YOUNG WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON THE TRAJECTORY OF THEIR FEMINISMS

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Sociology in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto

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Abstract

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This research is my understanding of the trajectory of eight women’s feminisms. All of these women were exposed to feminist theory and feminist organizing at a particular university and have graduated from their undergraduate studies within the last seven years. As well, all of these women are within a 25-30 age cohort at the time of the interviews. The purpose of this study is to enhance understanding of young feminist women’s experiences and determine why some feminist women may feel disenchantment with feminist theory and/or feminist organizing resulting in a movement away from their feminisms. I explored these women’s feminist journeys using in-depth semi-structured interviews. A distinct pattern emerged from these interviews suggesting that these women have neither out-and-out rejected feminism, nor have they chosen to live fully transformed feminist lives; rather, they have personalized their feminisms in their day-to-day lives as other life priorities have taken precedence.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The Research Problem

This thesis is an attempt to explore why a select group of young feminist women may have become disenchanted with feminist theory and/or feminist organizing, resulting in a movement away from their feminisms. For the purposes of this research question, ‘young feminist women’ will refer to women who are within a 25-30 year old age cohort at the time of the interviews and who were exposed to feminist theory and feminist organizing while attending a particular university. All of these women have graduated from their undergraduate studies within the last seven years.

Beginnings of this Research: My Experience

This research question stems from a personal desire to understand the trajectory of my own feminism from university to the workplace. Like many young feminists, my initial exposure to feminist organizing and feminist theory took place during my undergraduate years. I stumbled across Simone de Beauvoir’s 1952 publication The Second Sex while life guarding the summer after my first year of university. I instantly identified with the literature which marked the beginning of my feminist consciousness. Upon returning to university, I began to take Women's Studies courses and join feminist groups. This was a period of total exhilaration as I discovered words for unarticulated
feelings. Feminism as a world view allowed my surroundings to be more comprehensible. I felt proud to be female and for the first time I felt that my voice was validated. I was overwhelmed, elated, inspired, and driven to intoxicate my mind with more theory. In my third year I was appointed by the Students’ Council to be the Commissioner for a Women's Issues group. It was at this point that I experienced the intensity of feminist politics, grounding my theoretical feminism in practice.

In the late 1980s, mainstream academic feminism was beginning to respond to the challenges from black feminists and postmodernist feminists concerning its limited notion of the concept of ‘woman’ and of ‘sisterhood’. Identity politics became a necessary step in the attempt to deconstruct universal applications of these notions. As a white, middle-class, heterosexual feminist who was the head of a women's group and writing about feminist issues in campus publications, I was rightly accused of a personal bias. It was at that stage that I began the painful process of theorizing about race, class and sexuality. As I began this process, I became acutely aware of how difficult this process can be, particularly in feminist circles which have a tendency to become highly charged political forums. I felt that there was an unsettling degree of intolerance, backbiting and an inability to address and resolve conflict among some of the feminist women, including myself. I wondered if these issues were manifestations of our oppressions as women. I considered this infighting counterproductive and began to question if feminist circles were safe places for women to work through theorizing their oppressions and privileges.

Graduation marked a turning point in my feminist politics. While studying for my final exams, I came across an article written by a feminist who was reflecting on her
feminist burnout. Overtired from the emotional intensity of my own feminist politics, this article confirmed some of the feelings that I was experiencing at that time. As I graduated and moved into the workplace, I moved away from feminist activism. I now believe my movement away from feminist politics was partly due to a necessary respite from the emotional intensity of feminist politics.

At this stage in my life, I am involved in a few groups which I consider indirectly feminist. One of these groups is a support and lobbyist group for women's health. While feminism remains an important part of my identity, my feminist activism is relatively dormant.

Over the last decade, there has been a barrage of mainstream media attention around a 'post-feminist' theme. Various newspaper articles and anti-feminist critiques have reached the narrow conclusion that the 'war is over' and women can now get on with the business of reaping the benefits of their social equality. Susan Faludi (1991) describes this myth as part of a 'backlash' against women. Conscious of this popular mythology, I began to question why women who were self-identified feminists seemed to be stepping away from their feminisms.

Initially, I thought about the job climate that this age cohort was faced with upon graduation; perhaps there was a negative correlation between a recession and feminist priorities. I also considered the contemporary challenges within academic feminism including theorizing about post-modernism and race and difference generally which has resulted in the formation of factionalized groups. Finally, I thought about 'victim feminism' as described by Naomi Wolf (1993) and wondered how feminist issues were being presented to young women.
My involvement in this research question is reflective of Douglass and Moustakas' (1985) heuristic model of inquiry which entails three sequential steps: immersion; acquisition; and realization. I was able to come to an understanding of this research question through my shared experiences with the participants. This model will be examined in greater detail in Chapter six.

**Purpose of this Research**

While much has been written on various aspects of the feminist experience at university, very little of the literature explores what has been experienced by the students who pursue Women's Studies programs and the trajectory of their feminisms as they graduate from the university and move into the workplace. The purpose of this study is to enhance understanding of feminist students' experiences through understanding the experiences of a select group of women who have been exposed to feminist theory and feminist organizing at a particular university. I am interested in gaining a better understanding of the reasons why some feminist women may become disenchanted with feminism resulting in a movement away from their feminisms. I purposely chose an intensive semi-structured interviewing methodology in order to capture the important details of the participants' experiences as well as the phenomenology of their responses. I also wanted to allow these women to speak from their own frames of reference. The literature that exists seems to discuss Women's Studies programs, feminist pedagogy and feminist research methods from feminist scholars' perspectives rather than from feminist
students’ perspectives. Absent from most of the literature is an attempt to understand what the Women’s Studies experience has been for the students.

I conducted six interviews with eight women, one of these interviews consisting of three women. All of these women have been exposed to some feminist theory and feminist organizing at a particular university. The purpose of this study is not to isolate the causes or correlates of disenchantment with feminism in any precise way, although such a study might be undertaken when the phenomenon is better understood. In order to understand this phenomenon better, therefore, I believe the essential starting point is with the voices of young feminist women.

The purpose of this research, therefore, is to enhance understanding of feminist students’ experiences with Women’s Studies, which includes their experiences with feminist organizing while attending university. I hope that the knowledge these women share will enhance knowledge and understanding for others on this topic, particularly women who may be at similar cross roads with their feminisms. As well, I hope that this study will shed light on future areas of study. As feminist scholars grapple with issues like feminist student resistance in the classroom, for example, perhaps this study will offer some insight on such issues.

**Organization of this Thesis**

In this chapter, I have outlined the beginnings of this research question stemming from my personal experience with Women’s Studies and feminist organizing. I have also outlined the purpose and aim of this endeavor. Chapter two reviews the literature in the
areas which relate to this study: Women's Studies, feminist pedagogy, feminist research, current challenges in Women's Studies, and anti-feminist critique. In Chapter three I will examine my research process including the methodology, the interview process and the analysis of the data. I based my research process on feminist principles. By using an intensive semi-structured interview method, I felt that this form of research would provide an environment that was non-manipulative, non-authoritarian and non-hierarchical. Chapter four will provide individual descriptions of the eight women who were interviewed for this study. Chapter five will present my analysis of these interviews as they relate to each other and the literature review. Chapter six will be my concluding chapter. This chapter will include a summation of my findings, a review of the relationship of my personal feminism to this study, an outline of the significance of this study, a discussion of the limitations of this study and an identification of areas for future research.

**Summary**

This thesis is an exploration of a select group of young feminist women's experiences with Women's Studies and feminist organizing while attending a particular university. I am interested in gaining a better understanding of their feelings of enchantment and disenchantment with feminism. I am particularly interested in the trajectory of their feminisms from university through graduation and into the workplace to where they find themselves today.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

To gain an understanding of why a select group of young feminist women may feel disenchanted with the women's movement after exposure to feminist theory and/or activism at university resulting in some movement away from their feminisms, it seems appropriate to begin the literature review with an examination of Women's Studies, feminist pedagogy and feminist research.

To begin, I will trace the origins of North American Women's Studies programs evolving out of the social movements of the 1960s. In response to the mainstream curriculum, where the white male experience is treated as universal and all other experiences as deviants or anomalies thereof. Women's Studies programs recognized a need to broaden the scope of the universal experience to include not only women but other excluded groups.

Feminist pedagogy, influenced by the learner-centered education theories of the 1960s and 1970s and the teachings of Paulo Freire, is a recognition that women's ways of knowing and learning are incompatible with traditional methods of teaching which reinforce hierarchy, competition and authority. Feminist pedagogy emphasizes connected knowing where collaborative learning techniques are employed. Some would argue that these traditional methods are not good for men either.
Similarly, feminists recognized a need to construct 'herstory' starting with the voices of women, valuing what women know. Reflecting feminist values, feminist methodology attempts to be conscious of a non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian and non-manipulative interaction between the researcher and the subjects.

The next section will be a look at the current challenges facing Women’s Studies programs both within and outside feminist circles. First, I will touch on the contradictions facing feminist teachers as they attempt to actualize feminist endeavors in a hierarchical, institutionalized setting. Next, I will examine how constructive criticism from postmodernist and black feminist theory are challenging the limits of sisterhood. In addition, I will touch on some of the problematic issues relating to feminist classroom dynamics including the concept of feminist teacher and authority, and the different positionalities of the feminist teacher and students.

Although outside of feminist critique, I will give some mention to the recent genre of popular critique in mainstream press concerning Women’s Studies. While many of these books have been written by young women who have taken Women’s Studies courses, I will argue that they are written with an anti-feminist agenda.

In the final section, I will show how this literature review relates to the research question.

'Herstory'

Women’s Studies

The first Women’s Studies course to be taught on a North American campus was in the late 1960s. Women’s Studies helped mark the presence of the second-wave
feminists. who emerged predominantly from the Civil Rights and anti-Vietnam war movements. Disenchanted with the male domination of these political movements, these women began to explore ideas around women’s issues leading to the formation of a women’s liberation movement. These women were determined to intellectualize their feminist theories and challenge the academy’s traditional myopia of ‘universal’ truths. Feminists were determined to have their slogan ‘the personal is political’ include the ‘personal is intellectual’.

From Women’s Studies’ earliest days, there was an expressed political agenda to work towards improving ‘real’ women’s lives including their political and socio-economic position in society. Furthermore, from the outset. Women's Studies made it clear that it aimed to cross disciplinary boundaries (Klein. 1991). This stemmed from an emphasis on “interconnections, continuity and inter-relationships, where the compartmentalization of knowledge was explicitly opposed” (Klein. 1991, p.126). Hence, the emphasis on interdisciplinary studies reflected the transcendence of a feminist philosophy which, it can be argued, represented a world view where all things were believed to be connected.

Feminist scholars saw gaps in the scholarship where only the white man’s world was explored. Further, female students were not taken seriously both in and outside the classroom. Preparing white men for smooth entry into an advancing capitalist world, these institutions valued the skills necessary to make it in a man's world: production, competition, goals, and hierarchical structures. And universities held these skills as unquestionably superior to stereotypical female qualities.
Further disenchanted with the androcentric scholarship and 'socratic' methods of teaching, feminists scholars began demanding a more holistic education. In order to meet their demands, they began the enormous task of determining what a more holistic education would look like. Initially, the female question was treated as an 'add on' to the androcentric scholarship. It soon became clear, however, that a more critical analysis which was historically based and equally representative of both genders was needed.

Adrienne Rich (1979) argued for:

A need for her own history, her much politicized biology, an awareness of the creative work of women of the past, the skill and crafts and techniques and powers exercised by women in different times and cultures, a knowledge of women's rebellions and organized movements against our oppression and how they have been routed or diminished. (p. 24)

Rich went on to argue that it is not our biology, but the ignorance of our selves, which has been the key to our powerlessness. Again, feminist scholars were faced with the enormous task of unwrapping women's silenced and appropriated past.

Several groundbreaking studies helped shape the development of women's studies further. Carol Gilligan's 1982 study titled In a Different Voice presented a psychological model on moral development, challenging Kohlberg's 1981 study on morality. Gilligan basically argued that the trajectory in women's moral development had a tendency to differ from men because, unlike Kohlberg's model based on an ethic of justice, women exhibit an ethic of care. In other words, women's ways of knowing were not necessarily
inferior to men's. just different. This study helped inspire the work by Mary Belenky et al. (1986) which examined women's ways of knowing in more depth. The latter's work presented a model of women's epistemological development where relationships and connected knowing were valued. This study argued for the need to hear women's voices. It became increasingly evident that the treatment of women as 'other' or an anomaly of men was a gross oversight of the socially constructed differences in men and women's ways of knowing. Feminists argued for an equal treatment and valuing of these gender-specific ways of knowing. These studies contributed to the already evolving feminist pedagogy and feminist research within Women's Studies.

**Feminist Pedagogy**

We are all familiar with lecture-style pedagogy where the teacher is the informer of objective knowledge and the student is the passive receiver of such knowledge. These classrooms are based on a hierarchical model where competition, assertiveness and abstract, detached theorizing prevail. Feminist pedagogy is a direct challenge to these structures derived from the consciousness-raising practices of the women's movement and other movements of the 1960s. Further influenced by the progressive learner-centered education theories of the 1960s and 1970s, and the teachings of Paulo Freire who combined the theories of learner-centered education with explicit goals for social change, feminist pedagogy is committed to creating a learning environment specifically for women's ways of knowing, where she can comfortably hear her voice.

Freire's pedagogy suggests that students develop a consciousness of their oppressions leading to a commitment to end that oppression. As Weiler (1991) points
out, the role of the teacher is to encourage discussion between the teacher and the student around their ways of knowing the world and to act as subjects in that world. Freire’s theories do not, however, address the power of the teacher based on race, class, or gender in this teaching style (Weiler, 1991, p.454). This power issue will be discussed as one of the challenges facing feminist teachers in the feminist classroom.

Chronicles of women’s lives in traditional scholarship have either been nonexistent or token appropriation of their familial roles. Because of these gross oversights, women must begin recording women’s lives by locating their voices, first and foremost, and give meaning to their experiences. To respond to this need, feminist pedagogy aims to be collaborative, cooperative (which does not necessarily infer consensus), and interactive. Students must be involved in the construction of their own education. This philosophy is based on the basic premise that every student has something to contribute to the subject matter and the production of knowledge (Spender, 1981). Thus, we see the interconnection between ‘knower and what is known’.

Cooperative feminist classrooms entail classroom dynamics where students actively listen to each other's opinions and experiences in the attempt to appreciate the complexities of women’s diverse lives. Creating small discussion groups helps to facilitate this goal where women's silences will hopefully be overcome. Belenky et al. (1986) refer to this dynamic as the ‘connected class’ and argue that they will provide “a culture for growth, where members can nurture each other’s thoughts to maturity” (p. 221).

The exercise of breaking into small discussion groups and actively listening to each other's opinions is also reflective of a feminist ethic of care in education. According
to Nel Noddings (1988). "the hypocrisy inherent in a blend of Christian doctrine and individualist ideology has created opposition to traditional forms of moral education."

Noddings goes on to offer an alternative ethic of care arising out of "ancient notions of agapism and contemporary feminism" (p. 215). This ethic of care is a form of relational ethics where the individuals come to care for one another through a connectedness, respecting each other's positionalities in life. Inclusive in a feminist pedagogy, therefore, is a return to the goal of providing a moral education where teachers and students care for one another.

Noddings' emphasis on care in feminist pedagogy is challenged by some feminist critics. Patai and Koertge (1994) point out in their study on feminist teachers' perceptions of Women's Studies that some teachers expressed concern and disappointment with the personalized and haphazard academic proceedings. Patai and Koertge argue further that Women's Studies inadvertently disempowers women by teaching them only to be good listeners rather than teaching students to learn to learn. I believe both of these positions are oversimplifications of feminist pedagogy. Based on my experience in the feminist classroom, while there was some attention given to relational work with exercises like consciousness-raising, the majority of classroom time was spent analyzing feminist works.

Along with small group discussions, women are encouraged to find their voices in journal writing and readings on feminist essays. Feminist teachers hope that these exercises will help lend support to the often painful emotions students experience when engaging in feminist theory. Students may be encouraged to incorporate poetry and songs into their journal writings. Again, interconnecting the emotion with course content
reflects a feminist value. While I believe that journal exercises offer valuable outlets given the emotionally charged issues in Women's Studies classrooms, there are some ethical points to consider. Keith Louise Fulton (1991) raises several interesting points when she argues: "journal assignments that are turned in and marked may not facilitate empowerment, but instead set the student up for vulnerability and betrayal" (p.153). Fulton goes on to argue, "The choices for the students are to become vulnerable to judgment or to learn to guess at what the professor wants and to write it. Either can deepen the experience of oppression" (p.163). Perhaps it would be more appropriate to ask feminist students to hand in a paper on what they learned by keeping a journal. I recall having to submit a journal for grading in one of my Women's Studies courses and found this requirement quite problematic.

