

Introduction: What Is Women's Studies?

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Women's Studies is a field of study that developed out of a critique of phallogocentric knowledge which treats masculinity as central and representative of the universal. Definitions of this field are temporal, shifting and political, and as a recent Canadian volume on the state of Women's Studies has emphasized, often unstable and ambiguous (Braithwaite et. al. 2004). Until recently, Women's Studies has been defined as an academic project that "places women's experiences at the centre of inquiry" (Hunter College Women's Studies Collective 1995); this definition, however, has been challenged as too narrow. Feminist anti-racist, lesbian and disability scholars have confronted the exclusiveness of a Women's Studies that is primarily focused upon gender, emphasizing the importance of complicating categories of women and gender by understanding their implication in other forms of alterity. It is no longer enough to centre women, as we stress in this text; the contemporary project of Women's Studies involves questioning how systems of power based upon race, class, sexuality and ability interact with gender. In the current context, the category "women" has emerged as a conceptual window for interrogating interlocking systems of power, including race, class, ability and sexuality.

An emphasis on social justice and transformation underpins Women's Studies (Pryse 2000, p. 112). In fact, Women's Studies has often been described as the institutional arm of the women's movement. In the 1970s, when many students and faculty became active in social movements, including the students', civil rights, gay rights, antiwar and women's movements, women started to demand space for themselves within higher education (Boxer 1998). These activist academics fundamentally challenged prevailing canons by asking critical questions about what constituted knowledge and whose knowledge was legitimated and valued (Bird 2001). It was from these political roots that the first Women's Studies programs emerged in Canadian universities more than three decades ago. Women's Studies as a field of scholarly endeavour may be marked by deep diversity, and this is something we highlight in this reader, but its common features are its commitments to interrogating power relations, to fostering social change and to breaking down the boundaries between the personal and political.

Although feminist practice and Women's Studies scholarship are entwined, academic feminism has often been charged with diverting focus away from feminist political struggles. Feminist academics have been critiqued for producing theory rather than focusing on real life conditions, for being elitist and inaccessible (Nussbaum 1999). In this collection, however, we take the view that it is not theorizing and academic practice per se that are problematic; it is instead particular theories and practices. There are exciting possibilities for critical and exploratory thought outside the constraints of the everyday. Indeed, much contemporary feminist debate occurs in academia; the strength of this work is the critical distance academia provides, creating opportunities for theorizing and renegotiating gender relations (Kemp and Squires 1997, p. 6). Women's Studies must be viewed as an element of wider feminist endeavours, and conversations between activists and scholars must be encouraged. This productive relationship between politics and academia has been a vital part of the Canadian Women's Studies project.

In 1990, Margrit Eichler found that 93% of Women's Studies faculty members combine scholarship with feminist activism (1990, p. 7). Rather than retreating into the academy, Women's Studies has continued to be a politically informed activity. Canadian feminist scholars routinely engage in public policy debates. Women's Studies faculty have produced research studies for feminist movement organizations that have generated new demands and strategies. Feminist academics have worked together with feminist litigators to construct legal arguments that have advanced substantive equality on a number of fronts. Feminist researchers and grassroots activists have engaged in collaborative research projects that question hierarchies between academic and activist knowledge, producing synthetic and innovative results. In a context marked by the elimination of governmental funding for community-based feminist activism and research, such active collaborations assume a renewed importance.

Many students, excited by the questions raised in their Women's Studies courses, have been propelled into a variety of campus- and community-based feminist activism. Routinely, this activism is carried back into the classroom and becomes a basis for challenges to professors and course materials. There is an ongoing conversation, sometimes tense, often productive, between feminist activism and Canadian Women's Studies scholarship. There is a vital interrelationship between feminist politics on the street and in the academy.

DIVERSITY IN FOCUS: OUR APPROACH IN THIS READER

Academic feminism in the early 21st century is marked by diversity of method, motivation and focus. In its earlier days, feminism, newly institutionalized in Women's Studies programs, adopted a posture of defensiveness by necessity. Attempting to legitimize their place in the university where the study of women had never been seen as scholarly or worthwhile, Women's Studies practitioners emphasized the unity or potential unity of feminism and its challenge to patriarchal scholarship. More than three decades after the establishment of the first Canadian Women's Studies programs, we are fortunate to be the beneficiaries of that first wave of academic feminist struggle. The development of Women's Studies programs has contributed to the creation of a space in which the differences that constitute feminism can find their fullest expression.

