuse content
and practice, politicizing them both through feminist theory and living
them both concretely rather than treating them abstractly. To elaborate:

> as I reflect on my teaching, it is clear from the detailing of the examples
> I provide above that feminist teaching practices cannot be separated from
> the content of the curriculum. (Lewis,1990:485/6)

Thus theory is continually rendered problematic as it is read and re-read through

the eyes of practice. This was Ellsworth's process in designing an anti-racist course at

the University of Wisconsin. In attempting to concretize critical pedagogical theory and

to create from it some classroom practice, she in fact found,

> that when participants in our class attempted to put into practice
> prescriptions offered in the literature concerning empowerment, student
> voice, and dialogue, we produced results that were not only unhelpful, but
> actually exacerbated the very conditions we were trying to work against,
> including Eurocentrism, racism, sexism, classism, and 'banking
> education.' To the extent that our efforts to put discourses of critical
> pedagogy into practice led us to reproduce relations of domination in our
> classroom, these discourses were 'working through' us in repressive ways,
> and had themselves become vehicles of repression. To the extent that we
> disengaged ourselves from those aspects and moved in another direction,
> we 'worked through' and out of the literature's highly abstract language
> ('myths') of who we 'should' be and what 'should' be happening in our
> classroom, and into classroom practices that were context specific and
> seemed to be much more responsive to our own understandings of our
> social identities and situations. (Ellsworth,1989:298/99)

Although some critical pedagogues do not accept Ellsworth's concerns, as

previously outlined, what is clear is that it was, for Ellsworth and her students, the

process of *reading the theory through practice* that enabled them to render problematic

and move on to change and adapt the theory. Certainly it seems that she, as well as

other feminist pedagogues, have not completely abandoned critical pedagogy, but rather

they have, based upon their own classroom experience and practice, been able to expand

upon and reconstruct the theory to generate new forms of educational practice better

suited to their specific contexts.

One of the important concerns of feminist pedagogues with regard to their classroom practice, is that of the role of the 'emancipatory pedagogue'. Lather (1992) asks the simple, although not simplistic, question, "How do our very efforts to liberate perpetuate the relations of dominance?" (p.122). In his more recent writing, Giroux (1992) brings up a similar point. "At issue here," he suggests, "is an attempt to make problematic the voices of those who try to describe the margins, even when they do so in the interest of emancipation and social justice" (p.57). Ellsworth (1989) suggests that emancipatory pedagogues have not in fact sufficiently theorized the power imbalances between student and teacher, and are unwilling or unable to examine the authority inherent in the project of education:

> theorists of critical pedagogy have failed to launch any meaningful analysis of or program for reformulating the institutionalized power imbalances between themselves and their students, or of the essentially paternalistic project of education itself. (p.306)

She goes on to comment:

> The contortions of logic and rhetoric that characterized these attempts to define 'empowerment' testify to the failure of critical educators to come to terms with the essentially paternalistic project of traditional education. 'Emancipatory authority' is one such contortion, for it implies the presence of or potential for an emancipated teacher. Indeed it asserts that teachers 'can link knowledge to power by bringing to light and teaching the subjugated histories, experiences, stories, and accounts of those who suffer and struggle.' Yet I cannot unproblematically bring subjugated knowledges to light when I am not free of my own learned racism, fat oppression, classism, ableism, or sexism. No teacher is free of these learned and internalized oppressions. Nor are accounts of one group's suffering and struggle immune from reproducing narratives oppressive to another's - the racism of the Women's Movement in the United States is one example. (Ellsworth,1989:307/8)

Thus one of the strategies employed by feminist pedagogues is to address their

own partial knowledges. Shor and Freire (1987:14) comment that because for the most part teachers select the topics to be studied, they in fact know the material *better* than their students. However, Ellsworth's point is well-taken. Although educators may have read through specific texts, thought through certain ideas, in short, although they may be more familiar with what Shor and Freire call the 'objects of study,' they are not necessarily better equipped to understand the multiple subjective and personal ways the material is taken up and thus made unique to each individual, situated as they are in multiple social positionings. Particularly (although not only) in instances when the 'objects of study' are concepts such as 'equality,' 'racism,' 'colonialism,' etc., there will be many instances in which the teacher will in fact be *less* 'familiar' with the material than his or her students (or perhaps will have *different* familiarities).

Many feminist pedagogues thus seek to theorize their role in the classroom and to find ways to bring their own contextuality and that of their students into play. What this contextuality implies for feminist pedagogues is an acknowledgement, not, as many critical pedagogues would have it, of deciding to share one's power in the classroom, or to simply use one's power for emancipatory purposes, but rather to continually examine the power relations that inevitably will exist within any classroom. "To deconstruct authority," Lather (1991b) writes, "is not to do away with it but to learn to trace its effects, to see how authority is constituted and constituting" (p.144). This implies that feminist pedagogues must examine not only their role as teacher in the classroom, but also their other societally-backed areas of privilege and power based on skin colour, gender, sexuality, class, etc. It also suggests that feminist pedagogues must be aware of

and mediate power relations among students in the classroom.

A strategy employed by Ellsworth to negotiate the difficult power imbalances that exist in any class was for her students to break into what she termed 'affinity groups.' By naming the inevitable inequalities in the classroom, she and her students were better able to generate strategies to deal with difficult classroom process. To discuss racism and anti-racist approaches (as was done in her course) was to deal with much more complex issues than who knew the subject material 'better' than whom. As a white professor, Ellsworth's knowledge of the topic of racism was often very different from the knowledge of students of colour in her class. As well, how the topic interacted with the lived experiences of other students in the class created complex and contradictory views and knowledges. To expect the group, students and professor, to deal with racism as a sort of 'united front,' to unproblematically generate common visions and goals in learning about and responding to racism, is to create a fictional unity, to (albeit unwittingly in the name of a 'good cause') silence the diversity of experience and knowledge present in the class, a diversity which does not have to entail an essentializing authority related to 'experience'.