This interconnection between feminist knowledge and the personal also stems from a general distrust of traditional methodologies which claimed objective truth concerning women's inferior social status. This point reflects Audre Lorde's (1984) cautionary words that the "master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" as we search for new ways to bring women's lives to the surface.

The preceding discussion has shown that feminist pedagogy invites a new way of relating to one another in the classroom that respects feminist values. The actualization of feminist pedagogy varies from school to school and teacher to teacher. It will be interesting to compare the participants' responses on classroom pedagogy to this literature review.
**Feminist Research**

In the attempt to deconstruct androcentric scholarship and create our own, feminist research is the means to this end. It is a direct challenge to the positivist nature characterizing traditional research which treats the white male experience as universal and claims objective truth. Alternatively, feminist research claims knowledge is partial, contextual and diverse. It also attempts to incorporate a non-manipulative, non-authoritarian, and non-hierarchical structure in its relationship between the researcher and the subject. One of the most significant contributions to the debate on the politics of knowledge has been feminists challenging the objectivity of traditional scholarship (Spender, 1981).

As mentioned, in the effort to reclaim our 'herstory', feminist researchers must necessarily begin with the voices of women. This entails providing an opportunity for women to hear their voices and give meaning to their experiences within their own frames of reference. Thus, feminist research attempts to give value to the phenomenological, that is the personal, the emotional and the unarticulated within the scope of legitimate research (Rutledge Shields and Dervin, 1993). Feminist research also recognizes the interplay of participant's complex positions which are ever-evolving. A new so-called 'objectivity' emerges from feminist work which recognizes:

...the limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object...we seek those ruled by partial sight and limited voice-not partiality for its own sake, but, rather, for the sake of the connections and unexpected openings (which) situated knowledges make possible. Situated
knowledges are about communities not about isolated individuals" (Haraway, cited by Bhavnani. 1993. p. 97).

Hence, by locating the positionalities of women’s diversity we can also locate commonalities without either being sacrificed. As is the case with experiential research, the positionality and experiences of the researcher bear some significance to the research project. Hence, unlike traditional positivist research, feminists see the positionality of the researcher relevant to the project.

While some feminist scholars argue that there are possibilities for feminist research in quantitative methods (Epstein Jayaratne. 1983: Reinharz. 1992), most seem to agree that quantitative methods are quite limited in its potential for actualizing feminist values.

Like quantitative methodologies, however, feminist research is not without its flaws. Feminists have expressed concern regarding the power imbalance in the interview situation where the researcher walks away at the end of the interview having learned intensely personal information about the informer, and holds the power to interpret the informer’s words.

To address this issue, some feminist researchers may employ an interactive method of interviewing where the researcher shares their personal identity and experiences with the participant. I agree with Pamela Cotterill (1992) who sees this interactive method as problematic because it overlooks the structural barriers of status, class, age, race and disability in recognition of shared experiences based on gender alone. As well, the claim that interactive interviewing can lead to a friendship (Oakley. 1981)
not only overlooks these structural barriers but raises moral issues concerning the potential to exploit participants in order to gain source material (Cotterill. p. 595). I would argue that perhaps a friendship may be undesirable for either the researcher or the participant. Cotterill’s suggestion is to act as a “friendly stranger” where the researcher is a “sympathetic listener” but “who has limited status in her respondent’s lives”. She goes on to point out that “the friendly stranger, unlike a friend, does not exercise social control over respondents because the relationship exists for the purpose of the research and is terminated when the interviews are complete” (p. 596). Cotterill’s “friendly stranger” approach seems to offer a comfortable compromise between the detached interviewer and the befriending interviewer.

While feminists may disagree on the best ways to address power imbalances in the research situation, most would agree that feminist research must produce emancipatory knowledge which aims at improving the lives of its participants. This point reflects the principles of Freire’s critical pedagogy which aims towards a social transformation by empowering students with a critical knowledge of their lives. Thus, feminist research has the potential to provide a degree of emancipation for its participants as they make sense of their experiences. Perhaps this form of participant empowerment is one way to restore the power imbalance in the interviewing situation.

Although not always successful, feminist research attempts to combat all forms of oppression. Certain biases, however, still exist in the methodology, language and formulation of the research question (Lenskyj, 1990). While feminist research has been successful attacking the ontological implications of grammar generally. Helen Lenskyj (1990) points out examples of a heterosexist bias in language including:
- "couple" used only to denote male/female, not same-sex couples.
- "family" used only in reference to heterosexual parent(s) and children.
- "lifestyle" used exclusively in reference to lesbians' and gay men's living arrangements or social/sexual activities.
- use of categories such as "single" and "married" that exclude same-sex relationships.
- use of the term "spouse" rather than "partner." (p. 92)

Hence, feminist researchers must be conscious not to repeat the mistakes of androcentric scholarship where the concept "woman" is treated as a linear, universal category reflecting white, middle-class, heterosexual values.

Similarly, feminists must be conscious not to appropriate the voices of women whose experiences based on race, sexuality, ethnicity or class or different from their own. This point leads to the next section which examines the current issues and challenges facing Women's Studies where postmodernism and black feminist thought have offered invaluable insight on the concept of difference and how to integrate women's diversity into a feminist analysis without falling into the "add and stir" trap.

**Current Issues in Women's Studies**

While Women's Studies programs have experienced many celebrated gains throughout North American campuses, it has not been without incredible challenges both inside and outside feminist circles. Within feminist circles, these challenges are
necessarily constructive, essential to any social movement and body of knowledge. Post-modern and black feminist studies have been particularly useful in their challenge to the hegemonic nature plaguing a predominately white women's movement on campuses. These groups have successfully brought the concept of sisterhood into question given the diversity and positionality of women's experiences.

Before considering feminist critiques, however, I want to briefly touch upon some of the pressures feminist teachers face outside feminist circles. While some progress has been made in mainstream curriculum, reflecting the efforts of feminist scholars, such efforts are generally minimized and/or well contained as few feminists hold prestigious chairs in the academy. In the wake of budgetary strains and demands, a drift towards greater institutionalization, and the increasing pressures from students for a 'career-orientated' education, the conservative climate characterizing most university campuses makes for quite a chilly climate (Miller Gearhart, 1983; Watkins, 1983).

Feminist teachers must deal with the inner contradictions of promoting feminist values within an institutionalized, hierarchical, and competitive setting. For example, feminists must grapple with the pressures to compete amongst one another for space in feminist journals: published research being the most valued aspect of the job. And, while teaching is low on the university’s list of rewarded skills, feminists alternatively do value pedagogy and must struggle with the conflicting expectations between students and the academy in her deliverance and evaluation of scholarly material. Hence, the obstacles facing the actualization of feminist principles in the context of an university setting are significant and complex. Many feminists have been accused of co-opting their feminist principles in light of securing their place in the academy.
Feminist scholars are also faced with the double burden of keeping up with scholarly material in feminist literature and their respective mainstream disciplines. Because Women's Studies programs are interdisciplinary, scholars are typically drawn from the various departments to teach. Workload issues are overwhelming for feminist scholars as they represent the token woman for administrative and student committees.

It can be argued, that as a result of some of these pressures, Women's Studies has become a relatively subversive enclave on campuses. Some feminists view this as a positive and necessary thing, while others hold integration into mainstream curriculum as the ideal course. The integrationist/autonomous debate reflects an example of the challenges inside feminist circles, although the debate is certainly influenced by mainstream forces, and has serious implications concerning the future of Women's Studies programs.

To provide a brief synopsis of some of the ongoing issues surrounding the integrationist/autonomous debate, advocates for autonomy assert that if Women's Studies is integrated into mainstream curriculum, it will become just another discipline where the core values of feminism may be lost or co-opted in the process (Coyner, 1983). Feminists argue that this was the case with first-wave feminism and it can just as easily happen again. Integrationists, on the other hand, advocate that if Women's Studies remains autonomous, this will lead to an already existing intellectual elitism where feminist theory becomes an esoteric body of knowledge appropriating the voices of the 'common woman' and speaking on behalf of the rank and file in the women's movement (Walzer, 1982). Many feminists choose not to take a side in the autonomous/integrationist debate as there are many variables that make the choice less than clear cut. As mentioned
earlier. realities like local cutbacks and political sentiment may have an enormous impact on the logistics of Women's Studies integrating into mainstream curriculum.

Factionalism has been a recurring issue throughout Women's Studies and the women's movement generally. While factions at one time were typically aligned along liberal, socialist and radical ideologies, today it involves a multiplicity of interest groups including: black feminism, third-world feminism, lesbian feminism, psychoanalytic feminism, existentialist feminism and postmodern feminism.

Factionalism introduces the concepts of postmodernism which have contributed invaluable constructive criticism to the monolithic nature of white, heterosexist, middle-class feminist theory and subsequently, the concept of "sisterhood".

The Influences of Postmodern Feminism

Postmodern feminism assume that our world is multidimensional, ambiguous and contradictory. It challenges the notion of a linear body of knowledge and a tendency in traditional scholarship, including mainstream feminist scholarship, to universalize the human experience (Nicholson, 1990). Postmodernism questions all knowledge that undermines the 'politics of location'. Knowledge, therefore, becomes partial and contextual rather than absolute and fixed.

Influenced by postmodern critique, Western (white) feminist thought began to recognize the flaws in its conception of "woman" and "sisterhood". Writers recognized that their analysis of third-world women, reflecting a form of intellectual neocolonialism, was severely ethnocentric. Kathleen Weiler describes this deconstructing awareness as "a shattering of Western metanarratives" (Weiler, 1991, p. 449). Perhaps
even the attempt to search for a root cause for social inequality is a particular form of
relations which is rooted in patriarchy (Flax 1987, p. 633). Feminist scholars are left
with the enormous task of figuring out how they can conceptualize a feminist body of
knowledge while respecting these valuable critiques.

Reflecting Flax's point, Renate Klein (1991) argues that in the process of
deconstructing feminist epistemology, "when all is de-constructed- [it] precludes us from
having clear concepts about, for instance, the power dynamics between the sexes, or
feminism". Identifying feminists' concerns with postmodernism, including the
abandonment of theory. Linda Nicholson (1990) argues that:

...postmodernism need not demand the elimination of all big theory. much less
theory per se. to avoid totalization and essentialism. The key is to identify types
of theorizing which are inimical to essentialism. Thus, theorizing which is
explicitly historical, that is, which situates its categories within historical
frameworks, less easily invites the dangers of false generalizations than does
theorizing which does not. (p. 9)

Postmodern feminists like Nicholson, therefore, argue for historical context in theory as
opposed to an out-and-out rejection of theory. While I agree that the 'politics of location'
in knowledge must be foregrounded, it is essential to maintain the search for
commonality in human experience. Postmodernism has rightly challenged the oversights
in feminist theory relating to other positionalities among women's experiences like race
and class.
Black Feminist Critique

While black feminist efforts in the women's movement have historically gone unnoticed (or at least unreported), black feminists are rightly demanding that their voices now be heard (and recorded) and that white women begin theorizing their whiteness. Black feminist theories on anti-racism, along with postmodern feminism are the most significant challenges to the credibility of academic mainstream feminism. This point reflects the challenges feminism has brought to the politics of mainstream knowledge.

Black feminist critique, along with other forms of feminist critique, point out that because the women's movement and feminism in the academy is generally made up of white, middle-class, and heterosexual women. "other" oppressions like racism, heterosexism, classism and able-ism are not a part of their lived experiences and therefore fail to show up in their work in any meaningful way (Stasiulis, 1987). This critique is particularly important when constructing a 'herstory' or body of feminist knowledge that is experientially grounded. As outlined earlier, some feminist work still exhibits a heterosexist bias.

Black feminism is similarly critical of white women's treatment of women of colour as a binary "other" (Carty, 1991). These binary constructs underscore the need to analyze women's lives beyond a victim-agent analysis as in traditional scholarship where man is the agent and woman is the victim. In a hierarchy of privilege, white women are now the agents and women of colour are relegated to the role of victim. Women of colour's identity, therefore, becomes fixed and criticisms of identity politics and essentialism towards the latter group emerge. Attempts have been made among women
of colour to collectively organize in order to understand their differences in relation to white women. These efforts have proven equally problematic as other binaries develop like first world/third world women. Hence, feminists must remember Audre Lorde's cautionary words as she warned us about the 'oppressor within us' in our efforts to fight for social justice.

As mentioned, not unlike traditional scholarship, mainstream feminist theory has been accused of treating the white, middle-class, heterosexist experience as the universal women's experience. Some feminists argue that there are disagreements on the theorized construction of women's oppression. Some versions of mainstream feminism have traditionally located women's oppression in the interplay of relations among the state, the private family household, and the wage labour system (Stasiulis, 1987). Hence, to construct a research question around the increase of female labour participation, for example, would reflect a white racial bias as women of colour have historically had high labour participation. Some of the central categories of feminist theory, therefore, are brought into question. Mainstream feminism has also been accused of transferring its analysis of what fuels sexism to apply uncritically to other forms of oppression.

Reactions among white women to black feminist challenges have been mixed. When confronted with the challenge to theorize their "whiteness", many white women experience a period of denial. "I'm not racist", followed by tremendous guilt where confessionals are not uncommon (Weir, 1991). Once a white feminist has made some progression towards theorizing her "whiteness", however, the concept of anti-racist research and pedagogy does not fall into place automatically. Few guidelines exist on
what constitutes an anti-racist pedagogy and even a multiracial syllabus is difficult to ascertain. This task is usually, although unfairly, left to women of colour to pioneer.

Linda Carty (1991) points out that before an anti-racist anything can be established.

...one has to acknowledge the existence of institutional structures of racism. One cannot simply declare oneself anti-racist. Some of the fundamental questions which must be addressed include: How is anti-racist being defined? How is the category "woman" being dealt with, is it contextualized merely in terms of victim or does it also engage the important component of agency? Where is the category "woman" located in these feminist teachers' formulation of history? Does it involve change and transformation or is it static? Do their definitions of history erase notions of power? How are questions of race and difference dealt with in the Women's Studies/feminist classroom? Is there a serious intent to wage a struggle against racism on the part of those using the term anti-racist? What is the epistemological framework of this endeavor? (p.14)

Even if a feminist teacher has ensured that these "fundamental questions are appropriately addressed", however, she has little control over student's reactions to anti-racist material in the classroom. Women of colour often complain about the expectations put on them to act as the token voice or expert on their race. After all, women of colour do not own the category of race; they are not born experts on racism (Carty, 1991; hooks, 1996). Similarly, they resent having to continually educate white women on the issues of race
and racism. Furthermore, women of colour are put in a vulnerable position if they do challenge racist remarks, as they are often met with "denial, minimization, incomprehension or overt anger from white women" (Weir. 1991. p. 23). This reality is further complicated by the lack of women of colour scholars who can act as role models for these students or make them feel more comfortable when challenging racism in the feminist classroom.

It is because of these problems, that some black women and women of colour see the women's movement and Women's Studies for white women only. In response to this concern, bell hooks (1996) has always claimed explicitly to target a broad-based audience where she can hopefully appeal to "women like her". She asserts this position when she states "they [academic feminists] assume that the more complicated, convoluted, metalinguistic, and abstract the writing, the more theoretically legitimate it is" (p.819). This point reflects one of postmodernist's criticisms of academic feminism, namely that it is inaccessible and too esoteric for the common person.

Constructive criticism from postmodern feminism and black feminism has had an enormous and invaluable impact on identifying some of the oppressive forces in mainstream feminism. While some white feminists may still be stuck in paralyzing guilt, many have moved on to the liberating challenge of unlearning their racisms in order to build a 'herstory' that is inclusive of all women. Theorizing diversity should not be in a way that is additive or mainstreaming but rather transformative. In this process we must also search for common ground based not only on our gender but our humanity.
Problems in the Feminist Classroom

As mentioned earlier, there are no clear guidelines on what constitutes an anti-racist research paper or anti-racist classroom. Consequently, as feminist teachers engage in this transformative, yet exploratory, project of including all women in their syllabi and classroom discussions, many problems can arise.

I will divide this subsection into two areas of concentration: classroom dynamics between feminist teacher and students; and dynamics among the students themselves.