It is our intention in this text to provide an overview of some key debates that have marked the evolution of Women's Studies in Canada. We are second-generation feminist scholars; the struggles and achievements of our academic foremothers have enabled us to inhabit our classrooms as places of respectful debate and challenge. One of the critical insights of feminism has been the claim that knowledge is always situated and engaged (Haraway 1988). In this way feminism challenges the very claim that knowledge is objective. The "view from nowhere gaze" that has been the centre of post-Enlightenment Western thought has been dethroned and revealed as masking the specific perspective and interests of dominant social groups. With this insight comes the necessary realization that the creation of feminist "Truth" cannot be the aim of Women's Studies scholarship. Instead, as graduate student Eva Karpinski (1998) has emphasized, the notion of community that we create must "accommodate critique and questioning" and the right to "dissent and disagreement"; it must be "specific, situated, self-critical" (p. 139). The unsettling of foundations

that has characterized feminism's relationship with traditional academic disciplines must be brought into the very heart of Women's Studies (Braithwaite et. al. 2004). Offering competing answers to an ever-changing set of questions and providing students with the critical tools to assess contending perspectives is how we see the role of academic Women's Studies practitioners.

We compiled this reader with this approach to teaching Women's Studies in mind. While there have been some fine Canadian introductory texts, a text, or even a collection of overview articles, cannot always illuminate the rich contours and distinctive edges that comprise Women's Studies scholarship. It is for this reason that many instructors have supplemented texts with course kits designed to bring a multiplicity of voices to students. This collection, focusing on Canadian Women's Studies scholarship in English, grew out of our own efforts to map for our students the diverse contributions of Canadian scholars. It is our hope that this reader will reveal the dynamic nature of Canadian feminist debates, the genuine diversity within current feminist theory and some of the central issues at stake in the differing approaches to feminist activism.

THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF CANADIAN WOMEN'S STUDIES

The first undergraduate course in Women's Studies in Canada was offered by Professor Marlene Dixon at McGill University and the first program was initiated at the University of Toronto in 1974. Since these beginnings, most Canadian universities have established undergraduate degree programs in Women's Studies (34 by 2007). Initial programs borrowed and cross-listed courses from various disciplines. Some of these courses focused on "women and" or "women in," such as "Women and Politics" and "Women in Canadian Literature," with an emphasis on making women visible where they had once been absent. Since the 1970s, there has been a dramatic proliferation of courses and new curricular emphases, with programs developing and mounting their own core courses that surpass this earlier "women and" focus. Courses now interrogate the production of gender and its intersection with race, class and sexuality, and include such titles as "Queer Theory," "Gender, Race and Class," "Transnational Feminisms," "From Silence to Song: Voices of Women with a Disability," "Feminisms: Anti- and Third Wave" and "Feminist Culture/Popular Culture."

We have witnessed profound shifts in Women's Studies curriculum and greater institutional commitments to programs. At the beginning of the 21st century, some Canadian Women's Studies programs are expanding with the hiring of young scholars and the introduction of new courses and graduate degrees.¹ Nevertheless, most programs remain marginalized in their universities: many confront unstable funding and few dedicated Women's Studies faculty positions. Some Canadian programs exist because of the goodwill of feminist faculty, who perform a "second shift" of service to Women's Studies once their disciplinary obligations in their home departments are fulfilled. This is a practice that Dale Bauer (2002) has labelled "academic housework." Moreover, we have seen an increasing trend for new hires in Women's Studies to start their careers with heavy administrative responsibilities (such as chairing and coordinating their programs) at the same time that they face rigorous pre-tenure requirements to publish. Because of inadequate resources, most Canadian programs continue to rely heavily on the practice of cross-listing

courses. Cross-listing has contradictory implications. On the one hand, it enables the interdisciplinary work that is a critical dimension of Women's Studies. On the other hand, however, curricular development and cohesion are impeded when programs are unable to mount their own core courses.