> Because all voices within the classroom are not and cannot carry equal
> legitimacy, safety, and power in dialogue at this historical moment there
> are times when the inequalities must be named and addressed by
> constructing alternative ground rules for communication. By the end of
> the semester, participants in C&I 607 began to recognize that some social
> groups represented in the class had had consistently more speaking time
> than others. Women, international students for whom English was a
> second language, and mixed groups sharing ideological and political
> languages and perspectives began to have very significant interactions
> outside of class. Informal overlapping affinity groups formed and met
> unofficially for the purpose of articulating and refining positions based on
> shared oppressions, ideological analyses, or interests. They shared

grievances about the dynamics of the larger group and performed reality checks for each other. Because they were 'unofficial' groups constituted on the spot in response to specific needs or simply as a result of casual encounters outside of the classroom, alliances could be shaped and reshaped as strategies in context. (Ellsworth,1989:317)

Thus the fact that all voices are *not* equally positioned, combined with the knowledge that the desire to create equality in the isolated setting of the classroom does not equality make, led Ellsworth's students to find other ways to generate an environment in which these inequalities could be dealt with up-front, rather than denied in the name of a forced unity. Certainly a retreat to affinity groups is not a long-term goal for political action or educational process, however, it can be used, as Ellsworth suggests, as a possible strategy to help generate moments of greater safety and equality in an unsafe and unequal world. Certainly it is short-sighted to see this strategy in simplistic terms as a retreat to divisive and separatist politics as is suggested by critical pedagogues such as Giroux (Giroux,1988a:177).

Separating into affinity groups can be a way of countering oppressive social formations that make their way into any environment, including the classroom. As Ellsworth (1989) suggests, they become part of a bigger process, rather than *replacing* 'working together across difference,' and thus shutting down dialogue; they in fact facilitate the process:

affinity groups were necessary for working against the way current historical configurations of oppression were reproduced in the class. They provided some participants with safer home bases from which they gained support, important understandings, and language for entering the larger classroom interactions each week. Once we acknowledged the existence, necessity, and value of these affinity groups, we began to see our task not as one of building democratic dialogue between free and equal individuals, but of building a coalition among the multiple, shifting, intersecting, and

sometimes contradictory groups carrying unequal weights of legitimacy within the culture of the classroom. (p.317)

The affinity groups generated in Ellsworth's class are one example of a feminist pedagogue's attempts to create a classroom process which responds to the complexities of interaction among students positioned differently in the classroom. Her attempt to create a viable process responds to the questions raised when feminist pedagogues ask who is silenced in the effort to emancipate? Ellsworth is attempting to "face the underlying hubris of much of our intendedly liberatory approaches to research and teaching" (Lather,1991b:xviii).

To meet the goal of attempting to truly understand "to what extent is the pedagogy we construct in the name of liberation intrusive, invasive, pressured?" (Lather,1991:143), feminist pedagogues seek to act out a pedagogy in which a new 'truth' is not imposed upon students, even in the name of eventual emancipation. That new truth cannot be imposed by feminist educators in either content *or* structure Therefore, just as a new feminist reading of learning material cannot simply replace traditional interpretation, likewise a new classroom process can not come to simply replace the old:

> The task is to construct classroom relations that engender fresh confrontation with value and meaning--not to demonstrate to students their ignorance in what Freire terms the 'banking concept of education' where authoritarian talk shuts down communication, even if done in the name of liberation. To challenge the unequal distribution of power in the classroom is to ask, Who speaks? For what and to whom? Who listens? Who is confident and comfortable and who isn't? It is, also, to probe the many reasons for silence. (Lather,1991b:144)

Therefore feminist pedagogy, once again aligning itself with postmodernism's

attempt to avoid formulating any totalizing discourse, seeks not to generate a new single

pedagogical approach, but rather pedagogical choices and possibilities which foreground

the desire to educate in ways which shift and change, which remain context-bound:

> Such a political and ethical standpoint means that we cannot claim one
> method, one approach, or one pedagogical strategy for student
> empowerment or for making students name their identity and location. It
> means that we are not politically and ethically justified to assume positions
> of authority on 'negative identities': to assume that we have the power to
> empower or the 'language of critique' with which to translate student
> speech and give it back to them in politically correct terms. Nor can we
> claim to know what the politically correct end points for liberation are for
> others. (Luke,1992:48)

However, what this concern (not recreating relations of dominance) also means

for feminist pedagogy is a continual focus not only on content, but also on the details of

process, on the day to day lived interactions in the classroom. "The strategies I have

employed in the classroom," writes Lewis (1990:486), "have been directed toward

politicizing not only what we take up in the class as course content but also the classroom

dynamics that are generated by our topic and subsequent discussion".

As a result, feminist pedagogy can at times feel as slippery as critical pedagogy

has been accused of being, though on different grounds. If feminist pedagogy is

contingent and contextual, if it resists meta-level discourse and grand-theorizing, it may

also resist easy explanation and examination. It may feel at times to be frustratingly

contained in individual and specific moments of learning:

> The above suggestions are intended to be neither exhaustive nor
> prescriptive. Pedagogical moments arise in specific contexts: the social
> location of the teacher and students; the geographic and historical location
> of the institution in which they come together; the political climate within
> which they work; the personalities and personal profiles of the individuals
> in the classroom; the readings selected for the course; and the academic

background of the students all come together in ways that create the specifics of the moment. It is not appropriate to think of what I have presented here as a 'model' for feminist teaching. 'Models' can only be restrictive and reductive because they cannot predict and thus cannot take into account the complexity of contingent and material realities. My intent, rather, has been to articulate how, at particular moments in my teaching, I made sense of those classroom dynamics that seemed to divide women and men across their inequalities in ways that reaffirmed women's subordination, and how making sense of those moments as politically rich allowed me to develop an interpretive framework for creating a counter hegemony from my teaching practice. (Lewis,1990:487)