One of the contradictions facing feminist teachers in the classroom concerns the concept of authority. Feminism has traditionally been antagonistic towards authority given what it has come to signify for women culturally and historically. Hence, the feminist teacher must learn to redefine authority to reflect feminist values. It is important to note, that in a society which denies women authority, it is important for her to claim what little she can. This objective is further complicated by the 'authoritarian' pressures from the university to present and evaluate scholarly material in a certain non-feminist way. Again, depending upon the political climate of the university, some teachers have more flexibility than others to experiment with feminist endeavors.

In the effort to reconcile these contradictions, feminist scholars may look for ways to re-conceptualize authority. Kathleen Weiler (1991) suggests that feminist teachers accept their authority as intellectuals and theorists...and find "expression [for that authority] in the goal of making students themselves theorists of their own lives by interrogating and analyzing their own experience" (p.462). Authority then, is not conceptualized in the traditional, bureaucratic way, but a tool for student enlightenment through empowerment. Hence, there can be a feminist way of exercising authority.
While the process of redefining authority may appear problematic for feminist teachers, there are more concrete variables affecting her ability to actualize authority in the classroom. What Paulo Freire's theory on a critical transformative pedagogy failed to identify was the effect the teacher's positionality, that is, their race, class, sexual orientation, gender, etc., can have in the classroom (Weiler, 1991). Margo Culley et al. (1985) argue that "[women's] very presence within the academy as 'woman thinking', or the female authority, alters the fundamental construction of gender in our culture" (p. 11). Culley et al. go on to argue that "in our culture, the role of nurturer and intellectual have been separated not just by gender, but by function: to try to recombine them is to create confusion" (p. 13). Thus, because we have a powerful socialized tendency to separate these two realms into gender-specific things, some students may have a difficult time adjusting to the female teacher who holds intellectual expertise. Furthermore, while most students can make this cognitive adjustment to woman as intellectual, they do not let go of the nurturing expectation. Hence, the mother/daughter role playing may come into effect here. Feminist pedagogy recognizes that women typically need validation, nurturance and personal relationship in the learning process (Standford Friedman, 1995). It is easy to see why many female students look to their feminist teachers for reassurance and nurturing, as they would with a mother figure.

In addition, the effect of a teacher being a woman of colour may further alter these fundamental social constructs. Carty (1991) points out that as a black feminist teacher, she was expected "to bring to my class my personal experience of the issues being discussed because my experiential knowledge would concretize what were otherwise mere abstractions for the class" (p. 15). Again, not only is this problematic
because women of colour are expected to be the expert, token voice for their race, but it leads to accusations of identity politics and essentialism.

Inside the feminist classroom, where women are learning to peel off layers of socialized oppressions. learning about those oppression(s) may evoke a wide range of emotion and make for a highly charged classroom dynamic. And, because these forms of oppression are relationally based on one's positionality, this may further heighten classroom tensions. As a woman's feminist consciousness evolves, she may experience many stages ranging from denial to a fully transformative way of living her life. Classroom dynamics, therefore, may be altered not only by the concrete positionalities of a student's identity like race, class and sexuality, but the cognitive stage of their feminist consciousness.

Hence, because feminist theory is more than just a laundry list of issues, bringing one's entire identity into question, the potential for explosive politics is very strong. It is not uncommon for classroom dynamics to reflect tears, yelling, depression, anger, frustration, denial, exuberance, and immense intellectual stimulation.

Not unlike the contradictions facing the feminist teacher, students are also faced with the difficult task of working through the conflicting messages between their socialized patriarchal values and feminist theory. For example, the heterosexual female student may experience some tension between her desire for heterosexual fulfillment and the narratives of woman as sexual victim (Maher and Thompson Tetreault, 1994, p. 117). And, as the heterosexual student is grappling with this issue, she may be experience some hostility or intolerance from other students who are feel she is too male-identified. It is
not uncommon for some feminist students to lack empathy or respect for the hard choices and important conflicts traditional women may be going through (Maher, 1985, p.43).

Alternatively, lesbian students may experience overt homophobia or hostility from other students and be accused of being too radical or female-identified. If a lesbian student chooses to align herself as a separatist lesbian as she searches for a safe place in her identity formation, tensions between heterosexual and lesbian students or between separatist lesbians and other lesbians may be further entrenched. Jackie Anderson (1994) highlights some of the complaints lodged against separatist lesbians: "grounded in the very idea of separation...separatists are often criticized for being guilty of the very offense that, as a movement, we are setting ourselves against. We are viewed as child haters because we believe that even infant boys do not belong in spaces designated as women-only or lesbian-only. We are believed to be hostile to other lesbians because they may have male children or choose to be mothers" (p. 445). As well, the efforts of lesbian women in the women's movement may be minimized by heterosexual feminists' desire to appease mainstream culture's homophobia.

Feminist tensions cross racial boundaries as well. As discussed earlier, white students may be resistant to theorizing their whiteness. Perhaps these white women are stuck in the denial or the guilt stage. Again, the black student may feel reluctant to have to educate her white classmates on racism. Or perhaps the black student feels alienated as she listens and reads about a predominantly white woman's experience. Most likely, if a white student has not begun theorizing race, her vision of feminism will differ substantially from that of women of colour in the classroom. For example, the white heterosexual student, influenced by mainstream culture's declarations of 'post-feminism'.
may see the revolution as already won and merely be searching for the day when 'workplace equality' is "reinforced by a man at their side who is committed to co-parenting and his share in the housework" (Culley, 1985, p. 210). Presumably, although, not necessarily, black feminist students would be less naive about such falsehoods given their experiences with other forms of oppression.

While these tensions around class, race and sexuality only touch on a small sampling of the enormous range of feminist classroom dynamics, they all have the potential to lead to what Robin Leidner (1993) has described as "emotional intensity, ideological factionalism, leadership trashing, and stifling of dissent" (p. 4). Stifling of dissent leads to the silencing of those feminist students who are less vocal. Patai and Koertge point out "If a student feels that there's no space for her in a classroom to make a response unless it is the response expected of her, I don't think it's very healthy" (p. 24). Patai and Koertge refer to this type of silencing as "thought policing". Paula Kamen (1991) raises an interesting point in her study on young women who claim they were afraid to take a Women's Studies class because they feared being graded on the extent to which they agreed with the "radical propaganda". Like the women in Kamen's study, Katie Roiphe (1993) describes her experiences in the feminist classroom this way: "I was surprised at how many things there were not to say, at the arguments and assertions that could not be made, lines that could not be crossed, taboos that could not be broken: they had their own rigid orthodoxy" (p. 5).

I believe it is essential that classroom tensions, at the very least, be identified by the feminist teacher. Students can then move forward, looking for ways to work through these tensions by placing these issues in an historical and socio-political context. Further.
I believe that when the feminist teacher identifies these group tensions, students should be reassured that conflict around feminist issues is not only a normal but a necessary part of growth for both the movement and the individual. I would argue that difficulties actualizing this endeavor involve a tendency for women to avoid conflict: a product of our socializations.

Difficulty addressing conflict in the feminist classroom also exists in some feminist groups. Woolsey and McBain (1987) conducted a study of five all-women groups in the social service sector and discovered that infighting was not uncommon including: leadership trashing, back biting gossip and unaddressed conflict. Woolsey and McBain attribute these incidences of infighting to women’s difficulties expressing and working through anger as women are socialized to be nurturing and supportive. Some feminists go as far as to suggest that leadership trashing reflects an historical treatment of women. Bonnie Morris (1992) explains that “historically, public shaming has served the purpose of separating good women from bad women...we employ public shaming as a psychological control [mechanism]” (p.203). Morris’ point reflects Joreen’s (1976) belief that there is nothing new with using psychological manipulation to prevent women from stepping out of place. Based on personal experience, feminist organizing entails an incredible emotional investment. As well, we expect women to be supportive and nurturing. When these expectations are not met, and our emotional stakes are high, the crash is all the more devastating. Perhaps we have unrealistic expectations of one another.

Unlike the majority of mainstream courses, the feminist student is initiating theory from the location of the personal which may evoke a personal crisis. And the
ways we adjust to such crises are as diverse as the individuals themselves. Patricia Elliot (1995) points out that "in moments of crisis or instability there also exists a potential for repressing contradictions and for reaffirming investments in selective reality" (p.8). In other words, she may retreat back to her familiar environment by defending the status quo. Bell hooks (1996) states that "[young] people often start off very enthusiastic about feminist thinking but as they encounter various modes of thought that challenge or engender despair about patriarchy changing, there is often a movement away...there is often disillusionment" (p.825). This quote is very interesting in light of the research question for my study. Perhaps faced with the reality and disillusionment of graduating into a relatively unchanged patriarchal world, feminist women find themselves reverting to their familiar place in such a world. This trajectory may be further pronounced in a struggling economy and shrinking job market that take for granted competition, hierarchy and individualism.

**Anti-Feminist Critique**

In the last ten years we have witnessed an influx of mainstream attention to a so-called 'post-feminist' theme. Articles with headlines such as "Lament for Feminism: Sometime in the 1980s the Women's Movement Took a Wrong Turn": "Let's Junk the Feminist Slogans: The War's Over": "R.E.A.L. Women: The Traditionalists Take on the Feminists": and "The War Against Feminism" have served to perpetuate this theme. We have also witnessed a genre of popular anti-feminist critique among young female writers whose book titles include: *Feminist Fatale: Voices from the "Twentysomething" Generation Explore the Future of the "Women's Movement"* by Paula Kamen (1991);

All of these books were written by white women who had recently graduated from university where they had taken Women's Studies courses and were feeling some disenchantment or disillusionment with feminism.

To begin, Kamen's book is a study of the "I'm not a feminist, but..." phenomenon among young women. She identifies various reasons why young women have an aversion to the label 'feminist' including the stereotypes of feminists revealing society's homophobia and distaste for radical politics. Kamen also argues that young people, or "Generation X", are interested in a larger movement which incorporates many issues, not just women's issues. She argues further that young feminists' voices are ignored by 'older' feminists. I believe that Kamen is correct when she states that young women are recognizing a need for feminism to address issues like race. As well, I agree with her when she states that young women are focusing their energies on other issues like securing employment in a shrinking job market. While Kamen recognizes that the war is not already won, she argues that in order for feminism to survive, it must become more accessible to women by making a greater effort to supplement radical-sounding voices with more moderate forms of expression. She explicitly argues for a more marketable women's movement. Feminists have subsequently critiqued her work as promoting a 'bourgeois' brand of feminism.

While I would not go as far as to constitute Kamen's book as anti-feminist. I do believe her analysis lacks depth and critical thinking. An attempt to market feminism in a
patriarchal world is an oxymoron at best. Feminism is the antithesis of capitalism which uses manipulation and power to sell its products. Further, the source of many young women's claim that 'they are not feminists, but...' does not lie in the shortcomings of the women's movement marketing strategies, but rather the homophobia, racism, and classism of patriarchy. There will always be resistance to the label 'feminist' as long as patriarchy and its subsequent forms of oppression exist.

I would, however, classify Katie Roiphe's work as anti-feminist. Roiphe explores the frustration she experienced with feminism during her undergraduate studies at Harvard. Her basic premise is that dissent is discouraged in feminist circles and she uses the issue of sexuality as an example of how intolerance of dissent is manifest in the name of ideological dogmatism. While I agree with Roiphe's critique that some feminist circles may exhibit a tendency towards strict ideological thought. I do believe that influences like postmodernism and black feminist theory are addressing linear thinking in a constructive way. I see Roiphe's work as too one-sided and only a snapshot of feminism as it works through its growing pains towards a more inclusive transformative worldview. Like Kamen's work, although for different reasons, Roiphe's work is shortsighted and selective in its analysis.

Like Roiphe, Rene Denfeld argues that feminism's treatment of issues like female sexuality reflects a strict feminist orthodoxy which, Denfeld says, is remarkably similar to a Victorian crusade for repression. Denfeld argues further that feminism is counterproductively obsessed with date rape, pornography and goddess religions which have served to alienate young women as these issues are not relevant to their lives. She is critical of feminism's tendency to give lesbian rights top priority and argues that her
generation is far more accepting of homosexuality than older generations: many young people don't care what people do in the bedroom.

While this is a small sampling of the arguments put forth in her book, it is certainly a fair representation of her work. Like Kamen's and Roiphe's work, Denfeld misses the mark when she speaks about feminism as if it is a laundry list of issues only. Further, by dismissing feminism because it appears to prioritize issues that do not match her concerns, she reflects the attitudes of our consumer-based and individualistically-tempered society, not to mention a homophobic society, given her remark about lesbian issues. Feminism, first and foremost, is a transformative world view that attempts to address all forms of oppression. It is a form of liberation that offers women the critical skills to engage in their worlds and address those issues that are relevant to not only their particular lives but the lives of other women. It values interconnectedness among diversity. The fact that the media has selectively picked up on a small grouping of feminist activists organizing around one issue and therefore receiving more attention than others, has little to do with the overall message of feminism or its transformative potential. One needs to critically examine which issues the media singles out as important and why.

**Summary**

The research question of this paper asks why a select group of young feminist women may feel disenchantment or disillusionment with feminism after exposure to
feminist theory and/or feminist organizing at university resulting in a movement away from the women's movement.

The young women with which this thesis is concerned are among the first generations to benefit from the long-fought battles of second-wave feminists to have Women's Studies programs established on university campuses. I felt it was important to trace the origins of Women's Studies programs and reflect upon the practices of feminist pedagogy and feminist research to provide a historical context of young women's experiences. In addition, the discussion on feminist research methodology here provides background for the discussion of the methodologies used for this study in the next chapter.

This literature review could lead to several possibilities: the participants will view feminism as exciting and fulfilling; or the participants will be critical from within feminism; or the participants will come to reject feminism similar to the young writers outlined in the anti-feminist section.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter will address the methodology I used for my study. There will be two sections to this chapter. The first section will be an examination of my chosen research methodology. To begin, I will argue that qualitative research is more appropriate than quantitative research for this particular research question. I will then explain why I chose intensive interviewing. Next, I will discuss how I selected the participants, including any ethical issues in my selection process. Finally, I will examine the interviewer techniques that I employed during the interviews.

The second section will be a post-interview evaluation of this research methodology. Because this is an exploratory research question, an evaluation of how this method fared in the field is appropriate. This section will also include a description of how I analyzed the data.

Chosen Methodology

Qualitative vs. Quantitative

While historically, qualitative researchers have had to justify the credibility of qualitative research methods, today the question lies with its appropriateness to the research question. To review, I am exploring the question of why a select group of young
feminist women may have become disenchanted with feminist organizing and/or feminist theory resulting in a movement away from their feminisms. This research question addresses a recent phenomenon and is, therefore, relatively unexamined and exploratory in nature.

It is because this research is exploratory that quantitative research methods would be inappropriate. Quantitative methods demand that the researcher clearly have a question(s) or hypothesis to test. Typically, there is a large number of subjects and they are randomly selected. Furthermore, the quantitative study concerns itself with external factors or variables which help explain a social phenomenon and tend to underplay the complexity of our social worlds.

Sherman and Webb (1988) have outlined five characteristics which they argue typically describe qualitative research:

1. Events can be understood adequately only if they are seen in context. Therefore a qualitative researcher immerses him/herself in the setting.

2. The contexts of inquiry are not contrived. They are natural. Nothing is predefined or taken for granted.

3. Qualitative researchers want those who are being studied to speak for themselves to provide their perspectives in words and other actions: therefore qualitative research is an interactive process in which the persons studied teach their researcher about their lives.

4. Qualitative researchers attend to the experiences as a whole not as separate variables. The aim is to understand the experience as unified.

5. These methods are appropriate to the above statements. There is no one general method for many qualitative researchers. The process entails appraisal about what was studied (cited by Ely et al., p. 4).
As Sherman and Webb point out, qualitative research is useful when the research project does not entail predefined ideas directing the research question. Exploratory work connotes 'pre-operational definitions'. As Robert Bogdan and Sari Knopp Biklen (1992) argue, "the [qualitative] researcher's plan is to use part of the study to learn what the important questions are". They go on to argue that "finding the questions would be one of the products of data collection rather than assumed a priori" (p. 2). Hence, the study itself structures the research, not preconceived ideas as is the case with quantitative research.

Qualitative studies allow for a small group, perhaps different from the majority, to be examined where the subjects are selectively chosen. This study necessitates a selectively chosen group of participants given the uniqueness of the research question.

