

Becoming Feminists

an anthology of how we became feminists

Lorena M. Gajardo & Jamie Ryckman, editors

RFR & CWSE



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Thanks to all who accompanied us on this intriguing journey.

Lorena M. Gajardo and Jamie Ryckman, editors

*To my querida Abuelita and my mother for teaching me about women's strength, beauty and courage.
Las quiero mucho.
Lorena*

*To my old friend Amanda, who explained to me when we were fifteen that being a feminist is a good
thing
Jamie*

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Introduction

Lorena M. Gajardo and Jamie Ryckman

As editors, we are often asked how the idea for this anthology came to be. The answer is simply that we thought it was the right time for it. We had just read yet another newspaper article declaring the end of feminism and celebrating its demise. By now we have grown accustomed to periodic and premature announcements regarding the death or irrelevance of feminism. We asked ourselves, why is there such energy invested in the propagation of anti-feminist sentiment and the end of feminism? And, more importantly, does this reflect our social reality? Is feminism irrelevant and disappearing? And so the idea for this collection was born.

In March 2010 we sent out the call for contributions with the questions, “How did you become a feminist and how has feminism shaped your worldview?” to the widest audience possible making an effort to reach as wide a variety of people possible - people with different backgrounds, experiences and social locations. We wanted to hear stories from a variety of standpoints not as a means to show ‘diversity’ but as a way to represent polyvocality through the different ways in which we become social subjects. Storytelling, as feminist practice, became the methodological anchor of this anthology. Rooted in earlier practices of feminist consciousness-raising and in feminists of colour epistemological approaches like Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of autohistoria-teoría² or theorizing through self-histories, this anthology invites an embodied exploration of the myriad of ways in which we become feminists.

The result is this anthology of stories, essays, poetry and art. With these contributions we see that feminism(s) is a diverse and ongoing practice that is historically and ontologically situated. Here we present stories of the marginalization of women and girls, poetry of desires forbidden to women and the shame felt by women and, discussions of the importance of feminist discourse as serious and relevant social practice that provides an ethics for all people. The aim of *Becoming Feminists* is not to provide definitive answers but rather, to disrupt the erasure as well as privatization of feminist experiences by representing and respecting the polyvocality of feminism(s). Although our feminist journeys may begin from a variety of locations and follow different roads, the path is one that can create connections and ongoing conversations. Each of the contributions here represents an example of the many ways in which we engage in the practice of feminisms and of the continued existence, relevance and vibrancy of this practice on our lives.

¹Latina Feminist Group, [Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios](#). Duke University Press, 2001, p.4.

² For more on autohistoria-teoría see, AnaLouise Keating, ed. [EntreMundos/AmongWorlds: New Perspectives on Gloria Anzaldúa](#). Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

(mis)EDUCATION

Silvia Argentina Arauz Cisneros

Confused and frightened and only sixteen,
An intelligent and proud former beauty queen
Kneels and contemplates the words racing through her mind,
Spoken to her with such disdain and disappointment
A moment sketched in her time, for all time.

The bearer of these words? Her His/Story teacher
Turned fortune-teller for this occasion only.
He bestowed on the young girl a different knowledge,
One, before today, she had never been told.
One based on years of oppression and misconception:

Glaring into her eyes, and without so much as a blink,
He punctures the young girl's heart, and she replies with a weep.
He tells the in-love, lovely and expecting young Latina,
That her future foreseen is one of failure and disaster.
A dire existence of diaper changing and breast feedings.
The only option she has, he explains, because of her breeding.
Her virgin ears contaminated with every word of his sad song,

Tears fall, a drop for each woman before her that was taught the words to this hollow tune.

"Poor little Latina, promiscuous and exotic, clearly meant only for the erotic.
You opened your legs, and now you will pay. You immigrant girls are all the same.
Poor little Latina, unwed and pregnant, your life is over, your future stagnant.
It's not your fault really, your mother didn't warn you.
But at least you have welfare to feed you and warm you."