Yet it is this 'slipperiness' which feminist pedagogy, in the end, embraces. One feminist pedagogue after another, following Lewis above, rejects a definitional theory, arguing for a pedagogy which ultimately arises in the moment of accepting unknowability:

The terms in which I can and will assert and unsettle 'difference' and unlearn my positions of privilege in future classroom practices are wholly dependent on the Others/others whose presence with their concrete experiences of privileges and oppression, and subjugated or oppressive knowledges - I am responding to and acting with in any given classroom. My moving about between the positions of privileged speaking subject and Inappropriate/d Other cannot be predicted, prescribed, or understood beforehand by any theoretical framework or methodological practice. It is in this sense that a practice grounded in the unknowable is profoundly contextual (historical) and interdependent (social). (Ellsworth,1989:323)

I conclude this chapter by emphasizing what I see to be the limitations and very real contradictions of trying to explain and lay bare feminist pedagogical theory in the way that is required of academic writings, at the very moment that feminist pedagogy itself resists such handling. The themes I have loosely constructed are artificially imposed divisions, and I am aware of how each point might have been articulated differently so as to illustrate some other theme than the one it was intended to illuminate in the context of this work. Feminist pedagogy suggests new ways of approaching

teaching and learning, yet academic structures are sluggish and slow to imagine alternative ways of working through knowledge. I have been trained within the very epistemologies and ontologies I seek here to challenge, and I suggest that I have been limited by them in ways I cannot even imagine. I can hope, however, that this very process has helped me to take new steps, in different directions on the many paths to creating new counter-hegemonic ways of learning.

Chapter IV

Questions and Conclusions

4.1 A RE-READING

One of the aims of a feminist pedagogy is to render explicit

what has previously been implicit. That our ways of knowing and of engaging with

knowledge, our approaches to teaching, and our assumptions about the world are never

innocent, has been foregrounded by both the feminist and postmodern movements, and

subsequently by feminist pedagogy. What I seek to do here is return to the Unlearning

Homophobia workshop of Chapter II, re-reading it for assumptions and omissions in light

of the lessons I have taken from feminist pedagogy. I take my inspiration for this re-

reading from the deconstructionist impulse to "foreground the unsaid in our saying"

(Lather,1991b:129), to problematize thoughts and actions, bringing to light underlying

assumptions and making visible the socially constructed nature of our common sense

meaning systems. Patti Lather (1991b) suggests that "deconstruction moves against

stories that appear to tell themselves. It creates stories that disclose their constructed

nature" (p.129). I also take inspiration from the work of Michael Chervin (1991) and

his 're-reading' of his own pedagogical processes. As well as deconstructing, I follow

Lather's (1991b) example of 'reflexivity' by which she means the bringing of "the teller

of the tale back into the narrative, embodied, desiring, invested in a variety of often

contradictory privileges and struggles" (p.129).

Upon reexamination, we might find that the 'unproblematic' description of the

workshop in Chapter II in fact reveals a variety of 'invisible' assumptions: assumptions

which feminist pedagogical theory would suggest be rendered explicit in the name of generating a pedagogy which aims to truly disrupt relations-as-usual in the classroom. The following, therefore, are some of the issues and questions raised in my unsettling of the original narrative of the workshop. In all, I have focused on six particular issues and I am aware that my choice of these concerns reflects only one possible road I might have taken. Although each issue appears to me to be of central importance to the workshop in relation to feminist pedagogical theory, I have no doubt that six more equally compelling concerns are waiting to be addressed. In the final chapter of Getting Smart in which Lather (1991b) 're-tells' the story of her research data in a variety of different ways, she writes:

> My keenest sense in the writing of this chapter is the many different directions I could have gone with it, the gulf between the totality of possible statements and the finitude of what is actually written or spoken (p. 123).

The moments I seek to 'unsettle' in this re-reading are not intended to be the 'final' words on the topic. This workshop is one which will be, for me, always 'in-progress'. The following pages therefore constitute one moment in an ongoing project.

As I mentioned briefly in Chapter II, the design of this workshop grew, for the most part, out of my work at the Peterborough Rape Crisis Centre. What I find, as I retrace my steps now, in the light of my experience at the Montreal Assault Prevention Centre and with the differing perspectives feminist pedagogical theory has afforded me, is that much of the workshop is in fact not compatible with either the theories of feminist pedagogy, or with the positivity and empowering approach of the Montreal Assault Prevention Centre. Thus the following pages constitute very real and difficult re-

workings for me. My desire is not to belittle myself or the place from which this workshop grew, despite the fact that my re-readings may appear, at moments, highly critical. Feminist pedagogy has afforded me a very exciting and positive place from which I might rework old thoughts, ideas, and practices; this chapter is a reflection of my learning, and of my desire to challenge old patterns of thought and action. It is my attempt to re-vision, and thus create, something better.

1. The Invisible Teacher

In the description of the workshop, as in the moment of facilitating the workshop, I, as facilitator/teacher, remained an invisible presence. My identity remained hidden, as did for the most part, my stake in doing this work. One of the themes that arose in my engagement with feminist pedagogical theory was the problematizing of student voice when it was assumed to be unaccompanied by 'teacher voice'. In this workshop there is certainly an expectation that students will 'come to voice,' articulating their experiences with homophobia and heterosexism. Although not called for explicitly this tends to foster students 'coming out' or not, as they tell their stories. To reveal one's experiences with homophobia and heterosexism is likely to reveal one's stake in the issue. Did one experience the effects of homophobia first-hand, or did one learn homophobic attitudes and mis-information (or both)? To tell these stories is to reveal (or hide) one's identity. And yet, as teacher/facilitator, my identity and relation to the issues remained invisible, although not necessarily unproblematic. Did students wonder where I was speaking from, why I was interested in this work? Did my silence on this issue

impart a fear/uncomfortableness in dealing with my identity and personal experiences? What power do I as facilitator retain in expecting students to speak while I remain silent? To speak to issues of homophobia and heterosexism is to makes oneself vulnerable, to reveal a part of oneself, to acknowledge one's lack of information, or to share one's pain as well as joy. To expect vulnerability on the part of students while not allowing for or expressing my own is to contribute towards making risk-taking unsafe.