Accompanying the development of Women's Studies and women's increased participation in post-secondary institutions,² there has also been a growth of services designed for and by this constituency. These services include the creation of women's centres and sexual harassment offices, the support of feminist scholarship through various awards, the formation of women's committees as offshoots of larger university representative bodies,³ the establishment of special library collections,⁴ and the implementation of various university policy initiatives, including pay and employment equity and childcare. These developments reflect not only the increased presence of women in post-secondary education, but also the political role of Women's Studies faculty, who have often been at the forefront of struggles for the kinds of institutional changes that are required to make universities more equitable for all students, staff and faculty.

The phenomenal growth in feminist scholarship that has occurred over the past 35 years is reflected in ongoing Canadian feminist journals, presses and associations. When Women's Studies first emerged, it was possible for feminist scholars to read every new book or article that appeared. Since then, there has been a veritable knowledge revolution and feminist scholarship has grown remarkably both in quality and complexity. As Christina Gabriel and Katherine Scott (1993) highlight, feminist publishing has had a crucial role in the rapid acceleration of feminist knowledge:

Women have struggled long and hard to find a place in public discourse. The lack of access to critical material resources such as printing and publishing has been a significant barrier to efforts to create and disseminate a counter-hegemonic discourse against the dominant patriarchal, racist and homophobic mechanisms of capitalist society. Feminist publishing [has] worked to recover women's history, provided women with alternative political views and generally been part of the organized expression of the movement (p. 26).

From its beginnings, Canadian academic feminism has confronted disciplinary journals and other scholarly forums resistant to the insights offered by feminist approaches. This resistance lingers on. For example, Jane Arscott and Manon Tremblay found that in the 30-year history of the *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, only 3.5% of its articles have focused on women (1999, pp. 128–129). In this context, the continued existence of Canadian feminist journals, associations and presses has proven essential for the creation of research and theory. Publications such as *Resources for Feminist Research* (1972), *Atlantis* (1974), *Canadian Woman Studies les cahiers de la femme* (1978), and *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* (1985) have become internationally recognized scholarly journals. Feminist presses include the Toronto Women's Press (1972), Sister Vision Press (1984), Ianna and Sumach Press (2000).

As a final mark of its institutionalization, academic associations have emerged to foster Women's Studies scholarship and research, creating the possibility of conversations among diverse researchers. Crucially, the Canadian Women's Studies Association/L'association canadienne des études sur les femmes was founded in 1982 to build a feminist scholarly network and to promote Women's Studies as an interdisciplinary field within the academic community. Over the past several years, the Association has made a tremendous effort to

integrate new media as a means of nurturing a cross-Canada Women's Studies community among its several hundred members (see CWSA website at www.yorku.ca/cwsaacef). Other associations devoted to feminist research include: the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAW) (1976), the Canadian Women's Movement Archives (CWMA) (1976), the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women (CCLOW) (1978), the National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL) (1980) and the establishment of five regional Women's Studies chairs (1985).

National extra-academic associations such as CRIAW, the CCLOW and NAWL have played a crucial role in raising difficult issues that impact on women's lives, proposing concrete policy responses and holding governments accountable for respecting and promoting women's rights. And these associations have provided forums for active collaborations between feminist academics and activists. In 2006, the Harper Conservative government cut the budget of Status of Women Canada (SWC) by 40%, removed the word "equality" from its mandate and fundamentally altered the funding criteria for women's organizations, making research and activities related to advocacy ineligible for funding (Canada, 2007). The continued existence of organizations such as CRIAW, the CCLOW and NAWL has been threatened by these cutbacks. Feminist research and critique within the academy assumes greater importance in a political context in which community voices are being increasingly silenced.

Despite the lack of resources and institutional support that plagues many programs, Women's Studies as an academic endeavour continues to survive and often thrive, providing a site for sustaining feminist research and knowledge production. A special issue of the U.S. journal *differences* entitled "Women's Studies on the Edge" (1997) captures the contradictory state of contemporary Women's Studies. Underlying diverse perspectives on the state of the field, the articles together emphasize how Women's Studies' intellectual work remains on the critical "edge," asking difficult questions and taking theoretical perspectives that enliven its continued challenge to masculinist and hegemonic scholarship; yet at the same time Women's Studies is on the "edge" in another sense, as it remains struggling on the institutional margins of the university. As Shirley Yee contends, it may be that Women's Studies "occupies an embattled position on campuses" precisely because it makes "women and feminism visible in the academies" (1997, p. 50).