In addition, I am interested in how these women make sense of their worlds. As Michael Quinn Patton (1980) points out: "Qualitative measures describe the experiences of people in depth and the data is open-ended in order to find out what people's lives, experiences, and interactions mean to them in their own terms and in their own settings" (p.22).

The frame of reference is from the subjects rather than the study. This qualitative approach reflects a basic tenet of feminist research where a woman's voice is valued and her personal experience is a source of knowledge and truth (Weiler, 1991). Weiler argues that this feminist epistemology, growing out of early consciousness-raising groups to current women's studies programs, is perhaps the most fundamental tenet of feminist
pedagogy. This type of research also recognizes and values the positionality of women’s experiences, stemming from women’s differences (Maher and Thompson Tetreault, 1994). Hence, by allowing women to speak from their frame of reference, we ensure their different locations are acknowledged. Further, I anticipated depth, complexity, richness, ambiguity and contradiction as my participants gave meaning to their experiences. Quantitative methodology is relatively intolerant of ambiguity, contradiction and difference in its attempt to quantify the data.

Criticism of qualitative methodology tends to center around its lack of reliability and validity. A counter-argument put forth by Michael Brenner (1985) points to a failure on social scientists’ part to accomplish their ultimate goal of valid knowledge when social scientists have tended to bend, re-shape, and distort the empirical world to fit their models. While I agree that quantitative research serves a valuable purpose by providing some sense and order to the chaos of human knowledge, it is important to note that not all knowledge can be so easily measured and therefore replicated. There is a lot of gray area in human knowledge which is equally valuable and requires recognition in a meaningful way.

**Intensive Interviewing**

I chose to use an intensive interviewing methodology because of what this research question demands. Only intensive interviewing would honour the participants’ voices and create a space for them to give meaning to their experiences. Reflecting a basic feminist tenet. Seidman (1991) proposes that “at the heart of intensive interviewing
is the acknowledgment that other individuals' stories are of worth" (p. 3). I believe it is also critical to use intensive interviewing because I am studying women who presumably have a heightened awareness and appreciation for feminist methodologies.

Furthermore, some of the issues I explored with these women were at times awkward, difficult and painful to discuss. The intensive interview has the potential for a more intimate and trusting bond between interviewer and participant compared to other qualitative methods. This potential allowed a safe place for these women to explore such issues.

The intensive interview also allowed for flexibility in its design. When using this method, I was able to grasp a more holistic picture of the participants' experiences including past, present and future events. In addition, I was able to deal with the subject matter on a variety of levels according to the complexity or detail of the participants' responses, allowing me to respond to contradictions and ambiguities as well as explore issues around difference. As Marshall and Rossman (1989) point out, any misunderstandings on the part of the interviewer or the participant can be checked immediately in a way which is just not possible when questionnaires are being completed. This flexibility is particularly useful when the interviewer is grappling with the notion of difference and attempting to fully engage in a participant's experiences which are radically different from their own. This procedure also allows the researcher to present a life history of the participants for context in data analysis.

Alternatively, a weakness of the intensive interview involves the opportunity for bias to occur. A participant may not reveal his/her true feelings on a particular question
because they feel uncomfortable. cannot remember and/or feels a lack of commitment to the study. However. this is a potential weakness affecting virtually all human subject research. A lack of commitment to the study should be evaluated at the initial telephone contact.

Another weakness occurs when the interviews are being transcribed. Important physical cues may be omitted or responses interpreted incorrectly. This latter point highlights the importance of asking the respondents for clarification on points that are not clear.

In keeping with my arguments for using intensive interviews. I similarly chose a semi-structured interviewing format. I anticipated the participants' responses to entail a wealth of detailed and descriptive narratives as they explore their feminisms. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to present several broad themes to each participant. allowing them to respond from their own points of reference. (Refer to Appendix A for a list of the interview themes.) I anticipated that loosely defined themes would counteract any foreseeable interviewer bias whereby I was manipulating their responses according to the wording and/or phrasing of the questions being asked.

Quinn Patton (1980) refers to the presentation of themes as a general interview guide. He proposes that this approach involves:

...outlining a set of issues that are to be explored with each respondent before the interviewing takes place. These issues need not be taken in any particular order
and the actual working of questions to elicit responses is not determined in advance (p.206).

This format again exemplifies the flexibility of the semi-structured intensive interview. where the interviewer adjusts the sequence of the themes to the flow of the interview. With this flexibility, the flow of the interviews remained undisturbed which could have otherwise disrupted the bond established between myself and the participant. As well, by presenting themes rather than specifically phrased questions, I was able to pick up on the respondents' unique terminologies or sayings. These types of cues helped to formulate a more holistic picture of the participants' experiences.

**Participants**

Selecting the participants was based on an informal networking process. Because of my personal feminist activities while attending this particular university. I was able to approach one feminist woman who I still have contact with, and ask her if she would be willing to participate in this study as well as refer me to any other women who might be interested. A networking process began this way until I had eight women willing to be interviewed. Ethically. I was concerned about contacting women and saying "I got your name from so and so" and these women being able to identify this contact person in my study. I was also somewhat concerned about using a friend as a participant. I worried that she might react differently to me than if I were a total stranger. In hindsight.
involving this particular friend in the study proved to be a positive and rewarding experience for both of us. Initially, I contacted all of the participants by phone.

I conducted six interviews in total, one of these interviews consisting of three women. All of the participants were exposed to some feminist theory and/or organizing at a particular university within the last ten years. In keeping with the exploratory nature of this project, two of these interviews were unique in nature. As mentioned, one of these entailed a group interview of three women. These women collectively started a graduate feminist literature group on campus. I structured the interview primarily around their experiences as a feminist group while I focused more minimally on the themes and the meaning these women gave to them.

The other interview was unique because it was a telephone interview. The participant lives in the United States and due to financial constraints and time pressures. I decided to conduct the interview this way. I will discuss the effectiveness of this interview technique in the second half of this chapter.

All of the interviews were conducted in the privacy of the participants' homes. I hoped that this familiar environment would allow the respondents to feel more at ease and comfortable during the interviewing process.

I advised all of the participants in advance that there would be a consent form they would need to sign. This consent form outlined that the interview will be 1-2 hours in length and would be recorded by tape recorder only later to be transcribed onto a computer diskette. The names of all those interviewed and any named people and places would remain confidential and replaced with pseudonyms. In addition, the consent form
outlined that the transcripts will remain in a locked filing cabinet and that there is no
obligation on the part of the respondents to participate or answer any questions in the
interview if they did not wish to do so. (Refer to Appendix B for a sample of this form.)

**Interview Techniques**

There were certain techniques that seemed essential if the intensive interviews
were to be effective. This section will outline some of the interviewer techniques which I
made a concerted effort to integrate into the interview process.

Due to the nature of the subject being discussed, it was important that I attempt to
develop some level of trust with the participants. While the consent form outlined the
basic precautions to be used to ensure confidentiality, I reinforced these precautions prior
to the interview commencing. In addition, I began with small talk, looking for some
common ground. I hoped that this would put the participants at ease and develop some
degree of trust between us.

By referring to the list of interview themes, I attempted to have the respondents
cover all of these themes. Brenner (1985) argues:

...the interviewer must try to obtain accounts on all the topics listed in the guide.
How he/she does this is unimportant, as long as he/she acts nondirectively and
takes care that the accounts are adequate (free from internal inconsistencies, for
example) and as complete as possible (p. 152).
Reflecting Brenner's point. I did not feel that it was necessary to have the participants clarify all contradictions. While I was aware of inconsistencies and asked for clarification where necessary, I allowed for a certain degree of ambiguity and contradictions in their narratives. I believe all human behavior is, to a certain point, ambiguous and contradictory. This is especially true of women's feminism which tend to consist of a variety of conflicting influences.

I attempted to be acutely aware of any overt and observable influences during the interview as well as the participants' motivational state. Along with the participants' narratives, these cues may offer the interviewer precious information. Brenner (1985) suggests that the interviewer check for the informant's cognitive state either during or at the end of the interview simply by asking the informant how they experienced the interview and the interview relationship. Hopefully this helps check for participants who were acquiescing with the interviewer because they either didn't care about the study or needed social approval.

My objective was to act as a facilitator throughout the interview and to act nondirectively. Furthermore, I assumed a non-argumentative and supportive role. Seidman (1991) offers the following suggestions when conducting an intensive interview: listen more, talk less; follow up on what the participant says, but don't interrupt; ask questions when you do not understand; explore, don't probe; avoid leading questions; ask open-ended questions; keep participants focused and ask for concrete details; share experiences on occasion; ask participants to reconstruct, not to remember; follow your
hunches; use the interview guide cautiously; and tolerate silence. In the second part of this chapter, I will be able to reflect on how successful these strategies were in the field.

**Post-Interview Findings**

The purpose of this section is to critically review intense interviewing when used in the field. As mentioned, two of these interviews were unique in that one was conducted by telephone and the other one was a group interview. The remaining four interviews were one-on-one and in-person. I initially contacted all of these women by phone to request their participation. At that point, I made them aware of the themes to be examined, asked them for permission to tape record the interview and advised them of the consent form which I required them to sign prior to being interviewed.

Prior to each interview commencing, I attempted to establish some common ground on topics unrelated to the interview topics. After each interview, I checked for participant motivational state by asking each of them how they felt the interview went.

**The Telephone Interview**

I purposely contacted Zolah three times prior to the actual interview to give her the interview themes and to have her speak about her more recent life experiences. Because I was unable to meet with her in person and establish a more natural bond, my intention was to have more pre-interview contact. When the actual interview was finished, I asked Zolah how she felt being interviewed by telephone. She had indicated
that while it is usually much nicer in person, she felt the phone may have allowed her to disclose a lot more because she is talking to a voice rather than a body. This provided her with a certain level of anonymity. She also stated that the pre-interview calls added to a feeling of safety for her. Zolah did point out, however, that at the same time, she would have liked being guided or prompted by some visual cues which in-person interviewing provide.

My concerns over participant comfort and trust to disclose personal information with a phone interview appear to be minimized by Zolah's post-interview assessment. Clearly, the pre-interview contact is essential to building this element of trust. In addition, while Zolah felt interviewer visual cues may have helped her in some way, it can be argued that this may be detrimental to the interview as it can lead to interviewer bias.

My only reservation about using phone interviews concerns the interviewer not listening as intensely as they would with the in-person interview. I found a lack of visual contact could lead to more interviewer distraction. As well, having a view of the participant allows the interviewer to observe physical cues which are quite meaningful in the analysis of the data.

The Group Interview

The group interview consisted of three women who had collectively started a feminist literature group. All of these women are enrolled in their 4th year of a PhD in English. The interview was held at Samantha's home. The interview mainly dealt with a
discussion around the history of the feminist reading group, which is currently defunct, and the problems that arose during its existence. The interview was conversational style and for the most part, I felt I was merely an observer of their discourse.

I would recommend for future group interviews, the interviewer attempt to have some pre-interview contact with all the group members. This would allow for a more balanced relationship between the interviewer and the participants. Unfortunately, I only had contact with Samantha, so essentially I was interviewing the others as total strangers. When the research question entails such personal issues like one's feminism, pre-interview contact with all the members seems necessary. I think this weakness was somewhat overcome by the fact that these three women knew and trusted each other. Contacting all group members would be particularly useful when the group members are not as close.

When I checked for post-interview motivational state, all three women expressed positive feedback. They did express a desire to have me share some of my experiences with them as the process felt imbalanced in that way. Unfortunately, due to time constraints. I was usually unable to work in this way. Perhaps in future work, better time management would allow for a sharing of experience.

The One-on-One Interviews

The one-on-one interviews went equally well. As I mentioned, all of these interviews were conducted in the participants homes, which I believe allowed them to feel more comfortable with the issues being explored. I attempted to avoid giving
physical cues, either positive or negative responses to what they were saying. My reactions would, however, inevitably surface from time to time. If anything, these occasions seemed to offer the participants some confidence to explore their experiences more deeply. There was the occasional problem with memory lapse, although all of the women had indicated they had spent some time thinking about what they wanted to talk about and referring back to personal essays, newspaper articles and journal entries to refresh their memories. The tape recorder was only slightly distracting when a tape would run out and the participant would be speaking of a very personal moment.

I found all of these women to be very articulate and their experiences to be incredibly meaningful and complex. The intensive interview, with its built-in flexibility, allowed me to respond to certain issues, request clarification if needed and offer these women time to think through the complexities of their own words. Some of the women commented that they felt I was a good listener and that I asked good questions during the process which reassured me that I was listening. One of the potential problems when using a recorder.

During the end of one of these interviews, the interview was cut short by a visitor who sat through the remaining 10 minutes. While these situations cannot be predicted or avoided in some cases, it did have a profound effect on the space I felt was created between myself and the participant. Further, I felt rushed to finish, so the flow of the interview was inevitably disrupted.

I thought that the intensive interviewing strategies as outlined by Seidman (1991) were very beneficial. It felt quite natural, perhaps because of my gender conditioning
and/or my feminist consciousness-raising. to listen more and talk less. to explore not probe and to follow up on what the participant was saying but not interrupt. I did have to make a conscious effort to tolerate silence. And I found it quite rewarding when I did, as it provided the participants time to contemplate and respond in a more meaningful way.

Organizing and Analyzing the Data

Typed transcripts of these interviews served as the data. The data was coded based on common themes and analyzed in two chapters. Chapter 4 will be an summation of each interview. Chapter 5 will be a thematic approach where I will highlight both commonalities and differences among the participants’ responses and compare these findings to the literature review. Analyzing the data involved reviewing the transcripts carefully to see if any regularities and irregularities occurred in terms of words, themes or concepts. Marshall and Rossman (1989) argue that the purpose of open-ended material is to understand the meaning of the communication, both its manifest and latent meaning, within the context of the respondent's own frame of reference. Hence, it was critical to be aware of the more subliminal cues, like laughter and sarcasm, when I was analyzing the data.

As with any research study, I had to stand back from my research problem and gain a new perspective, working with the contradictions and exploring unanticipated relationships. When analyzing the data, I discovered common stages in the trajectory of each participants’ feminisms. I have structured Chapter 5 around these common stages. Each of the participants seemed to be initially exposed to feminist theory and feminist
organizing during their undergraduate years at university. The next stage seemed to be actualizing feminist theory whether it was in the classroom or in feminist groups. Graduation seemed to mark the next stage, followed by entering the job market to where they find themselves today. My analysis centers around this common trajectory in each of the participants' feminisms. I discovered common and different experiences as each participant traveled through these stages. I have attempted to relate these experiences to the literature review.

Summary

All of the participants were very articulate as they shared extremely complex, meaningful and intensely personal feminist journeys. I found this form of exploration to be extremely rewarding as I momentarily shared in these women's worlds and learned so much more about this research question. The next chapter will present descriptions of each interview.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE PARTICIPANTS

Introduction

All of the eight women interviewed have been exposed to some feminist theory and feminist organizing at a particular university. At the time of the interviews, the participants are between 25-30 years old and have all graduated from their undergraduate degrees within the last seven years. Three participants are enrolled in a Doctoral program, two women are enrolled in a Master of Arts program, one woman has just completed her Master of Arts and the remaining two participants are working and have a Bachelor of Arts degree.

Individual Descriptions

Claire

At twenty-eight years old, Claire has completed her first short film which was recently featured in an International Film Festival. She started her undergraduate studies in 1986 and stopped taking courses in 1992. Her degree was an interdisciplinary Bachelor of Arts where she started in Administrative Studies, took on a philosophy focus and ended up in Women's Studies. Her feminist involvement outside the classroom was mainly consumed by co-founding and co-producing a women's radio show for the campus radio station which she and her partner attempted to run as a women's collective.
Claire describes her experiences with feminist theory as "...really engaging and stimulating and pluralistic and full of possibility." Like many women discovering feminist theory for the first time, Claire's initial experience was transformative:

It was like a rebirth, a transformation that is ongoing, but for me it was like the catalyst to explode in a way, to just open up all these thoughts that I had and to realize that everything was so constructed and permeable and much more in flux than I had thought. It was really like this kind of validation and beginning of a kind of consciousness, so it was really 70s in that way.

Although Claire was quite impassioned about feminist theory, she did feel there were gaps in areas like race. She recalls taking an African-American Women's Literature course which was taught by a white woman because there weren't any black feminist professors to teach the course. While Claire felt it was more important for a white woman to teach the course than not at all, it was only offered once as a special topics half course. Claire also mentioned that although she did not have a strong consciousness as a Chinese-Canadian woman during her university years, the material did seem to alienate women of colour.