On the other hand, if naming my identity is important I must find a way to do so which opens doors for others to think about and name their own relationships to homophobia and heterosexism without simultaneously exerting some kind of confessional pressure upon students to say from where they are coming. My lived experience doing anti homophobia work as a non-lesbian needs to be named in such a way that it clarifies the place I am working from, not so that heterosexual students can unproblematically 'identify' with me and thus feel less (rather than more) compelled to work against their own homophobia and heterosexism.

Feminist pedagogy also calls for the acknowledgement of our subject positions, varied, shifting, and multiple as they may be. My subjectivities will inevitably shape and inform how I speak to the issue of unlearning homophobia. Susan Bordo (1990) aptly comments:

> We always 'see' from points of view that are invested with our social, political, and personal interests, inescapably 'centric' in one way or another, even in the desire to do justice to heterogeneity. (p.140)

As a non-lesbian my experience of and my specific 'familiarity' with homophobia and heterosexism would likely be different than if I were a lesbian. Not to name the

position from which I speak is to posit myself as a "disinterested mediator on the side of the oppressed group" (Ellsworth,1989:309). Crucially it is also to leave invisible my complex subjectivity which not only is capable of being hurt and limited by homophobia, but which is also capable of informing homophobic thoughts, beliefs and actions. If I don't acknowledge these tendencies and contradictions in myself, do I not suggest to students that thinking through these issues is unnecessary/unimportant?

In a written (informal) evaluation, one of the instructors who asked me to facilitate the workshop raises this concern:

> As an animator, by not identifying your own sexual orientation I wonder
> if this reinforces a fear among people to being honest about their sexuality
> in the class (i.e., is *she* too scared to talk about it?)? Or, rather, does it
> effectively de-essentialize the relation between experience, identity and
> knowledge for the students (and thus de-centring the question 'do you
> have to be gay/bi/lesbian to do this type of work)? Both effects at the
> same time? (personal communication,1992)

The way identity and experience have been seen to legitimate knowledge, in much of the women's movement, has brought up difficult issues for me facilitating this workshop. The taken-for-granted assumption, which I learned in my early years at the PRCC, and which was learned by many women in the grass-roots movement all over North America, was that to 'live' an experience was to have true knowledge of it (i.e., to live homophobia/heterosexism was to know it) and that those who did not, by reason of their social positionings, live the experience could <u>not</u> have that knowledge, could not, in fact, speak of it with any authority at all. To move beyond a kind of knowledge which, as Fuss (1989) suggests, excludes people from its arena rather than opening the doors to a greater range of people (p.115), has been an important process for me. Perhaps rather

than hiding this process (and thus remaining silent about my identity/ies), articulating my lived reality (that I am not a lesbian, that I am concerned about homophobia and heterosexism for reasons which I explain, and that I feel it has effected my life in ways I explain) will not only open doors for students to examine their own identities, but might also serve to 'de-essentialize the relation between experience, identity and knowledge,' helping us to see how we can in fact have access to knowledge, understanding, and empathy of things we may not directly experience.

2. The Unknowing Students

The range of knowledge about homophobia students brought to this workshop certainly varied. Although I designed the workshop to combine knowledge 'provided' by me and knowledge drawn from the lived experience of participants and their reflections on that experience, there was a sense in which it appeared clear that I was in possession of considerable knowledge/information about homophobia and heterosexism, and that I was going to in some way 'impart' this information (even 'bring the light') to the students. I am led to ask in what ways my pedagogy differs significantly from traditional enlightenment concepts of 'banking education'? Certainly the workshop is participatory in nature, it is assumed that the lived experience of participants is valuable, and that most of them do, in fact, have considerable knowledge of homophobia and heterosexism, although that knowledge may be in some way buried, unconscious, or simply not usually legitimated. Although while not suggesting that I as teacher/facilitator have 'truth' to impart, it does appear that I set myself up in the questionable role of

Giroux's (1988c:xxxiii) "transformative intellectual", attempting to (albeit with good intentions).

> empower students by *giving* [emphasis mine] them the knowledge and
> social skills they will need to be able to function in the larger society as
> critical agents, but also educate them for transformative action. That
> means educating them to take risks, to struggle for institutional change,
> and to fight both *against* oppression and *for* democracy outside of schools
> in other oppositional public spheres and the wider social arena (Ibid)

Feminist pedagogy suggests that I ask how I can avoid the assumption that I have privileged knowledge. For to believe in one's knowledge as privileged seems to necessitate the belief that one must impart this knowledge to the less informed. How in this workshop can knowledge be created rather than imparted, generated rather than 'passed on', while at the same time not erasing my own knowledge on homophobia and heterosexism? If I start from the belief that students have a vast array of knowledge about homophobia and heterosexism, is to help them 'uncover' this information any less paternalistic than to 'impart' the information in the first place?

Perhaps the notion of 'knowledge production' is a stumbling block. If we are to assume that, rather than generating knowledge we are going to share experiences, thoughts, ideas (my own as well as students'), and that our working through of these ideas will generate different knowledges within and from each of us, might this not lead us out of the trap of assuming there is a 'real' knowledge to be discovered?