CANADIAN WOMEN'S STUDIES: ANALYTIC TOOLS AND CHANGING DIRECTIONS

The analytic tools of Women's Studies are feminism, sex, gender, race, sexuality and class. Definitions of feminism as both a practice and an academic endeavour now proliferate. Most introductory Women's Studies courses present a typology of feminist theories, and these feminisms are modified by other theoretical positions—for example, liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, psychoanalytic feminism, postmodernist feminism, anti-racist feminism and third wave feminism. What many professors and students find in this typology is that feminist theories overlap and that any attempt to define feminism narrowly or categorically, without multiplicity, will inevitably be problematic. Nonetheless, it is important to understand the divergent approaches feminist scholars have employed in their efforts to analyze systems of domination. Much of this reader represents a conversation among competing feminist perspectives.

Patricia Elliot and Nancy Mandell (1998) define the project of feminist theory in the following broad terms:

First, feminist theorists seek to understand the gendered nature of virtually all social and institutional relations Second, gender relations are constructed as problematic and as related to other inequities and contradictions in social life Third, gender relations are not viewed as either natural or immutable but as historical and socio-cultural productions, subject to reconstitution. Fourth, feminist theories tend to be explicitly political in their advocacy for social change. (p. 4)

In keeping with our focus on Women's Studies as a field of academic inquiry marked by diverse voices, we emphasize that feminist theory must move beyond an exclusive and primary focus on gender relations. In advocating for egalitarian social changes, feminist scholars have been forced to recognize that, as bell hooks (1997, p. 26) argues, if "feminism is a movement to end sexist oppression, then it must not focus exclusively on any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women." Attention to the construction, formation and articulation of gender by many of the contributions to this reader reveals that gender is made in specific ways. To understand the content poured into the category "women," we need to recognize the racial construction of that category; we need to recognize that the material conditions of middle-class professional women and women living in poverty differ in fundamental ways; and we need to acknowledge that compulsory heterosexuality and norms of gender conformity have an impact on how lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered people relate to the category "woman." Disentangling the complex relationships, discourses and material structures that intersect on the very bodies of contemporary Canadian women is a preoccupation of contemporary Women's Studies.

If feminist theorizing is the first analytic tool of Women's Studies, interdisciplinarity is its companion. The commitments to social justice that motivated the emergence of Women's Studies carried with them strong challenges to the disciplinary organization of knowledge. Women's Studies scholars embraced a particular kind of interdisciplinarity, one that began with questioning how conventional disciplinary frameworks have been resistant and often blind to gender analysis (Blee 2002, p. 177). The form of critical interdisciplinarity embraced by Women's Studies is problem-based. As we will see in the pages of *Open Boundaries*, Third Edition, exploring such enduring and pervasive problems as gendered violence involves not only moving across and synthesizing the insights of diverse disciplines (for example, law, sociology, political science, psychology, sociology), it also involves interrogating how disciplinary knowledges can operate as barriers to understanding and change. Moreover, as Marjorie Pryse (2000, p. 109) has argued, Women's Studies interdisciplinarity produces a flexibility and mobility that is conducive to self-reflexivity. Understanding the complexities of gendered violence involves transcending gender-focused approaches in order to analyze the contextual intersections of race, gender, class, ability and sexuality. In moving across disciplinary lines, Women's Studies students and scholars gain practice in intellectual border-crossing that can also promote thinking, theorizing and listening across vectors of race, class, ability and sexuality. Labelling this form of boundary-crossing "transversal method," Pryse contends that it enables Women's Studies scholars to construct research that emerges from women's lives, while at the same time getting specific about differences between women.