Applying feminist theory to the women's radio show proved to be quite problematic and disillusioning for Claire. She attempted to structure the show as a women's collective where each member had an equal voting right in the decision making. She describes the process as "a rather difficult, cumbersome kind of experience" and attributes this partly to inexperience but also acknowledges the uneven degrees of
commitment as being a factor. Perhaps more painful, however, was the infighting that took place. Claire describes this problem as "...trying to work with a group of people who all had similar issues in that kind of life baggage kind of way." Different strands of feminist politics seemed to create group tensions. Reluctance among members to overtly address group conflict resulted in back biting, leadership trashing, and ultimately factionalism.

Claire also found the unchecked content and quality of the members' shows problematic. Because Claire valued the feminist concept of letting women discover their voices and not arbitrate what women say, each member was given the responsibility to choose a topic, its content and its presentation. This invariably led to questionable quality and content at times, an issue that remained unresolved due to the difficulties of addressing conflict as already outlined.

Hence, as a result of these experiences, Claire now realizes how "tricky" it is to apply feminist theory to practice. It is partly out of her painful experiences with this group, along with where her priorities lie today, which account for a general moving away from feminist activism. She acknowledges that she isn't even involved in the women and film organization which is mainly reflects a "middle-class, white, professional" interest.

Claire intimates that while she didn't feel cheated by the program per se, as if it offered her some "naive promise of a changed world", she did experience a process of being disappointed by the fact that what she learned in Women's Studies wasn't really able to "put her in a different place". She comments that:
I don't know if it was feminism as much as it is trying to effect socio-political change and trying to be very idealistic at first and then coming into a natural and sadly inevitable disillusionment or something or shifting gears, or gearing down and not ending back in neutral or park but still moving along slowly in first gear. whereas I thought you could go along in third gear the whole way. And that is disappointing and that is disillusioning.

Despite this, feminism plays a significant role in Claire's day-to-day life. She feels that feminism has allowed her to engage in her life in a slightly different way. Claire believes that she now has an acknowledged name for her personal growth and her identity.

While Claire's priorities lie with creating and producing her own films, she does express some willingness to join a women's filmmakers group which is supportive as opposed to socially active. Claire also acknowledges the importance of Women Film Festivals in their promotion of women's voice through the film medium.

As Claire personalizes her feminism, she is able to provide some appreciation for her work as a woman in art and the difficulty and anxiety women experience when creating and how that is engendered in some ways. She is therefore left with some invaluable skills to critically engage in her world and place her experiences in a socio-political context.
Tracy

Like Claire, twenty-six year old Tracy was engaged in feminism both inside and outside the classroom setting. While her political affiliations and activisms are too numerous to list, the range of her involvement was exceptionally broad, admirably reflecting the multiplicity of feminist issues. Tracy’s feminism entails questioning all sources of oppression, hence, her involvement in a coalition to fight racist scholarship, for example, was rightly feminist in its intolerance of racism at the university.

Most notably, Tracy was instrumental in making gays, lesbians and bisexuals visible on campus. She co-founded a campus organization with this explicit mandate. The structure, while loosely based on feminist principles, did consist of an executive which was mindful of race and gender in its electoral process.

She achieved a Bachelor of Arts (honours) degree in Women’s Studies, attending university between 1990-1994. Her first step towards feminist activism was marked by attending a Women’s Issues Commission meeting in her first year. While she describes this step as "ground shaking", it nonetheless took her years to attend another meeting. She found the first meeting to be “cliquey and scary for newcomers” as she states:

Feminism really started to take on meaning for me and it seemed scary and it seemed serious but it also seemed wonderful and so I went to this meeting and I was terrified and some of these women had the greatest self-confidence and self-esteem and maybe it was just that they were so comfortable in that environment and they all knew each other...and nobody made any efforts to make me feel welcome...and they talked about stuff and I felt afraid to ask what is that or I don't
understand. I said something and some woman said "What! You don't know what that means?" [gasps as if mortified] I thought this was supposed to be wonderful. this was supposed to be safe and this is not what this is....and I left. I remember. I was almost in tears. I thought. I can't go back. holy cow. this is awful.

In the attempt to find a safe place on campus and to help articulate her feminism. Tracy found refuge in other groups. particularly the gay, lesbian and bisexual group she co-founded. She states that "I guess at that stage. I was a lesbian with a vengeance...I just wanted to identify that way and do stuff from that angle. it was liberating." She identifies the paradox of finding a "safe" group where you can be with people more like yourself. forming a clique. and the necessity for such a group. particularly for lesbians within the larger context of the movement. However. Tracy appreciates the need to work towards the bigger goal of ending all oppressions. and not to "close yourself off". which the formation of factionalized groups may encourage.

Problems with group infighting did exist among the gay. lesbian and bisexual group as well. She attributes this mainly to politics. whereby some of the so-called "radical" actions like spray painting gay and lesbian slogans on campus property were considered offensive by some members. While these actions stirred controversy among the entire university population. they did however. surface the issue of homophobia and created visibility for the gay and lesbian community at the university.

It was disturbing to listen to the overt anger and hatred Tracy and her group experienced from others while attending university. Some of the examples Tracy gave included:
Written on a phone booth in a few of the Colleges—save a seal, club a dyke. We would post our signs and then we would repost the next day because our posters would be ripped down faster than anyone else's. At the presidential forum for Student's Council candidates, I got up and asked them what they plan to do for the gay and lesbians on campus...the people in [the audience] went nuts. Some of them threw things, some of them screamed and yelled. The campus newspaper would publish valentine messages for free every year. They devoted a whole page of valentine messages, you know. Susan from Michael, this kind of thing. We inundated them. We had everyone from our group send one in whether they were in a couple or not and we delivered them all together. We know that they got about 50 love letters and they didn't print one.

Tracy’s anger, particularly in reaction to the overt homophobia she was forced to endure, was a big energizer behind her politics. This anger and frustration was also felt inside the feminist classroom, as mainstream feminism was somewhat intolerant of her "radical" politics and theories. She recalls one incident where a woman in one of her feminist classes was doing a presentation on the role men play in the women's movement. Tracy was initially reluctant to come to this class because "...you get to know where these people are coming from...I would be fed up with a lot of people in the Women's Studies classes and some of them I thought - what are you doing here, more interested in twirling their hair and not offending men." She went on to explain that after this woman's presentation, one of the male students shared a story about how he tried to
explain to children what feminism meant. After this student told his story, the women in Tracy's class began clapping. Tracy describes her reaction:

That was the last straw for me. I stood up and I said, "Why are you people clapping? If I just told you the same story would you be clapping for me? I do far more than he has ever done and I'm not getting clapped. but you're clapping for him right now!" Did that make me really pissed off. So I didn't have a lot of support in my Women's Studies class.

Tracy feels that when explosive situations like this would arise, some teachers were afraid to address the conflict. Besides ineffective conflict resolution, she also identified the different levels of feminist knowledge, insight and experience among students as a source of tension inside the feminist classroom.

Commenting on infighting within the feminist classroom. Tracy states: "there's lesbians getting fed up with straight women wanting to sort of apologize for men or include their men, or being too male-identified or something....and they all complain about not being accepted by the straight women, and that straight women are too lesbophobic or whatever." Tracy is also mindful of the fact that there is not enough attention paid to race which can result in further classroom tension. It is the infighting that Tracy finds frustrating about feminism, where feminists misdirect their energies towards each other rather than the real enemy.

The flexibility of the feminist classroom, particularly relating to writing feminist papers, was one of the pleasures for Tracy. She describes herself as a "self-directed
learner" who will "...do what they want on the first paper, let them know that I know what I'm doing, like leave me alone, I don't need a professor kind of thing and then go out and do what I want to after that." Tracy was able to formulate her essays, playing with punctuation and incorporating lyrics from a favorite song, in ways that other mainstream courses would not have tolerated.

Other than the infighting within feminist circles, Tracy identifies the difficulties of living a feminist life in the context of mainstream culture as the real source of her frustration. In other words, it is not feminism per se, but fighting the forces of patriarchy that can be exhausting. Tracy talked about the depression she felt when faced with graduation and trying to decide how to live a feminist life and make a living as a feminist.

The birth of her niece proved to be a real turning point in her life as it helped her realize her true calling: a midwife. At the time of the interviews, Tracy was practicing as a dula; however, she is in the process of applying to the Midwifery program. She describes her current work as a dula in the following way: "To be a dula is to be doing explicitly feminist work. You're helping a woman to have a wonderful birth experience in a culture that does not give birth is rightful place...and being a mother, the place and credit that it deserves. And so you're validating that against a culture that doesn't value them and you're supporting their choices." According to Tracy, a dula is a non-clinical midwife who doesn't have the certification to use their medical skills.

Graduation was also a turning point in Tracy's feminism. Through exposure to other women, some older, some mothers, she learned to be more tolerant of the difficult choices women make in life and to respect their positioning, regardless of how explicitly feminist their lives may seem. Tracy states that "I think we're all full of contradictions
and inconsistencies and that's us trying to be in this culture that still forces us to be the way it wants us to be, and we're sort of caught in the middle and we make our choices." She attributes this transition partly to maturity, partly to being involved in things which are not explicitly feminist and partly to reading bell hooks.

Tracy is quite optimistic about the future of the women's movement and her individual feminism. She believes that most women are personalizing their feminisms as they live their lives, settle down and create their families. She sees small pockets of resistance where more and more people are beginning to teach their children about anti-racism and anti-sexism. Tracy looks forward to actualizing her plans with her partner to have babies. "bring them up the way we want, live our lives in sort of a feminist way, vegetarians, home schooling possibly, and breast feeding." For her, feminism has not only given her the skills to view her world more holistically and critically, but through these skills and the support of a feminist community, live a life as a woman that is different, making lesbianism an honourable choice.

Zolah

At the time of the interview Zolah is 25 years old. She graduated in 1991 from university with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Women's Studies. Currently, she is in her second and final year of a MSW program at an American university and is doing an internship three days a week at a community health centre, mainly working with Latino and African American women.
Like Tracy, the extent and range of Zolah's feminist activism is quite large and diverse, again reflecting the multiplicity of feminist issues. Her first experience with a feminist organization was an abortion rights group while attending university.

Zolah's initial experience with feminist theory was outside the classroom when she came across a feminist book. She describes this experience as "a bolt of lightning providing words to unspoken thoughts and feelings." While she found the Women's Studies program to be a very positive experience overall, she did note that in her third year, she became aware of the silencing of women who were not white and heterosexual. Recognizing the frustration women of colour often experience if they try to educate white women about race, Zolah believes white women should take responsibility to educate themselves about racism. She is critical of mainstream academic feminist theory for its racial bias and sees a need among feminists to deconstruct feminist theory in order to account for women's differences. Furthermore, Zolah is critical of the inaccessibility of academic feminism which excludes the very women it is trying to help.

As a Jewish bisexual woman, Zolah never really found a place for herself even within the feminist community at this particular university. Because her classes mainly comprised WASP middle-class straight women, she never felt safe expressing her issues. Even in feminist organizing, Zolah had to struggle to find her voice. Zolah recalls one incident where, after graduation from university and living in Vancouver, she submitted an article to a lesbian publication she was involved with promoting a lesbian comic. After submitting the piece, she was informed by the editor that it wasn't their policy to have bisexuals writing about lesbian women. At the time of the article, Zolah was having a relationship with a woman, so she felt she was living as a lesbian. While she can
appreciate separatism as a necessary stage in one's identity formation. Zolah still felt her identity was as a lesbian at that time.

Zolah also felt her racial identity was quite ambiguous. Regarding race, while her skin is more or less white, she points out that she is never really considered to be from Canada. People would confront her wanting to know where she was from assuming she is of a Hispanic, a Brazilian, or a Melado ethnicity. Zolah also experienced some anti-semitism even within feminist circles.

Despite the shortcomings of her experiences with feminist theory and activism, Zolah consciously chose to live a transformative feminist life upon graduation. She was chosen to work with a UN sponsored group on a project to establish a women's shelter overseas in the war-torn former Yugoslavia. Zolah describes her involvement:

We went to one of the refugee camps and spoke with some of the Bosnian women there and worked with them to develop a fundraising project. Sewing machines had been donated, so these women were sewing to keep busy and keep their minds off things. We would take their goods and distribute them in Germany and Switzerland with stores that wanted to sell them for nonprofit and give them money.

It was through experiences like these, that Zolah began to recognize how resourceful low-income and women in developing countries are, and how much she could learn from these women. Zolah is critical of North American feminism's tendency to judge these women.
Part her feminist transformation incorporated a spiritual awakening. While overseas, Zolah began the painful yet exhilarating process of peeling off layers of her past and reclaiming her identity. Part of that process entailed coming into her identity as a Jew and deciding to find another name for herself. After coming to terms with the sexual abuse that she had suffered as a child, she wanted to dispel the name her father had given her. "I wanted to give birth to myself". She set out to Eastern Europe where her ancestors were from in the hopes that she would discover a woman in her family that she could identify with and therefore be named after. During her journey, she learned about her great-grandmother Zolah and she knew immediately that she was the one. Zolah recounts her great-grandmother's story:

I really identified with her ability to endure suffering and struggle. First, she resisted the lies that the S.S. officers were telling villagers that they were being transported to these family camps and then released again. Something inside her told her that that was bullshit and she wasn't going to put her family in danger. A lot of Jews didn't want to face their hunch that they were going to be done in or they didn't want to believe what they had heard about these concentration camps. I just admire the real independence of thought and spirit for my great-grandmother to take her remaining three children, because the other three had already left the country and her husband had already been killed, and give everything she owned to this Polish family so they could hide in this family's basement for four years. I just thought about her and I thought about her getting up every day and thinking maybe this will be the day that the war will be over. And having her dream being
interrupted only three days before the war ended when they were discovered and shot. I felt that since I was the first person in my family to go back to where my ancestors came from and to face that sense of presence that you feel. I really felt that I was protected by Zolah the time that was there and I wanted to take on her name so I could tell her story. Because her name isn't very common, so many people ask me about it and I get to tell her story and share in her legacy.

Feminism has not only given Zolah the ability to critically engage in her world and see rewards in helping women at a grassroots level, but a spiritual rebirthing and healing from past injustices against herself and the women in her family's lineage.

Her feminist journey has taught her to respect the differences among women. She recognizes a lot of gray area in women's lives and the appropriating of feminist theory to such lives. Zolah is hopeful that other feminists will be equally tolerant of women's differences, whether it stem from one's sexuality, one's race, or one's politics. For Zolah, the world is much more gray than black and white or dichotomous. It has been through some of the painful experiences with feminist organizing and theory that Zolah has arrived at the critical position of viewing all sides to a situation. The process of unwrapping her identity is described as "[feminism] helps me to take off the layers of socialization that have built up and as the years go by, that colour of what I really am becomes clearer and clearer underneath. All the grime of socialization gets swept and washed away. Feminism has been the cornerstone of my coming into an identity."
Amy

Amy, twenty-nine years old, has just completed a Masters of Arts in French at the time of the interview. She started her undergraduate degree in 1986. Like all of the women interviewed thus far, Amy's feminist experiences extend beyond the classroom. Most of the feminist theory she studied was in a literary context as her academic focus has primarily dealt with women authors. Outside of the classroom, Amy was involved in a number of organizations dealing with refugee women and women in developing countries. Her work has taken her to places like Morocco where she was involved in some developmental work.

Amy believes that the main source of her disenchantment with feminism involves the way feminists negatively treat the choices made by third-world and refugee women. Within this context, Amy is critical of mainstream feminism's tendency to exclude diversity in its theory and practice. She recalls the intolerant comments among her feminist coworkers towards Moroccan women who wore the veil. While she originally endorsed the notion of a "sisterhood", Amy no longer believes such a thing exists.

Amy is also bothered by feminism's judgments about women in male-identified occupations. She remembers when a group of exotic dancers at a local bar donated a night's earnings to the Battered Women's Shelter. The management at the shelter refused to accept the money stating: "These women had no right as they were playing into a role that men had identified for them."

Feminists may overemphasize the concept of victimization in their theorizing which is problematic for Amy. She believes that by doing this, feminists are playing into the hands of patriarchal men. Further, Amy sees issues like date rape and wife abuse as
women's and men's issues, not solely women's issue. Isolating ourselves and viewing sexism as if it were a war is to dichotomize gender into a no-win situation, according to Amy. She states:

We're not fighting war. that means that one side had to win and if one side has to win that means we will have a matriarchy. I don't believe in a matriarchy as much as I don't believe in a patriarchy. And I don't quite understand how we are supposed to live with each other as men and women if we are not working with each other.