This approach might free us from the trap of having knowledge which I as teacher/facilitator seek to have uncovered or imparted. If I move away from 'right answers' (which I subtly 'lead' students to discover) and leave learning to occur in multiple and different ways based, as Lewis suggests, in the specifics of the moment I

might ultimately not only be better able to dismantle my apparently privileged knowledge but also allow for a multitude of moments of learning to emerge. Lewis (1990) comments that:

> .we cannot artificially construct pedagogical moments in the classroom to serve as moments of transformation toward a critical political perspective. Nor can we predict how such moments will be responded to when they arise in particular situations. given the personal histories of the students and instructors involved. (p.470)

What it appears I am doing. in asking questions/calling on student experience. is couching my desire for certain specific responses in an apparently participatory structure which appears to respond directly to student experience and information. When asking questions in the workshop. I can be fairly certain that eventually the desired knowledge will emerge. and 'wrong' (tangential. irrelevant. unnecessary. unimportant. unrelated) information can thus be (politely) discarded. It seems that the participatory structure is here diffused by my desire to move students through the workshop. In asking questions and calling on student experience I always 'accept' (write on the board) a range of responses and yet there are always particular responses I focus on and respond to because they lead us more conveniently in the direction I have planned/designed the workshop to take. I must therefore ask what I am missing as data that doesn't fit into my 'plan' is discarded? What pedagogical moments are lost? In the name of generating the correct. emancipatory knowledge. what opportunities for student and teacher learning are denied?

It is neither realistic nor ethically and politically desirable to deny my personal agenda (I would like students to come to understand the ill-effects of homophobia and

heterosexism, and to be able to act against them). However, my concern here is how my (teacher/facilitator) agenda overrides and silences all others. My aim is, rather, to create an environment in which multiple agendas can be acknowledged and be productively engaged with. That doesn't necessarily mean that my personal agenda will be dropped, but can simply mean an experience in which we are able to learn more about and from each other. All of this is not to suggest that the participatory emphasis (drawing on student experience and answers) is to be stopped, but rather that my facilitating needs to be less concerned with 'right' answers and exposing certain 'right' information, and instead needs to be more genuinely open to hearing and engaging with students' comments. In truly acknowledging and responding to the diversity of student response (rather than targeting those responses which best suit my agenda) many more and perhaps deeper moments of learning may occur.

3. Negative Versus Positive Critique

One of the informal responses by a student I received after doing the McGill workshop was a suggestion that the workshop be divided into two sections, one half focusing on homophobia and heterosexism, the other half addressing the positivity of gay/lesbian/bisexual experience. It didn't take an in-depth review of the workshop to identify how firmly grounded the process was in the negative critique model discussed in Chapter II. Certainly, as I have stated, homophobia and heterosexism *are* negative, painful, and disrupting. Yet as Audre Lorde (1990:282) has suggested, we need not only to challenge our own racism, heterosexism, etc., but also to celebrate the differences

which have been wrought through struggling against such forms of oppression. Exercise after exercise in the workshop is designed to draw out negative images, to examine the sources of the stereotypes and misinformation we learned as children and young adults. In the informal evaluation by the instructor who invited me, cited above, a concern with negative critique echoed the student's evaluation referred to above:

Almost complete focus on negative images of gays and lesbians, and what things can/do/will happen to you - if you are gay or lesbian...does not necessarily or by itself produce empathy. If anything, I think there is a great risk of re-enforcing and affirming these images in the minds of people. (personal communication,1992)

Negative images alone risk perpetuating and even solidifying the very discourses I am seeking to challenge. If, by the end of the workshop, participants understand the negative effects of homophobia and heterosexism, are they necessarily any more prepared to challenge their own thoughts and actions (or those of others)? If we have not visioned the positivity of gay/lesbian/bisexual life, do we not risk perpetuating a paternalistic, negative, 'poor them' attitude where being gay/lesbian/bisexual is primarily about experiencing homophobia/heterosexism rather than about joy, love, and desire? The author of the written evaluation goes on to say:

I'm concerned that there seem to be no positive images or strengths of being gay, bi, or lesbian in the workshop (not even any talk of their *resistance* to the manifestations of homophobia), and that the negative images are not corrected or even explained how they came into being. (personal communication,1992)

It is apparent to me that the workshop needs to incorporate positivity, difference in Trinh Minh-ha's terms of difference as a positivity, not merely different from a hegemonic norm. How do I bring gay/lesbian/bisexual experience, voice, life, into the

classroom? To stumble over the fact that I am not a lesbian (therefore how can I truly 'know' that experience in order to represent it) is to beg the question; if I were, I might not be any better able to represent lesbian life, culture, experience in all its diversity As Trinh Minh-ha (1986/87) has pointed out, representing the 'other' is always a process of interpretation, translation (p.6). At times, in fact it is better to refrain from yet again imposing representation on those so constantly denied the right to self-definition and self representation: "to raise the issue of the Other is also to raise the issue of not representing the other" (Trinh T. Minh-ha,1986/87:6). Lather (1991b) writes of,

> The profound dangers in attempting to speak for others, to say what others
> want or need, of performing as the Grand Theorist, the 'master of truth
> and justice'. (p.137)

How then, might we discover gay/lesbian/bisexual positivity, without me being the purveyor of knowledge, or equally importantly, without gay/lesbian/bisexual students being forced into the spotlight as 'experts' who become responsible for educating the others? One option is to simply change the focus of some of the exercises, still drawing on participant experience and knowledge, generating together notions of what we imagine/know to be positive in gay/lesbian/bisexual experience. I see an exercise like this not only as shifting the focus away from negative-only images, but also in providing the opportunity for students to reflect on their own identities, on the often taken for granted assumption that heterosexuality is the only (or best) choice.

Another method for bringing gay/lesbian/bisexual voice into the workshop might be to import texts representing the multiplicity of gay/lesbian/bisexual experience Lather (1991b) suggests:

In my own writing, the accumulation of quotes, excerpts and repetitions
is also an effort to be 'multi-voiced,' to weave varied speaking voices
together as opposed to putting forth a singular 'authoritative' voice. (p.9)

This might be done via written texts by gays/lesbians/bisexuals, but might also

be done by carrying out a study myself. One respondent to the workshop suggested the

possibility of interviewing/talking with a range of gays/lesbians/bisexuals and asking how

they might like to be represented in the workshop, in what ways they would like their

realities addressed, what parts of their lives are important for others to know about.