It is difficult to pin down the distinctive characteristics of Women's Studies in Canada, mainly because of the plurality of voices in this forum and the manner in which these voices contest the meaning of Canadian nationhood. Contemporary Canadian feminism is

shaped by the maternal feminist legacy of the "first wave" and by the organizations and activists that struggled on after the vote was won. It has also been shaped by our colonial history and by the cultural and economic dominance of the United States. Nevertheless, some feminist scholars have sought to articulate the specific configuration of Canadian Women's Studies.

The emphases on diversity and boundary-crossing that are so central to the thrust of *Open Boundaries*, Third Edition, demand that we interrogate and disrupt the place of "nation" and "Canadian" in Women's Studies, especially in the contemporary global context of the rise of ethnic nationalism. Canada is a country where feminist organizing has been divided by national identity and where scholarly conversation is often difficult because of linguistic duality. Given the close association between Quebec feminism, the Quebec state and the project of Quebec nationalism, most scholars now recognize that there is a fundamental division between Quebec feminism and feminism in the "rest of Canada" (Lamoureux 1987). Apart from a provocative essay on the meaning of feminism in a context of backlash by the renowned Quebecoise lesbian novelist, poet and essayist Nicole Brossard, our collection does not include any selections in French addressing the different trajectories and voices that constitute Quebec feminism. However, we chose not to modify "Canadian" with the adjective English in the title of this volume in order to encompass the national identities of First Nations' women, whose scholarship has greatly influenced Canadian feminist thought, and the contributions of immigrant women with diverse ethnic and linguistic identities. Much scholarship by immigrant women and racialized women has been concerned with identifying the racist, classist and sexist dimensions of Canadian nation-building and construction. Many contributions to *Open Boundaries*, Third Edition, provide us with ways to identify problems, thereby revealing how "Canada" invokes certain exclusionary assumptions and values. Indeed, as Dua (this volume) argues, anti-racist feminism has both a long history and an active engagement in Canadian feminist scholarship and Women's Studies. Moreover, as Joyce Green has recently argued, Canadian Aboriginal women have been at the forefront of the development of indigenous feminisms, bringing together feminist and postcolonial critiques to theorize the historical and contemporary intersections of patriarchy, racism and colonialism.

Maroney and Luxton (1987, p. 8) emphasize the overwhelming contributions that Canadian socialist feminists have made to Women's Studies scholarship. This tradition can be understood as the result of feminist involvements in Marxist-influenced social movements in the 1960s and in the social democratic traditions that maintained an openness to socialist politics in Canada. The legacy of this materialist feminism for Women's Studies, including its careful analysis of work and its attention to political economy, is evident in many contributions to this reader. It is also the case that most contemporary Women's Studies instructors have been critically influenced by this tradition, both as its creators and students.

Another distinctive feature of Canadian Women's Studies scholarship grows out of the particular character of feminist politics after World War II. Whereas it could be argued that only a minimalist welfare state emerged in the United States, in postwar Canada the state underwent massive expansion, taking on new roles and engaging in the project of ensuring social citizenship. Women's movement activism has thus focused on the state, and (with the exception of Quebec) on the federal state, given its central role as the initiator of social programs and the guarantor of national standards. This focus has resulted in a rich literature within Canadian Women's Studies that interrogates the role of the state vis-à-vis women. As the threads of the Canadian welfare state have been dismantled over the past 25 years, an equally rich literature

has emerged disentangling the impacts of neoliberalism on feminism. Many contributions to this reader are concerned with analyzing contemporary feminist issues and struggles within the context of neoliberalism—a governmental ideology that erases structural disadvantage, pathologizes dependence on the state and constructs equality-seeking movements as antithetical to a new public good defined in terms of individual responsibility.

While these analytic traditions and concerns have marked the field, it would be a great simplification to define anti-racist feminism, indigenous feminism, materialist feminism and feminist state theory as the distinctive features of Canadian Women's Studies. Women's Studies everywhere has become the site of multiple inquiries and new kinds of questions. Many initial contributions to Canadian Women's Studies stressed the sociological and the material, and while this rich tradition continues to have a strong presence, some scholars have shifted their attention to the interaction between images and social representation, culture and the production of identity. The critical insights of radical social constructionism are represented most clearly in this volume, including contributions dealing with sexuality, reproduction and the body and violence. This literature calls attention to the ways in which masculinity, femininity, race and sexuality are continually produced and reproduced in language and in discourse. American feminist Judith Butler, for example, calls attention to gender as "performance," to the rigid binary that divides masculine from feminine and to the necessity of deconstruction, that is, the erosion of gender as dichotomy (1990). For Butler, identity always excludes just as it includes, and, given that "women" are constructed, our experience and identity provide no stable ground from which to build theory and politics. Challenging the idea that "women" represents a fixed category, this literature calls attention to the multiple ways in which women are constructed in language and in discourse, including within feminist theory itself.