Amy believes that if women do not include men in the struggle to end sexism they are living in a vacuum.

While Amy found academic feminism's discussion of goddess archetypes stimulating, she also felt there was a tendency in Women's Studies to undervalue traditional religions. Amy found that growing up Catholic, her Catholicism has taught her a lot about strength and believing in herself as a woman. Rather than 'throwing the baby out with the bath water', feminists should recognize some of the good in traditional structures like Catholicism where Amy believes there are some positive role models for women.

Inside the feminist classroom, Amy was not comfortable when classes became too therapeutic. She felt that this seemed to lend itself to competition over who was the most oppressed. Amy was concerned that if there was a movement towards claiming an
oppressed status, it may undermine the real life experiences of those women that were
legitimately victims of oppression.

Amy is also critical of feminist students who are judgmental of the more
traditional students when she states: "I used to see feminists in my classroom treat women
who were 'traditional' as ignorant, saying you're in denial. Like that's the biggest insult.
what if they're not in denial, what if they know what they want? That doesn't show
respect for women." Amy believes that feminists are pushing women away by treating
them this way and silencing them. It is this type of intolerance of the different choices
women make in their lives, resulting in factionalism and infighting, which Amy views as
counterproductive for the movement.

For Amy, feminism does not promote a positive image regarding women's
sexuality, female beauty, and heterosexual relationships. In the attempt to achieve gender
equality, some of the mystery that exists between women and men in heterosexual
relationships may be lost. Amy sees the concept of equality as a dubious one for in
relationships conflict and little power struggles will always exist, which can be healthy in
some cases. Furthermore, she doesn't mind the idea of admiring female beauty or
viewing women as sexy. However, she would like to see more emphasis placed on the
concept of intelligence as sexy.

Amy points out incidences where, among her feminist peers, she was accused of
being too male-identified or male patronizing, basically giving men more credibility. She
felt that she was being forced to justify her relationships with men which was very
problematic for Amy.
Other disturbing experiences for Amy include feeling pressure from her feminist friends to go into psychotherapy as she states: "I had close feminist friends tell me that I should go into therapy; you probably have father issues, paternal issues, and suddenly everything was an issue." Amy later comments "...you know it's funny, when you're growing up you have a lot of pressure to have sex, and now I had to feel like I had to go into therapy."

By living through these painful experiences Amy has learned the lesson of tolerance. She describes her approach to feminism as more relaxed, giving people a chance to express themselves.

Amy is very grateful for the positive ways feminism has influenced her life. When I asked her what these positive influences are, she stated: "Strength and having confidence in myself as a woman. To have the opportunities to meet with other women, to have a political voice and know that that voice counts."

Interestingly, when I asked Amy if she was reluctant to get involved in a feminist organization based on these negative experiences with feminist theory and feminist organizing, she stated: "I thought I did, but the more I talk to you I think, no I don't. because if I don't speak out and if I don't get involved, I change nothing. I would get involved. I would definitely get involved. But I think it's important to listen to all feminist voices, no matter if we agree with each other or not."

Michelle

Michelle, thirty years old at the time of the interview, started her undergraduate degree in 1985, took four years off after her second year and returned where she
combined her English major with Women's Studies. She officially completed that degree in 1995 and is currently working towards a Master's degree in English which she hopes to complete in 1997. Michelle recently married and is living with her partner who is completing his PhD.

Her feminist activism has taken her to "Take Back the Night" marches and celebrating International Women's Day. She has worked at a Sexual Assault Center, a Battered Women's Advocacy Committee, a women's shelter and a campus Foot Patrol Program as a paid staff member.

For approximately the last two and a half years, Michelle's feminist activism has remained relatively dormant as she explains:

I've been in a state of self-imposed hiatus for awhile, just getting back into things but I'm finding at this point that I'm less interested in seeking out specifically feminist organizations. I'm interested in starting up a reading group so I can keep abreast of what's happening and the theory and the pop culture but for the time being. I'm probably not going to be sinking my teeth into anything that is out and out feminist organizing.

While Michelle feels that she lives her personal life in a feminist way, she attributes her lack of interest in feminist organizing to minimal funding and therefore minimal groups available that she could be involved with along with feeling burnout from previous feminist work. While working as an sexual assault hot-line support person, she found that she wasn't emotionally prepared to deal with some of the calls that she was
receiving which included suicidal calls, crank calls, and one woman who was just discovering she had a multiple personality disorder.

Michelle found her feminist classes to be a very positive experience and the course work to be quite rigorous academically. She notes that the classes she took were not "the stereotypical Women's Studies class: tell us about your life sort-of-touchy-feely consciousness-raising stuff".

There were, however, politics inside the feminist classroom. Michelle recalls one incident in her Feminist Theory and Methodology course where a mature student, who had extensive grassroots experience in the London community, was quite resistant to the theory and would challenge academic feminism in general. Michelle acknowledges that while this woman's presence was invaluable to the group's discussions, there were times when things became too "whiny". Apparently, this issue became even more problematic the following year. Michelle had several friends who were in the course, taught by another professor, where classroom politics were described as explosive and quite painful. The professor was from the Philosophy department and decided to experiment with the concept of allowing the students to choose the syllabus. According to Michelle, this experiment proved disastrous as the class spent the entire year arguing over what should be covered rather than actually studying any agreed upon material. There were a few students, who Michelle believes were quite determined to bring identity politics into the classroom, that were particularly difficult and as a result, the Women's Studies department had to meet afterwards to agree upon a written policy that would deal with future situations like this one.
Interestingly, Michelle brought up the notion that female professors receive less credibility from students as she states: "There would be a segment of the class that would dismiss almost anything she said and make it difficult for her to speak. Or if they would not confront her, they were extremely dismissive outside the classroom, in both feminist and nonfeminist classes. I saw it in every class where there was a female instructor and I have no statistics to back this up, this is my own personal experience." Michelle feels students expect more from female instructors, particularly in the feminist classroom. She felt that a certain percentage of feminist students, who she describes as "intolerant", would consistently interrupt professors, challenge what they were saying, demand the floor, and usually get what they wanted. Michelle states that the other women in the classroom were usually silenced by these more "radical" women which partly has to do with the fact that they were just coming into a feminist consciousness where they lacked the confidence and voice to share the floor with the more outspoken women. Hence, as Michelle states: "...an incredible percentage of the classroom gets put aside."

When I asked Michelle where she is with her feminism, she intimated that: "I'm at the point where I can safely make fun of it without putting myself at risk of being called a nonfeminist supporter." She goes on to explain that she is more practical in her application of feminist theory in her day-to-day life, no longer as volatile; the anger has subsided somewhat. She also notes that she will give more thought to issues rather than be quick to pass judgment. She attributes this to other life experiences, like her present relationship and getting to know about the lives of other women she has met and respecting the choices they have made. To offer an example of how her feminist beliefs have become less rigid, she explains that her partner hates to clean, which she
acknowledges falls into a gender stereotype, and this tends to be an ongoing battle between them. However, the power dynamic is slightly altered as her partner has absolutely no expectations of her to clean. Hence, she sees it rather as a personality issue than a gender-specific power struggle.

When the issue of power dynamics in heterosexual relationships came up, Michelle spoke about her frustration with some feminists' tendency to judge women who make traditional decisions in their lives. Michelle has a friend who is a well-known feminist in the academic community. Her friend recently decided to get married and live a traditional stay-at-home mother life. Many of this woman's feminist friends were quite critical of her traditional life. Michelle explains:

This is simply a stitch in time where she needs to forge this relationship in order to carry on. There is too much stigma in the feminist community among young female academic feminists against that part of your life where you are forging a heterosexual relationship. There is much more tolerance in that way for lesbian relationships and the demands that lesbian relationships make on feminist women than there is for the demands that can be made for heterosexual feminist women.

For Michelle these demands entail an unwillingness to make concessions with a man, which she believes is unrealistic in any relationship.

Despite these frustrations, feminism plays a central role in her identity as she explains "...it is one of the ways that I define myself. It is more practical but that is a result of my circumstances. I'm not reading any theory at the moment, I'm just living my
life and thinking about my choices and it's very grounded at the moment." While Michelle is unsure of the future trajectory of her feminism, she is certainly open to returning to grassroots activism or engaging in feminist theory again.

**Samantha, Christine and Evelyn**

All three of these women are in their fourth year of their PhDs in English at the time of the interview. Samantha, 28 years old, is single. Christine, 27 years old, is married and Evelyn, 27 years old, is living in a common-law relationship.

All three women co-founded a feminist literature reading group in the first year of their PhDs which is currently defunct. We spoke mainly about the reasons why this reading group did not work out, although other issues outside of the reading group relating to their personal experiences as feminists were also discussed.

The feminist reading group was meant to initially provide a forum to voice their concerns relating to feminist issues and keep abreast of feminist literature. They attempted to structure the group in a feminist way, keeping the structure very open, similar to a collective in terms of decision making and selecting topics.

Among the reasons they felt the group wasn't able to continue after a two year lifespan was a lack of focus. As Samantha states: "We were trying to be very inclusive, we wanted everybody to feel good and involved and no one to feel excluded and so it didn't end up satisfying anybody." As a result, various factions of literary interests developed and ended up forming their own reading groups like a post-colonial group, queer theory reading group and a race reading group.
Christine believes that their intention to not have any specific focus stemmed mainly from a commitment to making the reading group a collaborative effort and collective idea. Samantha agreed and saw her primary interest being a lot about relationships and getting to know people. Unfortunately, there were some downfalls to relationships being the primary focus. However, as Samantha acknowledged that at every meeting they were too concerned that everybody was interested and not feeling silenced or alienated.

Evelyn points out that these dynamics were further complicated with the different levels of feminist consciousness in the group. There were some women that were not comfortable with the label feminist. Evelyn also found that the group was ineffective when addressing conflict, fearful that they might seen as coming down too hard on people.

Maintaining commitment among the members was also a problem. Evelyn felt that in the later stages of the group’s existence, Christine was overburdened with most of the work.

It was the culmination of these issues along with the changing needs of these three women that led to the reading group being dissolved in their third year. At that point, Samantha’s academic work was not focusing on feminist theory. She states:

I think that I was becoming impatient with dealing with feminism. I wasn’t prepared to put a huge commitment to it. Had it been something practical like feminist pedagogy, it would be something that would interest a number of people because we are all TAs and it would have had some concrete application.
Both Samantha and Christine mention a general dissatisfaction with the lack of connection between academic high theory and its practical application to the community.

When speaking about feminist organizing generally, the issue of difference was brought up by Samantha. In her experience with feminist groups, difference among the membership was usually not addressed; rather, the commonalities of the group membership was typically the focus. She believes that by not acknowledging the differences in the group, overt tension inevitably develops. These women attribute feminist’s unwillingness to address difference and the tensions resulting from it to problems women have being assertive and assuming a leadership role, particularly in a feminist forum.

Evelyn describes her personal struggle with being assertive this way: “I feel a little bit schizophrenic: I will get excited about something and speak up but it’s always this examination where you think: Was I just pushing my ideas on everyone else and no one was really interested?” Evelyn takes the leadership and women issue into the classroom as she points out that she finds she expects more from her feminist professors, reflecting what would be expected in a mother-daughter relationship. Hence, in the feminist classroom, we expect the female in authority to be nurturing. One of Evelyn’s side topics for her dissertation touches on the mother-daughter relationship and just how complex that dynamic can be.

One of the wonderful things about interviewing this group of women was that I could listen to their personal experiences with feminism in the classroom as students and as teachers. Christine talked about her tendency as a teaching assistant to try to convert
female students in her classroom towards a feminist consciousness and the frustrations she felt when students were unresponsive or resistant. Christine's point caused Samantha and Evelyn to recall their experiences during their undergraduate years as students coming into a feminist consciousness. They spoke about this transition as an evolution whereupon it is necessary to question feminist theory and its validity in one's life. Samantha talked about the fear that she felt about saying the right things in the feminist classroom. Evelyn remembers feeling as if she had to read a certain amount of feminist literature before she could rightly wear the feminist badge.

As teaching assistants, all three women attempt to structure their classes with a critical feminist pedagogy unless the structure has been explicitly laid out for them otherwise by the professor. They talked about the gender differences among students in their classrooms where male students tend to occupy more space. Evelyn explains: "They take up more room somehow, their chairs, not just spatial room but the vibes they give out sort of takes up more room." Samantha commented "I find that my male students are active non-listeners sometimes. You can have a guy and a girl who have never spoken in the same class; you will be very aware of the guy's silence and of the girl. you think: Was she there?" Samantha believes the most valuable tool she can teach her students is to learn to actively listen to one another.

The role of female as intellectual and authority figure was mentioned. Christine and Evelyn could recall at least one incident in their experiences as teaching assistants where their gender seemed to be an issue. Christine shares one experience:
I come in. I sit down. I had two very hostile males in that class who continually interrupted me throughout the whole class to ask things like: “Can you tell me what’s going to be on the exam”, or. “Is our attendance and participation going to count for today”. throughout the entire class. I was able to respond enough to help shut him down but that was the most that I could do. And I know it had a lot to do with my gender and their lack of respecting any authority that I had in front of the classroom.

Evelyn's experience entailed the following:

When I was TAing film. we had to do quizzes and one of the last questions I had as a bonus question was: What are your TA’s office hours? One of these male students wrote: Whenever I want them to be! And I thought. oh my god. what do I do? So I asked this student if I could see him during my office hours and I asked him what he meant by it and you could tell he was really uncomfortable and thought I had it in for him for the rest of the year.

As we discussed the complexities of women as teachers in the university setting, all three women acknowledged the difficulties trying to do feminist work. whether it be as a teaching assistant or in their dissertation work, in a department which is not explicitly feminist. They pointed out that there are only two senior-level female professors in the English department and that they end up being overburdened with feminist students’ demands.
Closer to the end of the interview, they talked about the idea of trying to start the feminist reading group again. While Evelyn was somewhat skeptical about the idea, Christine and Samantha seemed quite willing to consider it. They talked about what they would do differently and felt that there was a need to structure the group where a focused list of readings would be prepared with the flexibility that members could make requests or offer suggestions. Evelyn felt that effective conflict resolution skills would have to be foregrounded.

**Summary**

All of these women have had experience with feminist theory and feminist organizing while attending a particular university. As well, all of these women have indicated disenchantment with feminist organizing and/or feminist theory which has had some impact on the trajectory of their feminisms from university through graduation and into the workplace to where they find themselves today. For the purposes of this study, graduation will indicate graduation from one's undergraduate degree.
CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS

Introduction

While I was listening to the participants talk about their experiences with feminist theory and feminist organizing, it became increasingly clear that their feminisms were ever-evolving, complex and influenced by their respective life stages. In other words, their feminisms were and continue to be lifelong journeys which began prior to university. For all of these women, however, it was at university that they began to articulate and organize around issues that were explicitly feminist, marking a feminist consciousness. While each participant had a unique way of viewing her feminist experiences and each feminism is quite different, there are some broad commonalities around the trajectories of each participant's feminism from university through graduation and into the workplace to where they find themselves today.

As cited earlier, bell hooks (1996) suggests: "people [young feminist women] often start off very enthusiastic about feminist thinking but as they encounter various modes of thought that challenge or engender despair about patriarchy changing, there is often a movement away." Reflecting hooks’ point, I believe there is a tendency for young women to initially find feminist theory very exciting. Among the participants, there appeared to be a general step from exposure to feminist theory to joining a feminist group. It was at this stage of trying to put feminist theory into practice, whether it be in the feminist classroom or in a feminist group, that most of the participants experienced
some level of frustration and disillusionment. These experiences, along with graduation into a minimally changed patriarchal world where participants were exposed to a more diverse population of women, resulted in a general movement away from explicitly feminist activism and theory.

I believe that each participant's feminist journey is inextricably tied to an ever-evolving self-identity. Feminism has offered these women the skills to view their worlds critically and place their identities in a socio-political context. As each of the participants lives her day-to-day life, feminism remains a very important element in her self-identity and life choices.

Relating what appears to be a common trajectory in young women's feminisms to the research question, I will argue that while there is evidence of some disenchantment among the participants with regards to feminist theory and feminist organizing, these experiences have given these women invaluable insight as to the limitations of feminist theory and activism, allowing them to formulate a more personalized feminist identity as opposed to an out-and-out rejection of feminism or living a fully transformed feminist life.