Certainly such a project would have to make clear that these voices would not be

intended as 'representative' but rather as a 'collage,' to highlight the diversity of

gay/lesbian/bisexual life. This work might also contribute to gay/lesbian/bisexual

students in the class, of their own volition, coming forward to share more of themselves

and their stakes in the issue.

These notions are speculative and have to be worked through; however, they

attempt to unsettle the workshop's focus not only on the negative experience of

gay/lesbian/bisexual life, but also its attempt to generate social change via negative

critique alone. When social change is attempted via negative critique a vacuum is

created, an empty space into which new, positive, and truly alternative images need to

move in order for us to be able to vision a future which consists not simply in the

negation of the present, but in some new positivity.

4. Learning From Resistance?

At the conclusion of the Hamilton workshop, one of the trainers approached me, asking with obvious concern about her future employees, "did you notice their uncomfortableness?" I had, and had not responded to it. Upon reflection it was apparent that although most students seemed comfortable discussing 'definitions' and other 'head knowledge,' when it came to 'heart knowledge,' memories of childhood experiences in learning about gays/lesbians, the classroom atmosphere shifted rather dramatically. In telling their stories students giggled, laughed nervously, displayed a dis-ease with their own and other's words. Often quite serious stories were told light heartedly, as though to diminish their significance.

In not using these moments to examine student fear and even resistance, I believe I colluded with a status quo which deems it solely acceptable to deal with the pain of homophobia and heterosexism by laughing, 'lightening the mood'. In the name of a good cause (educating against homophobia), I perhaps missed moments of great pedagogical significance, moments of student resistance. Patti Lather (1991b), commenting on her study of student resistance in the emancipatory classroom, writes:

> ...I know I had a preconceived notion of a 'resister': someone so saturated with false consciousness that she could not see the 'light' being offered her in our classrooms. The work of Ann Berlak...began to focus my attention on the sins of imposition we commit in the name of liberatory pedagogy. And an emergent focus began to take shape: to turn the definition of resistance inside out somehow so that it could be used to shed light on efforts toward praxis in the classrooms of those of us who do our teaching in the name of empowerment and emancipation. (p.78)

How then, might I have used these moments rather than rendered them insignificant and in fact avoided by me? How might resistance and the very real fears

of students have been acknowledged rather than denied? To assume that 'unlearning' long standing beliefs will be a simple, painless, or fearless process is to deny the unsettling effect in revisiting parts of knowledge and ourselves we now question and challenge. To assume that because I believe homophobia and heterosexism to be bad that students will be able/will desire to unproblematically divorce themselves from these hegemonic attitudes is to deny student subjectivities and realities; to imagine that they can/desire to simply and quickly un/re-learn.

Magda Lewis suggests that pedagogical moments 'arise' in the classroom. How then, might the students and I have identified those moments and used them to aid in the "transformation toward a critical political perspective" (Lewis,1990:470)? In acknowledging student fear/discomfort/resistance we might have been able to effectively disrupt conditions-as-usual in the classroom rather than colluding with them. Of equal importance, interrupting those moments might have allowed students the space to critically reflect on their own identities, drawing themselves more actively, as embodied, desiring subjects, into the process. In asking ourselves to search for the source of our laughter and discomfort, might we not un/discover in ourselves ideas and feelings that in heterosexist society remain unacknowledged, unnamed, and unaddressed?

5. Who Is Silenced?

One of the areas most theorized within recent feminist pedagogical theory is difference. The Unlearning Homophobia workshop is based on challenging the power imbalances which are justified by defining difference negatively as 'other'. Through our

discussions, and our naming of our personal experience with homophobia and heterosexism, there were undoubtedly those in the workshop who were silenced and those whose reality was confirmed. At the beginning of the workshop I suggested we try to create a 'safe space,' understanding the risks involved in disclosing our various identities. Yet as Ellsworth has pointed out, desiring a safe space does not ensure that one exists. The groups in each of the three workshops were predominantly female, yet in at least one of the three, male 'air-time' was disproportionately high.

In the Hamilton workshop outlined in Chapter II, it was the one woman of colour in the group who objected most strongly to the 'unlearning' theory I presented. She suggested that it was unreasonable/undesirable to expect us to have empathy for our oppressors, to even talk of the 'pain' they felt in learning oppressive behaviour. Although she and I, as well as other students, discussed the benefits and disadvantages of having empathy for our oppressors, the discussion remained theoretical and abstracted from our personal identities and experiences. We did not address, for example, how our responses to this suggestion of empathy interconnected with our experience of racism from very different social positionings. Clearly she, as a student of colour, and I, as a white facilitator, had different readings of the same information, interpreting it through our own personal and historical lenses.

Although our discussion ended with an understanding that this approach might not be useful for everyone, whose reality was silenced in this process? What experiences and enriching pedagogical moments were ignored/denied in my desire to educate against homophobia?

Of equal importance, how were the experiences, insights and desires of gay/lesbian/bisexual students either confirmed or denied during the workshop? On the one hand, the very topic of the workshop seemed to lend itself to a stance against the oppression one might experience as gay/lesbian/bisexual. Yet did the workshop also silence those who might experience gay/lesbian/bisexual life differently? Was there a sense in which, although never proactively or positively defined, gay/lesbian/bisexuality was constructed not only in negative terms, but also uniformly, as though there might be a single gay/lesbian/bisexual life, indeed one built solely on the position of a powerless 'victim'? What was the experience for students (gay/lesbian/bisexual and others) who felt/experienced/saw different versions?

Although my *intent* was to open up discussion about homophobia and heterosexism, and thus about gays/lesbians/bisexuals in a way that is not common either within or outside of the educational system, who in fact was shut out of this discussion? Was I unintentionally recreating the all too common situation in which 'others' are discussed, defined, theorized, without their control and participation?