Some scholars have drawn upon Butler's insights to argue that just as we must "trouble gender," so too must we "trouble Women's Studies" (Braithwaite et. al. 2004; Brown 1997). As Ann Braithwaite, Susan Heald, Susanne Luhmann and Sharon Rosenberg contend, Women's Studies has been rendered unstable by the loss of the category "woman" as a foundation. Rather than attempting to shore up a singular meaning of Women's Studies in defence against such profound challenges, they argue that we must embrace the ambiguities of our intellectual project and accept that our field is a site of contestation that should not remain bound to its origins. In *Open Boundaries*, Third Edition, we embrace this call for complexity and self-reflection. But at the same time, we see such critical interventions on the "state of Women's Studies" as signifying not a crisis of the field, but instead its maturity.

Women's Studies is a field of critical intellectual inquiry and debate at almost every Canadian university, whose scope, methods and theoretical commitments must be subject to ongoing debate and revision. Its direction continues to be challenged and contested, most recently by third wave feminist scholars emphasizing: the embrace of contradictions within feminism; the importance of sexual expression; the defiance of rigid binary constructions of gender and sexuality; the centrality of anti-racism and inclusive forms of feminist activism; and the importance of culture as a site of politics (Pintareks, this volume). We have tried to capture the thrust of these challenges in diverse contributions to *Open Boundaries*, Third Edition. At the same time, however, and along with Kim Sawchuk (this volume) we emphasize the importance of critical conversations between second and third wave feminisms, highlighting the ways in which the metaphor of "waves" operates as a force of division and one that may hide the complexities within and among generations of feminists.

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What makes Women's Studies most exciting to us is that it is both a dynamic theoretical framework and practice, elastic enough to be a site of these kinds of important debates and challenges. Women's Studies keeps "gender" on the table as a visible, yet contested and complex, category of analysis entwined with race, class, sexuality and ability. Feminism takes on the monumental challenge of interrogating the relationship between systems of domination, exploring and making concrete their interconnections and highlighting the necessity of diverse forms of social, cultural and political change. Sometimes this approach has the effect of making feminism seem "messy." We believe, however, that this appearance is a reflection of the complexity of feminist theories and practices. To paraphrase Audre Lorde (1984), *while surely the master's tools cannot dismantle the master's house, such dismantling will involve the simultaneous uses of different kinds of feminist tools*. We hope that this reader contributes to this complex and contested project.

Endnotes

1. There are currently eight Canadian MA Programs: York University; Simon Fraser University; Dalhousie University/Saint Mary's University/Mount Saint Vincent University (joint program); University of British Columbia (Women's and Gender Studies); University of Toronto (Women's and Gender Studies); University of Northern British Columbia (Gender Studies); and Western University (Women's and Feminist Studies). In addition, three universities have collaborative MA Programs (where students pursuing an MA in another field can designate to complete a combined MA in Women's Studies and another field): University of Ottawa; Lakehead University; and Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (Women's Studies/Feminist Studies). There are Ph.D. programs at Simon Fraser University, York University, University of British Columbia (Women's and Gender Studies) and a collaborative program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (Women's Studies/Feminist Studies).
2. Women's participation rates in undergraduate programs have increased from 43% in 1972 to 58% in 2004; in master's programs from 27% in 1972 to 51% in 2004; and in doctoral programs from 19% in 1972 to 46% in 2004 (CAUT Almanac of Post-Secondary Education in Canada, Ottawa, 2007).
3. Examples would be the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) Status of Women Committee, and the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences (CFHSS).
4. Special library collections include the Nellie Langford Rowell Library at York University and the housing of the Canadian Women's Movement Archives (CWMA) at the University of Ottawa.