I will structure this chapter around main themes which I have identified as common stages in the participants’ evolving feminist identities. These themes will include: the introduction of feminism; the feminist classroom experience; the feminist organizing experience; graduation; and the participant’s current feminism. I will attempt to highlight both commonalities and differences among the participants’ experiences with each theme and relate their experiences to the literature.
Introduction to Feminism

The Subconscious Feminist

Many of the women stated that they had always held feminist beliefs prior to entering university. Tracy states: "I always told myself, even in high school, that I was a feminist, but what did that mean to me? Women should make equal pay to men? I don't know too many people that would disagree with that. When I was in high school, I didn't know what it meant." Christine similarly points out that "it [feminism] was sort of there for a long time, but it probably wasn't until university before I could say...really put a vocabulary to it and say: I'm a feminist." Further, Michelle states "I hadn't consciously aligned myself as a feminist, but I certainly always had feminist sentiments without being able to identity them." These women already had some level of feminist theorizing prior to entering university. By being exposed to feminist literature at university and by having a forum to discuss these unspoken ideas, their feminist inclinations were validated. similar to the reaction second-wave feminists experienced when they initially picked up Betty Friedan's 1963 publication The Feminine Mystique over thirty years ago giving some meaning to the 'problem without a name'.

Initial Exposure to a Feminist Consciousness

When these subconscious feminist ideas are validated by exposure to feminist literature the initial reaction can be quite profound. Claire described her feminist awakening as a "rebirth" and a "catalyst to explode". She describes it as a "kind of
validation and beginning of a consciousness". Zolah's initial experience was like a "bolt of lightning", while for Tracy it was "ground shaking". This sense that feminism is a validating experience reflects Belenky et al.'s (1986) emphasis on women's ways of knowing being different than men's and the need to provide a pedagogical style to accommodate such differences. Feminist theory and pedagogy is a means of validating women as producers and subjects of knowledge.

**The Feminist Classroom**

All of the participants took some feminist courses during their undergraduate years, keeping in mind that this particular university only began offering Women's Studies as a major in the late 1980s. Claire and Michelle's course work started out in other programs only to end up at Women's Studies. Amy, Christine, Evelyn and Samantha were able to take advantage of the interdisciplinary nature of Women's Studies and take feminist courses within the departments of French and English. Benefiting from starting their undergraduate degrees in the latter part of the 1980s and early 1990s. Zolah and Tracy majored in Women's Studies from the beginning. It would be interesting to examine data on how many women switch their majors to Women's Studies after initial exposure.

Participants' experiences inside the feminist classroom were generally very positive. Claire comments that she found feminist theory "engaging and stimulating and pluralistic and full of possibility". She goes on to talk about her realization that everything was "so constructed and permeable and much more in flux than I thought".
While it could be argued that mainstream curriculum does present the student with the skills to analyze their worlds critically, there is generally no specific discussion on gender constructions other than a cursory and binary approach to gender differences.

**Feminist Pedagogy**

Michelle states that "I had a great experience with Women's Studies." She found the course work to be academically rigorous contrary to stereotypical images she cites like "touchy-feely consciousness-raising". Claire, on the other hand, notes that the consciousness-raising of feminist pedagogy was one of the elements she most enjoyed. Some feminists are critical of a tendency towards 'therapeutic' environments in the feminist classroom (Patai and Koertge, 1994) reflecting Amy's comment that "As soon as feminist theory came up, suddenly everyone wanted to talk about their problems and maybe I'm being insensitive, but it's a classroom not a therapy group." Tracy expressed some dissatisfaction with a lack of time that could be realistically given to relational work in the classroom.

This is a complex debate. On the one hand, feminists value consciousness-raising as a cornerstone of feminist pedagogy where women may discover their voices in a supportive and connected environment (Belenky et al., 1986). On the other hand, feminist scholars are pressured by university administrators to prove Women's Studies' credibility as determined by traditional standards and measurements. And one of the traditional measurements used, student evaluations, may be influenced by socialized beliefs of what a higher learning environment should be.
As outlined in Chapter 2, the fact that feminist pedagogy remains in a somewhat exploratory stage, particularly in areas of anti-racism teaching (Carty, 1991), may incline feminist students to criticize the chosen pedagogy or course syllabus. Michelle talked at great length about this issue and offered several examples to illustrate her point that if students have too much say in terms of pedagogy and content it may prove counterproductive. Recall her story in Chapter 4 of the class that spent the entire year arguing over what should be covered rather than actually studying any agreed upon material. Feminist teachers struggle with the concept of authority and trying to include everyone's voice in their classrooms (Weiler, 1991). I believe more research needs to be done on student resistance in the feminist classroom. The fact that the Women's Studies professors at this university only recently got together to decide upon a strategy or policy for dealing with radical student resistance inside the feminist classroom highlights a need for more discussion and sharing of information on this issue.

Student expectations are further complicated based on the gender of the feminist teacher and the fact that she is teaching feminist values within a institutionalized setting. Michelle noticed an uneven treatment of female professors in both her feminist and nonfeminist classrooms. She felt that if the professor were female, she received less credibility from the students, who would dismiss almost everything she said and make it difficult for her to speak. Both Evelyn and Christine detail situations where, as teaching assistants, they felt they were being unfairly challenged by students based on their gender. As well, student expectations of what the feminist teacher can actualize in terms of a feminist pedagogy may be unrealistic as Evelyn points out: "I think I've been a lot
harder on the evaluations of my feminist professors because they purport to do this [feminist pedagogy] and they didn't deliver."

The gender of the teacher, the politics of the classroom and student expectations of feminist pedagogy appear all to play into the student’s evaluation of the feminist classroom.

**Theorizing Women's Difference**

While feminist theory provided an intellectual validation of their transforming self-identities, participants’ disenchantment with feminist theory tended to center around minimal theorizing of race and difference. Reflecting the literature on postmodernism. Amy states "I think a lot of the theory we read is just theory, because we are dealing with a huge spectrum of society and women are not just this one person. We're all different kinds of women and I think if we want women to gain power, we have to respect a lot of the differences." Amy refers to North American feminists’ tendency to underplay the experiences of refugee women or women in developing countries as she points out "...there is a reluctance from North American feminists to accept refugee women's' need to adapt feminism within their own lives at their own pace and within their own comfortability factor."

Zolah is similarly critical of her experiences with feminist pedagogy as she felt that there was a lot of silencing of the lesbian and bisexual women and women of colour in the classroom. She attributes this silencing to a lack of material on these women as well as Women's Studies classrooms not being a safe place for these women to air their concerns. Claire talked about minimal course selection in Women’s Studies dealing with
women of colour. Tracy read a lot of literature by lesbian women and women of colour on her own because of gaps in the course syllabus. Michelle identifies this white bias when she states: "I didn't have to deal with race because I wasn't confronted with it...it was something that I read a lot about [on her own]. All of my instructors were white. In my Women's Studies courses, not once was there a nonwhite woman in those classes which was absurd. It was an incredibly limited experience."

A lack of women of colour in feminist classrooms could be a result of academic feminism being viewed as a white woman's discipline. An under-representation of women of colour students and professors at this university is undoubtedly a product of systemic racism as well as the location of the university. Universities in larger cities show a tendency towards more racially diverse classrooms. While Michelle recognized a need to read about anti-racism on her own, her point that "I didn't have to deal with race because I wasn't confronted with it" is certainly reflective of black feminists' critique that white women do not theorize about race because racism does not appear to them to affect their lives personally. It should be noted, however, that race does affect white women in the sense of unconscious privilege. It would be interesting to interview women who are currently enrolled in Women's Studies courses to see how feminism's theorizing on race and difference has changed.

**Feminists Theorizing on Women's Sexuality**

Amy was the only participant who expressed some disenchantment with feminist theorizing on specific issues like women's spirituality, wife abuse, women in the workplace, victimization and the dichotomizing of men and women. Amy explains that
while she does not disagree with the dominant approach feminists seem to take on issues like wife abuse, she feels that feminists need to examine the gray areas in more detail before applying a strict orthodoxy to such issues.

All of the participants touched upon feminism and female sexuality or relationships with their partners on some level. Samantha pointed out that: "The backlash towards feminism and the media has affected feminism such that feminism isn't hip, chic, funky, sexy...because it isn't sexy. It's kind of this anti-sexy. and when you say that it sounds gross." Amy states: "There's nothing wrong with sexy...suddenly sexy is a bad word." Evelyn describes the tension she felt:

When we first started going out, big conflicts would erupt especially over the notions of sex because I was sort of in my more radical phase and I was trying to come up with theorizing heterosexual sex without feeling as if I was not being raped and trying to imagine it differently. My feeling that in a sense as a feminist, lesbian is the logical conclusion. so feeling frustrated being in a heterosexual relationship that I got into a few months before I came to that conclusion. feeling very divided all the time over sexuality and feeling as if I'm in a relationship that is working on so many levels. but me not being really fulfilled in other ways.

Maher and Thompson Tetreault (1994) point out that the heterosexual female student may experience some tension between her desire for heterosexual fulfillment and the presentation of woman as sexual victim of men.
This issue is further complicated when some students judge others as being too male-identified or forsaking their feminist beliefs while they are in heterosexual relationships. Amy mentions the tension she felt from her feminist peers when she was accused of being "male-identified" and "male-patronizing" and feeling pressured to justify her friendships with her male friends. Likewise, Michelle states that "...there is a tremendous amount of expectation that women won't give an inch, won't sacrifice anything for the sake of their relationships with men."

Tracy attributes this type of judging to a difference in feminist politics. For her, lesbianism is a choice. While she is no longer quick to judge women for the 'traditional' choices they make in their lives, while attending university as a self-described "lesbian with a vengeance", she expressed some frustration with the women in her feminist classes who "were more interested in twirling their hair and not offending men".

Alternatively, both Zolah and Tracy talk about a lack of material on lesbian and bisexual women. Their point is reinforced by the literature review in Chapter 2 which shows a heterosexual bias in mainstream feminist literature (Lenskyj, 1990). Tracy also points out complaints from her lesbian peers that they are not accepted by straight feminists because straight feminists are too "lesbophobic". Zolah talks about feeling ostracized by not only heterosexual feminists but lesbian feminists as well because of her bisexuality. She makes an interesting point when she states:

I would like to think that one day feminism can wake up a bit more and realize that by embracing bisexuality you are embracing ambiguity and grayness and the
refusal to be categorized. Even though I use the label bisexual, I don’t really feel it adequately describes me either. Feminism needs to look at labels and how they prevent people from expressing all that they are.

The fact that each participant identified sexuality as a source of tension in their identity formation with feminism not only reflects how deeply connected feminism is to a woman's personal identity but how complex and painful the process of coming into a feminist consciousness can be. For feminists who choose to be in a heterosexual relationship, I believe that their struggles to theorize such a relationship differently, as described by Evelyn, should not be underestimated. Many heterosexual feminists really struggle with this issue because no one really knows what a ‘equal’ intimate heterosexual partnership means. And, such a discovery is dependent upon a collaborative effort from both parties which can be problematic.

Responding to what she believes to be a preoccupation by feminists with lesbian issues, Denfeld (1995) states that young feminists don’t care what people do in the bedroom. After listening to Tracy and Zolah speak about their experiences with homophobia, even within feminist circles, I believe young people care very much about each other’s sexualities. Like the need for white feminists to theorize their race, heterosexual feminists need to extend their theorizing beyond the male/female domain and address their own homophobia.
Conflict in the Classroom

As outlined in Chapter 2, classroom conflict tends to stem from the different positionalities each student occupies and the student’s emotional and intellectual response to issues of difference and forms of oppression. I cited Audre Lorde’s cautionary words that feminists must be aware of the oppressor within. Inside the feminist classroom, feminist students must learn to listen actively to one another, as described by Samantha and reflected in Nel Noddings’ feminist ethic of care.

Despite a need to listen actively to one another, however, conflict is inevitable and in most cases necessary as students work through the messages they learn inside the feminist classroom which contradict in multiple ways the years of socialized conditioning. Some of the participants felt that it was the professor’s responsibility to act as a facilitator in ensuring that conflict was addressed appropriately. Weiler (1991) argues that the feminist teacher should use her authority in the feminist classroom to enlighten students through empowerment. When addressing conflict, therefore, I would interpret Weiler’s point to mean that the feminist teacher should help the students to examine critically the sources of their conflict by placing the conflict in some socio-political context.

I agree with Tracy who feels that conflict needs to be addressed. When conflict is not addressed, it invariably leads to the stifling of dissent by silencing those who are less vocal. Michelle believes that women who are in the beginning stages of forming their feminist identities, lacking a distinct idea of who they are and where their politics lie, are the most vulnerable to silencing. While Michelle, Zolah, Amy, Tracy, Samantha and Evelyn all acknowledge the silencing factor, they did not feel personally silenced in
the feminist classroom. Tracy claims she was very vocal in her classes as she states: "I'm sure that people were fed up with me as much as I was fed up with them." Amy confesses: "I have a big mouth. I tend to say what's on my mind and I would notice after class a lot of women would come up to me afterwards and say: I was afraid to say that, but thank god you did." Similarly, Michelle notes that: "I was one of the obnoxious ones. I had come back from being off for four years. I had come back and I took these courses for a reason and I knew why." It is interesting to note that these women did not feel silenced in the feminist classroom. During my selection of participants for this study, there were a few women who were reluctant to participate. One of these women stated explicitly that she was afraid to talk about her "negative experiences" with feminism. Perhaps my selection of participants has missed the 'silenced' students.

**Feminist Organizing**

All of the participants were involved in at least one explicitly feminist group while attending university. With the exception of Claire, all of the participants seemed willing to join a feminist group again despite the difficulties they experienced in their respective groups.

Interest in joining a feminist group was typically preceded by some exposure to feminist theory. A few of the participants talked about some painful first impressions. Tracy's first meeting with a feminist group was described as "cliquey and scary for newcomers." She felt that there was an element of judging going on in terms of one's feminist knowledge. Zolah similarly found her initial experience with an abortion rights
group to be problematic when one of the men in the group kept trying to make passes at her rather than attend to the issues at hand. She also expressed some disillusionment with what she felt to be an abuse of power by the more senior members in the group.

Despite these negative first starts with feminist organizing, both Tracy and Zolah remained committed to feminist organizing while attending university. These experiences did, however, make them more selective in their choice of groups.

**Structure**

Tracy, Claire, Evelyn, Samantha and Christine were all co-founders of various feminist groups. While Tracy co-founded a support and activist group for lesbian, bisexual and gay students on campus, she rightly aligns this as a feminist issue and was mindful of employing feminist values when creating the group's structure. Claire structured the feminist radio show as a collective as did Evelyn, Samantha and Christine with their feminist reading group. Tracy's group had an executive. She was quick to point out that this executive observed affirmative action principles when nominating candidates. She felt this type of structure was necessary in order to ensure that a check and balance system was in place to avoid the men in the group taking over as Tracy says is often the case in lesbian and gay groups. For the other women, a more loosely defined structure where each member had an equal decision-making power proved to be quite cumbersome at times.

Members of Claire's radio show were given the sole responsibility to select, produce and present their own weekly show. Claire was trying to avoid arbitrating women's voices. Unfortunately, her good intentions proved to be problematic when some
shows were of questionable quality. She recalled one incident where a member's show contained borderline racist remarks. Likewise. Christine. Samantha and Evelyn purposely avoided any predetermined topics allowing the members to decide on what literature to explore as Christine explains: "We had somewhat of an organizational meeting at the beginning of each term where we would ask what are the things that people are interested in and work from there; try to set up some sort of schedule where someone would be responsible for a certain day and they would choose the topic and then choose some readings and then photocopy them." They wanted to incorporate everyone in the decision making in the attempt to make their group a collaborative effort. They discovered, however, that some people would end up dominating the meetings and there were uneven commitments among the members. They also found that because their focus was so broad, smaller interest groups developed, forming their own reading groups.

When reflecting on how they would do things differently. Samantha and Christine agreed that some type of focus would have to be put in place prior to meeting with the general membership. Likewise. Claire felt there was a need to ensure that members produce quality shows. She states that "I would start with a handful, at least four, of people who are equally skilled and equally committed and if you have new people come in there would be something like training. I guess I would have some sort of hierarchy in a way or maybe a buddy system where someone has to look over your work so you get some feedback." While feminists admirably bring women's voices to the surface and allow these women to speak within their own frames of reference, it is important to keep in mind that we can learn a lot from other's constructive criticisms. and
particularly when those voices are being broadcast to the general public, there is some responsibility to ensure that the material does not contain any forms of oppression.