Acknowledging difference in this workshop is a difficult task. Time constraints give us little room in which to get to know and trust each other enough to, for example, break into Ellsworth's 'affinity groups,' from where students might speak and share experiences from some common ground. To be able to collectively generate, within a three-hour workshop, a space safe enough for gay/lesbian/bisexual students to 'come out' in order to work in affinity groups, is perhaps an almost impossible task. This concern leads me to question the effectiveness of a workshop of such short duration. How might

the workshop function differently, perhaps more 'deeply' if it were two or three days rather than two or three hours? Although in my mind there would be greater potential for learning and growing, both by students and facilitator, in a longer format, I am also then led to ask how many fewer opportunities there might be for people to engage in such a process. For most people, an afternoon workshop is far more accessible than a week-end one; concerns relating to jobs, family commitments, child care, energy levels, all deter many people from committing to such a lengthy process, despite the tremendously greater learning potential.

One of the ways differences might be more actively acknowledged and addressed is for us as a class to each speak/write of our various subject positions, specifically what we bring to a discussion of homophobia and heterosexism, in what ways we relate to the issue, what other experiences of oppression and of the positivity of our differences are important to us in this workshop. Feminist pedagogy calls, most simply, for making the invisible, visible. Thus instead of glossing over differences (rendering them unimportant/invisible), we might be able to address how differences will benefit and/or problematize our work together. This would have to be done in such a way that we each make personal choices about what we disclose of our selves and our experiences, acknowledging that our voices will be partial, that ultimately there will always be parts of each other we cannot know. In doing so, while not artificially claiming to create a safe environment, we might effectively open the doors for bringing to the surface the subtexts of our experiences and identities which necessarily inform our participation in this workshop. In working on issues so centrally tied to notions of difference and

'otherness' we would perhaps do greater justice to our unlearning by consciously bringing our more complex selves, raced, classed, gendered, etc. into the process.

In a world (and a workshop) where not all voices are equal, although we can acknowledge that our work together is intended to generate greater equality, we must also acknowledge that those inequalities will persist. Who speaks and who is silenced, whose experiences are validated and whose are denied, are questions I seek to explicitly and self consciously address in my pedagogy.

6. 'Owning' Our Own Homophobia As a Way of Unlearning

I am interested, while retracing my steps in designing this workshop, in examining what ways homophobia and heterosexism are constructed as somehow 'out there,' separate and away from us, the participants in the workshop. At one level, the exercises in the workshop, by drawing on student experiences of learning homophobic/heterosexist attitudes, work to implicate us all as part of a homophobic society. And yet it seems there is another level, at which we as participants in the workshop are able to distance ourselves from homophobia, making it something we have moved 'beyond'. Particularly the time we spend discussing 'what we first learned' about gays/lesbians/bisexuals, and later 'what we know now about that information' facilitates this distancing. Although I intended our discussion of 'what we know now' to serve as a countering to the negative images many of us received as young children, this strategy also appears to function as suggesting that we now 'know better' and are thus no longer homophobic ourselves.

In this process I am concerned that we risk constructing homophobia and heterosexism as something extreme and 'bad' that exists only in overtly bigoted and prejudiced individuals, or in our 'past' selves three hours previously. In this way we avoid addressing homophobia and heterosexism as integral parts of our society, present in both individuals and institutions, as structured by social relations of power, and for which, therefore, we are all at some level accountable to. When homophobia and heterosexism belong to the 'bad guys' and is not acknowledged and claimed as ours as well, what kind of 'unlearning' can really take place? As I have suggested elsewhere, the desire to construct oppressive attitudes as belonging to a few isolated and extreme individuals is not entirely innocent. To name ourselves as complicit (even unintentionally) in social constructions based on power inequalities is usually to significantly shake up our self-perception. For most of us, it involves making ourselves vulnerable, dealing with guilt, and often with the fear of seeing our world in new and difficult terms. Thus, to do the work involved in owning, rather than simply eschewing, homophobia and heterosexism is not easy. To name what is 'bad' about homophobia and heterosexism is not necessarily to examine one's role in perpetuating oppressive ideologies and social relations.

Patti Lather (1991b) suggests that when students appear to say/do the 'right thing', this may reflect a desire to please the teacher (i.e., the 'right thing' is therefore what the teacher believes) rather than a genuine moment of learning for the student:

> ...the game of producing what the teacher wants to hear cannot be overlooked, students in women's studies classrooms learn to produce . 'correct' answers, to follow a kind of 'group think'. (p.139)

Lather's comments lead me to question in what way my pedagogy sets up a new 'truth' into which students buy without doing the difficult work of examining their own inner feelings and ideas. Ricki Sherover-Marcuse's work suggests that we will work more effectively against oppression when we can identify the loss to ourselves, even when the oppression is not directed at us. Upon reflection, I can identify that one of the important factors that led me to do this work was a deeply felt understanding of how homophobia and heterosexism have limited my life. Perhaps a discussion of the effects of homophobia and heterosexism on all of us (heterosexual as well as gay/lesbian/bisexual students) could be brought into the workshop, suggesting that we reflect on the limitations homophobia and heterosexism have put on our own lives. This might bring individuals into the system of homophobia and heterosexism, helping us to understand it not simply as something 'out there' but something with implications for our own lives and which we all, although very differently, experience and participate in.

However, this still leaves me questioning how this workshop might function to take this thinking a step further. How might it move us from an understanding of homophobia and heterosexism, and their negative effects, to an acknowledgement of our role in both the personal and institutional nature of these attitudes? How might we do this in such a way that does not immobilize us with guilt, freeze us under the weight of a system we may feel powerless to change? Of equal importance, how might we address these issues while acknowledging how they will be taken up differently by gay/lesbian/bisexual students than by heterosexual students, as well as differently through other overlapping social positionings students are placed in or have taken?