**Infighting**

Tracy talked about some of the infighting and resulting factionalism that developed within the lesbian, bisexual and gay group. She noticed a division along political lines in terms of radical and liberal approaches and a division according to gender. Tracy's group attempted to address these different interests by organizing a range of activities from lesbian-only events to combined "homohops" and from liberal acts like petition signing to the more radical act of spray painting. Interestingly, Tracy found that there was more infighting in other feminist groups with an explicitly feminist mandate.

Claire was particularly troubled by the backbiting and an inability to address conflict among the members of the radio show.

Zolah's experience of having her article on the lesbian comic rejected by the editor of a lesbian publication because she is bisexual is one example of how differences pertaining to one's sexuality can result in divisive relations.

While the participants attribute infighting to a difference in politics and positionality, similar to their ideas about the source of classroom conflict, all were troubled by what appears to be an inability among members to address conflict and work through it. This inability to address conflict reflects Woolsey and McBain's (1987) study of five all-women groups. Woolsey and McBain believe that women have difficulties expressing and working through anger and conflict because they are socialized to be nurturing and supportive. Claire states:
I have this vague memory of everybody, including myself, being really unassertive and kind of passive aggressive. If there was a problem, it would kind of be addressed, but then you would hear later that so and so who talked to so and so, they were really pissed off at you and so on and so forth and it really got out of control. That kind of not talking directly and addressing it, it just kind of spun off and it starts having a life of its own.

Similarly, Evelyn points out that her group avoided addressing conflict because they were fearful that they might be seen as coming down too hard on people. Alternatively, Evelyn, Christine and Samantha spoke about being overly concerned with trying to please everyone and making sure that no one was being silenced.

Women and Leadership

Not unlike the contradictions feminist teachers face teaching feminist theory in an institutionalized setting and dealing with the concept of authority and leadership, the participants ran into similar internal struggles. While Claire did not structure the radio show so that any one leader would evolve, she states: "My authority arose quite naturally because I helped start the show. I knew the most about radio. I know more people at the radio station and I was left holding the bag after a certain point." Claire's point that she was "left holding the bag" is a common complaint among many of the more involved members in groups. Evelyn was also critical of an uneven commitment in the literature
group where only a small percentage would come to the meetings prepared, leaving most of the organizational responsibilities with the co-founders of the group.

**Graduation**

Reflecting on graduation, Claire states: "It's partly a process of being disappointed by the fact that all those things that women were doing and learning and discussing weren't really able to change the world or put me into a different place. I just thought it would be much more dramatic or significant." Tracy describes the period of graduation as "depressing". Upon graduating, she took a year off from feminist activism because she felt burnt out and realized that she had to change her approach to feminist politics. She states: "I realized I had to do things differently. It was like I just made a decision. I'm going to be calmer and I would try to be more tolerant and give people more of a chance. I had a hard time doing that because I was wondering if I was selling out by making these changes." Tracy went onto explain that she went into therapy specifically to work through this issue.

**Participants' Feminisms Today**

Although all of the participants experienced some degree of disenchantment with feminist theory and feminist organizing, feminism still remains an important part of their lives. While none of the participants have out-and-out rejected feminism, no one is living a fully transformed feminist life either. All of the participants seem to be living their
lives somewhere in between these two extremes, reflecting, as Zolah points out, the ambiguity and gray areas of human life.

I believe that all of these women have learned invaluable insights from their feminist experiences at university. It has been through these experiences that these women have been able to examine critically not only mainstream culture but feminist culture as well, as they continue to search for their place within these two overlapping world views.

Claire admits that she still has a knee jerk reaction to feminist organizing based on her radio show experiences, although she is mindful of the concrete priorities in her life presently which include writing, directing and producing her own films. While Claire values the critical skills she learned from feminist theory, she is not as idealistic and naïve when thinking about feminism as she states: "...at university you have to have a certain amount of idealism, energy, enthusiasm and naïve idealism. It’s partly about the newness and it’s partly about youth. given what our age was at the time. and I think that’s great because you end up further than if you were cautious to begin with."

At present, Amy’s priorities lie with finding a job. By exposing herself to other women like the refugee women she has worked with and the women in Morocco. Amy feels that her feminist approach is more “relaxed”, giving people more of a chance. She is grateful, however, for the strength and self-confidence feminism has given her.

Michelle describes her feminism as more practical and grounded as she lives her life day-to-day. She believes the anger she once felt when expressing her feminism has subsided which is partly due to where she is at this stage in her life and the more ‘traditional’ women that she has met.
Likewise, Tracy's approach to feminism is much more tolerant of the difficult choices women make in their lives. Tracy attributes this change to maturity, reading bell hooks and learning from her work with mothers and older women. By being exposed to these women, Tracy appreciates the contradictions and inconsistencies in all of us. She looks forward to living her life with her partner in a "sort of feminist way" including studying to be a midwife, having babies, breast feeding, home schooling and vegetarianism.

Through Zolah's work with low-income women and women in war-torn countries, Zolah appreciates the resourcefulness of these women. Meeting these women and experiencing some forms of oppression within feminist circles including homophobia and racism, Zolah is much more tolerant of women's differences. While she is mindful of the shortcomings of North American feminism, she describes feminism as the cornerstone of her coming into an identity.

Samantha, Christine and Evelyn are committed to a feminist pedagogy as they run their classes; however, as Samantha points out, feminism is not presently at the forefront of her mind given her priorities which include finishing her dissertation.

**Summary**

With the barrage of mainstream media claiming we are now in a post-feminist era, at first glance, one may assume that this research question is connected to such a phenomenon. Contrary to the popular press, however, young feminist women who have experienced some disenchantment with feminist theory and feminist organizing resulting
in a movement away from explicitly feminist work are doing so because of their respective life stages and a need to personalize their feminisms. Feminism still remains an integral part of their identities and life choices. These women do not believe that sexual equality has been realized, as the term "post-feminist" implies. Rather, at this point, they have chosen to take a step away from the feminist front lines and focus their energies in other areas like their careers and relationships. As Michelle states, their feminisms are "grounded" at the present time.

While I do believe that the participants' negative experiences with feminist theory and feminist organizing have influenced their decisions somewhat, all of the participants, with the exception of Claire, expressed some willingness to get involved in feminist organizing again.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

Findings

This research is an heuristic endeavour which came out of my personal experience with feminist theory and feminist organizing during my undergraduate years and my transition from university to the workplace. I explored eight women's feminist journeys using in-depth semi-structured interviews. A distinct pattern emerged from these women's experiences which basically suggests that young women typically start off very enthusiastic about their feminist thinking only to become disillusioned with feminism as they realize the limitations in feminist theory and feminist organizing as well as the realization that patriarchy will be very difficult to change.

According to these women, limitations in feminist theory and feminist organizing include: a difficulty theorizing women's difference; factionalism over ideological differences; an inability to effectively work through conflict, whether it be in groups or in the class; and a tendency towards infighting. The realization that patriarchy will be very difficult to change seems to take place in the transition from university to the workplace.

Working with women at a grassroots level seems to have influenced their feminisms further. Amy’s experiences working with women in developing countries and refugee women has allowed her to appreciate the different locations and priorities of ‘traditional’ women. Zolah’s experiences with low income women and women in war
torn countries has given her the insight of how resourceful these women are. Tracy feels that she is more tolerant of the difficult choices women make which she claims is partly due to working with mothers, including teenage mothers and working with older women.

The changes in these participants' feminisms seem to suggest that the feminism they expressed while attending university was much more rigid or theoretical. It was through their 'real life' experiences, working with women at a grassroots level, that these women were able to stand back and see the gaps in their experiences with academic feminism.

Interestingly, these experiences did not result in a total rejection of feminism, but rather a preference among the participants to personalize their feminisms in their day-to-day lives. While none of these women are living fully transformed feminist lives, feminism remains an important factor in their personal identities.

With the exception of Claire, all of the participants indicated some willingness to join a feminist group in the future. All of the women indicated other life priorities which affect their willingness to do explicitly feminist work at the present time. These priorities include school, career and forging relationships. Five of the eight women are working on graduate degrees at the time of the interviews. Tracy is focusing on applying to a specialized program to further her career in the midwifery field. Claire is developing her career as she works on the writing of her next film. Amy’s priorities lie with securing gainful employment. Michelle just recently married and is content to have her feminism grounded.

I believe that the results of this study reflect the complexities of the human experience, particularly for women living in a culture of contradictions.
**Personal Reflections on this Study**

My part in this research question reflects a heuristic model of inquiry as described by Douglass & Moustakas (1985) which entails several sequential steps. Douglass and Moustakas outline three phases to their heuristic model. The first phase is `immersion` which entails total involvement with the research question and exploring it as it is lived. The second phase is termed `acquisition` whereby the researcher gains some sense of direction resulting from their compilation of the data. The third phase involves a `realization` where the `fragments of inquiry` seem to fall into place.

As I showed in chapter one, my desire to do research on the trajectory of young women's feminisms stems from a desire to understand the trajectory of my own feminism as I made the transition from the university to the workplace. When I began this project, I was fully immersed in the research question, and remain so, as it continues to reflect my life. While I did have some inclination as to what the reasons were for my personal movement away from feminist organizing, it was not until I interviewed the participants and listened to their personal narratives that this phenomenon became clearer to me.

When I initially began theorizing this research question, I was focusing on popular feminist critique in mainstream culture hoping to gain a better understanding of why some young feminist women may become disenchanted with their feminisms. Most of this literature focused on issues like date rape or the presentation of feminism suggesting that feminism was dated or too radical. These arguments proved to be limited, not to mention anti-feminist, as I have argued in Chapter two. When I interviewed these
women, it became increasingly clear that these women were, for the most part, very grateful for their experiences with feminist theory and feminist organizing as both played a significant part in their identity formations. Their feelings of disenchantment with feminist theory and feminist organizing have allowed them to recognize the limitations in their feminisms. I then realized that the causes and correlates of these women's disenchantment with feminism were to be found somewhere between the two extremes presented from pro-feminist work and anti-feminist work. Both of these viewpoints seem to be oversimplifications of these women's experiences.

Not unlike the women I interviewed, I find feminism remains very important to me. I often find myself turning to what I call my "feminist spirituality" in times of personal crisis. While I am also living out my feminism on a personal level. I am involved in several advocacy groups which are indirectly feminist. I see my feminism like a lifelong friend who will always be there for me when ever I need it. And that lifelong friend is really about discovering my inner wisdoms and learning to validate my voice.

I began this research project somewhat confused and unsettled with my personal feminism. Connecting with like-minded women helped me to reaffirm the positives in my feminism and allowed me to 'acquire' some sense of direction in this inquiry as described by the second phase of Douglass and Moustakas's heuristic model. After examining the data intensely and further researching feminist literature and non-feminist literature, I was able to arrive at some distinct 'realization' or phase three of my inquiry. This realization allowed me to resolve many personal issues with my feminism and put to rest some anxiety and guilt that I previously felt.
**Significance of this Study**

While much has been written on feminists' experiences at universities, very little has examined the experiences of feminist students. This study has shed some light on this phenomenon. It is important for feminist scholars who are planning their classrooms to continue to listen to the voices and concerns of their students. This paper has highlighted some of these concerns including student silencing, intolerance of difference including ideological differences and difficulties addressing conflict. Because Women's Studies programs are a major force for young feminist activity, it is important that we identify young feminist voices. It is equally important to have a clearer understanding of the trajectory of young women's feminisms as they make the transition from university to the workplace. These women will be among the tomorrow's leaders in the women's movement.

**Limitations of this Study**

It is important to note that this study focused on the experiences of a small sample of young feminist women who were exposed to feminist theory and feminist organizing at one particular university. Because it is difficult to ascertain which issues may be isolated consequences of studying at a particular university, young feminist women's experiences with other Women's Studies programs would be necessary in order to determine a level of generalizability.
In addition, I conducted only one interview for each participant. Some scholars argue that it is necessary to conduct several interviews when using an in-depth interview methodology increasing the likelihood that the participant will feel more comfortable discussing sensitive or personal issues. As well, multiple interviews may help to establish a trusting bond between the interviewer and the participant.

Finally, I found that there were several limitations in conducting an interview by telephone. Because I could not observe Zolah, I found that there were gaps in the data relating to facial expressions along with other physical cues. I also found a lack of participant observation decreased my ability to listen actively. I noticed this in the questions I asked and my reactions to her comments.

**Areas for Future Research and Recommendations**

Issues identified by the participants highlight areas for future research. To begin, there needs to be more discussion on student resistance inside the feminist classroom and ways of dealing with this conflict. Student resistance and classroom tensions were recurrent themes in the participants’ responses. Many of the participants felt that there was a need to focus on conflict resolution and teaching students to listen actively. Literature tends to identify classroom conflict and not offer strategies for working through these issues. Scholars have argued that women’s difficulty addressing conflict and anger stem from their social conditioning (Woolsey and McBain, 1987). Likewise, Patai and Koertge (1994) acknowledge the problem of stifling of dissent which takes place when the more vocal students in the classroom silence the less vocal students.
Koertge and Patai fail to offer any suggestions for addressing this problem. I believe a starting place is with the students' voices.

I found the participants' discussion on women's sexuality as it relates to feminism quite illuminating. I believe more work needs to be done on the issue of theorizing our sexualities as feminists. whether we choose to be lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual. I found Zolah's point that feminism needs to wake up and realize that by embracing bisexuality you are embracing ambiguity and grayness and a refusal to be categorized in the traditional binaries of either/or very interesting. I would extend her point to question our need to even categorize our sexualities.

All of the participants touched on the issue of theorizing women's differences. I would be interested in seeing more research on young women from racially and culturally diverse backgrounds and how these women came into a feminist consciousness respective of their personal epiphanies. These personal epiphanies are obscure because they involve women's many positionalities in life, including one's racial and cultural traditions.

I think feminist teachers need to continue to strive towards theorizing difference in their course syllabi and pedagogy. Linda Carty (1991) identified the difficulties trying to actualize a non-racist classroom pedagogy. How have Women's Studies programs progressed in this area?

I believe it would be interesting to examine feminist students' post-graduation adjustment in more depth. I was not able to find any material on this topic and yet I see it being quite relevant in terms of what types of career paths these women choose and how they make the emotional adjustment to a patriarchal workplace, particularly those women who graduated into the recessionary 1990s.
More research on the types of women that Women's Studies attracts, their reasons for majoring in Women's Studies and the trajectory of their university studies as they come into a feminist consciousness may also prove useful for recruitment interests.

**Summary**

It is worth reiterating that the voices of young feminist women need to be heard on the issue of Women's Studies programs and feminist organizing. These women are the successors of the women's movement and their concerns are very significant in the shaping of feminism in the years to come.
Appendix A

Interview Themes

A. Background
Name, age, relationship status, family size, year of graduation from university, degree, current occupation and a brief job description, number of feminist courses taken and the number of feminist organizations involved with during university life.

B. Details of Feminist Experience
A more in-depth description of the participants' feminist experiences and their perspectives on their feminisms. Focus will be on both positive and negative experiences, with an emphasis on those feelings of disenchantment and why.

C. Influence
How these feminist experiences have influenced the participants' academic and career paths, integration into the workplace, relationships with significant others, i.e., parents, friends, partners, and coworkers.

D. Effect
Personal changes in the participants' feminist politics and beliefs as a result of their positive and negative experiences with feminist theory and feminist organizing. Where the participants see their feminism today and in the future.
Appendix B

Letter of Consent

Dear Participant:

As mentioned in our telephone conversation, I am conducting a research project on young feminist women who have graduated from a particular university within the last 7 years and are among the 25-30 age cohort at the time of the interview. This project will comprise the thesis portion of my Master of Arts degree at The University of Toronto.

I will be interviewing eight women who have had some exposure to feminist theory and feminist activism during their university careers and self-identify as a feminist. I am interested in these women’s perspectives of their feminisms from university through graduation and into the workplace to where they find themselves today. I am interested in understanding feelings of enchantment and disenchantment with feminism.

If you agree to take part in a 1-2 hour interview, I will be focusing on a few issues I have identified; however there will be room for you to highlight other issues of importance and relevance to your life. I will arrange this interview at your convenience.

With your permission, this interview will be recorded by a tape recorder and later transcribed onto a computer diskette. The names of all those interviewed and any named people and places will remain confidential and replaced with pseudonyms. These transcripts will remain in a locked filing cabinet. There is no obligation for you to participate or answer any questions in the interview if you do not want to do so.

Thank you for considering being a part of this study. If you agree to be a participant, please read and sign the next page.

I have read the letter describing the research being conducted by Martha Turner. I understand the procedures and safeguards as described and agree to participate.

Date ________________________________

Name ________________________________

Signature ____________________________
References