4.2 CONCLUSIONS AND AVENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In the re-reading of the Unlearning Homophobia workshop, I have attempted to relate my learning about feminist pedagogical theory to practice. Lather (1991b), like many feminist pedagogues, looks at how research can serve as praxis, how we can "maximize the research process as a change-enhancing, reciprocally educative encounter" (p.72). Feminist pedagogy does not float in some abstract theoretical arena; through a re-reading of my workshop, I have drawn from the (often complex) theory in such a way that my practice feels to be profoundly enhanced. The research I have done, while often difficult and challenging, has become a part of my practice.

Like Lather (1991b), I offer "no synthesis, no teleological conclusion" (p.153) I intentionally seek to avoid these kinds of conclusions, choosing rather to acknowledge the open-ended nature of this work. I am acutely aware of the many un written projects that might have emerged from my work over these last months, and I seek to acknowledge their potential to be written at other times and in other places.

The previous section poses more questions than it answers. This is not to suggest that the work of this thesis has been insignificant. In fact, my coming to grips with feminist pedagogical theory, as well as my re-reading, constitute visceral and at times harrowing reworkings on my part. To have come this far in questioning and examining my own approaches and practice feels to be no small task. I have asked questions of myself and my practice, which although sometimes glaringly simple, I would not have known how to ask prior to my study of feminist pedagogical theory, my experiences at the Montreal Assault Prevention Centre, and informal evaluations by participants in the

Unlearning Homophobia Workshop. To ask has been my work to date, to begin responding to these questions will be my future struggle. I am drawn to a comment by Henri Bergson (1992) about questions and answers:

> But the truth is that in philosophy and even elsewhere it is a question of *finding* the problem and consequently of *positing* it, even more than of solving it. For a speculative problem is solved as soon as it is properly stated. By that I mean that its solution exists then, although it may remain hidden and, so to speak, covered up: the only thing left to do is *un*cover it. But stating the problem is not simply uncovering, it is inventing. (p.51)

This is not to suggest, of course, that the problem is everything and that the solution counts for nothing:

> On the contrary, it is the solution that counts, but the problem always has the solution it deserves, in terms of the way in which it is stated. (Deleuze, 1991:16)

I do truly feel I have 'invented' for myself, posing questions that are informed by my experiences at the Montreal Assault Prevention Centre, and by feminist pedagogical theory, and which lead my practice in education for social change in new and exciting directions.

Although this project has been a tremendous learning experience for me, there are, as always, things left undone. 'It's only a Master's thesis' has been a common refrain of the past months, as the pages seemed to expand almost by themselves. Acknowledging all of its imperfections, I am delighted with this work for helping me experience a side of academic work I consider to be truly engaging and valuable; I have both struggled (and I'm sure that struggle is apparent) with new concepts which I thought I would never be able to grasp, and I have addressed the practical and meaningful work

of my life in a way that has not only enhanced my practice, but in a way that has given very real meaning to what often felt to be very abstract theory.

This said, there is much I could not accomplish in the writing of this thesis, areas of research and practice which still await me. One of the foremost of these is, of course the implementation of a 'new' Unlearning Homophobia workshop. In the process of designing this thesis, I originally intended not only to look at how feminist pedagogical theory could enrich my practice, but also at what my practice had to say about feminist pedagogy. I believe this reciprocal process to be valuable, however any genuine ideas about the effectiveness of feminist pedagogy and its successes (or limitations) in enhancing my practice, must necessarily and, at least, wait for the implementation of a new workshop. The question of whether the questions and ideas generated in my re reading are transferable to my practice is not something I can theorize about in an abstract manner. Although there is little doubt that my workshop will undergo significant changes as a result of this project, exactly what form those changes will take, and what their impact will be, remains for future study.

Most significantly therefore, my interests at this point lie in implementing and evaluating a new Unlearning Homophobia workshop. While the work of this thesis, remaining as it does in the theoretical arena alone, has given me many new insights and strategies, clearly my aim is to be able to implement these workshops and to thus be able to gain valuable feedback and evaluation from participants.

In Chapter 1, I briefly addressed the limitations of writing in a kind of academic language that renders theory inaccessible. I believe that feminist pedagogy has much to

say to students and teachers alike, yet I believe that much of feminist pedagogical theorizing remains insular and elitist, speaking to a relatively select few who are schooled in the language of critical, feminist, and postmodern theory. The fact that significant parts of this thesis are written in this kind of language is a limitation as well as an avenue for future research. Barring the 'real world' replete with time constraints and deadlines, I would have liked to 're-write' this thesis, 'translating' it, so to speak, into another language accessible to an audience who may not have been positioned with relative access to academia and academese. I imagine this project to be a fascinating (and no doubt difficult) one, which would push me to yet another level of understanding of the theory. The relationship between author, text, and reader is an interesting one, and the style/language used in writing is something I hope to explore in the future. Certainly this is a topic which speaks to the particular concerns of feminist pedagogy.

One other area of future study that this work suggests, is an examination of the relationship between various oppressions. How might education against homophobia and heterosexism, relate and interconnect with education against racism, anti-Semitism, etc.? When we begin to 'unlearn' homophobia, do we also begin to examine other relations of power and inequality, do we become better equipped to do so? I am interested in the possible applicability to and relevance of teaching/learning strategies against homophobia to other forms of oppression. Is there a kind of 'anti-oppression' education which might make links between our learned hatreds and fears of 'otherness' while not reducing these different experiences to some common denominator? These are questions I hope to pursue in my future studies.

To conclude is to end, and for me this project is about beginnings. Feminist pedagogy calls for a critique of what is as well as for a revisioning towards what might be. It asks of us how we can do education differently, in ways that not only engender a more just world, but in ways that use pedagogies that are themselves more just and which take into account the complexities of the world. This thesis not only examines feminist pedagogy, it also is a dream of how I might learn and teach in more just ways, taking part in creating, step by pedagogical step, a better world.

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