In the silence of her bedroom,
The young Ms.Latina
Feels her tears fall hot on her tanned face.
She closes her eyes to remember the hot springs of Tipitapa.
Mother Nature's gift of healing to her people.
She sees the sunset along the line of Amerrisque,
An unmoving power that never ceases to amaze her.
And although her ears hurt and her mind is tired,
She hears the chanting of a different song,
A lullaby she knows dear to her heart,
Sung by her grandmother on the day of her birth.
She rises to her feet.
Her red flesh has knowledge His/story can't refute.
She will not let her mothers' teachings be denied and silenced.

This moment, sketched on her face, is the beginning of her struggle,
It will sculpt her life and push her to her destiny.
And while her (mis)educator was wrong in his teachings,

His song had purpose and was meant to be,
It served to awaken her to the reality
Faced by so many of the women in her life.
And it rang true in just one way:

She was her mother's proud child, and vowed to teach him just what that meant.

Recollections of the Revolution

Silvia Argentina Arauz Cisneros

Eyes open to possibilities. I surrender my tongue to the satisfaction of fried beans, white rice and crispy tortillas. I am Latina, and yes, I am a feminist. I am the daughter of my descendents, *mujeres tercas, contestonas, y fuertes*.

I am Isabel Godoy who raised ten children on her own, and at ninety-five-years-old insists on walking the streets of Nicaragua without a cane, and managing her own money in her own home.

I am Audrey Cisneros, who at fifty-four is completing her Masters in Social Work, who speaks English with a thick and beautiful accent and refuses to accept that she is too overqualified (also known as old) to begin a career in Canada.

I am myself at sixteen, with her hands on her hips and six months pregnant, refusing to believe that I will be just another high school drop-out. I did not become a feminist; I am the incarnation of ancestral female struggle and victory. It runs through my veins, I ingest it with every meal my mother makes with wisdom. I breathe it out with every word that I speak. I write to document knowledge of flesh from and for the women of revolution: strong-willed, out-spoken and fierce.

“Uh Oh”

Jessica Balmer

“Uh oh.”

That is the sound of me becoming a feminist.

Well, not exactly.

That is technically the sound of me realizing I’d hit record instead of play, my pre-teen voice forever emblazoned onto a mix tape featuring “Fuel” by Ani DiFranco.

You see, my friend Kathleen and I were enjoying the fort we’d just spent all day building: lounging beneath the blanket and sheet roof on a pile of couch cushions, dabbling in a little Nintendo and listening to “Fuel.” Over and over and over again. I was eleven, she was twelve, and we were enthralled.

We had made this mix using her sister Susan’s (secretly borrowed) CDs. Susan was five years older than us, a goth punk feminist who wore thrift store tutus and stayed out very, very late. Her friends wore plaid, had safety pins in their ears and patches on their bomber jackets, and one even had a shaved head (and she was a girl!). Kathleen and I were mute witnesses to all of this from our sleepover stakeouts of Susan’s room (which, the ultimate perk in our pre-teen eyes, was in the attic—and which Kathleen would later inherit and I would later sleep over in).

Some Saturday nights, if we were lucky, Susan would let us play outside her door while she got ready to go out. The soundtrack to these ripped fishnet fashion shows ranged from Aretha Franklin to Nine Inch Nails, and of course Ani DiFranco—near requisite listening for young feminists in the 90s (and their younger sisters [and their friends]). We drank it in: pouring over the lyrics from the CD insert and sing-talking along in a dual attempt to conjure Ani’s curled lip curtness and warbling voice.

Knowing these symphonic Saturdays were nothing to rely on (at twelve and seventeen sisters are not usually the paragon of unlimited smiles and sharing), Kathleen and I recorded our favourite songs onto a mix tape so we could listen to our hearts’ content whenever and wherever we pleased. So, naturally, the tape made its way into the stereo we’d built into our fort—the weight of the dual cassette player actually secured one corner of our cloth ceiling; so it was an architectural necessity.

Having listened to “Fuel” several times in a row, we were both becoming quite adept at hitting stop, then rewind, then play to start the tape again from the beginning—all without leaving the fort. This required reaching a hand up and out from under the roof, and using touch alone to find and depress the right buttons. With eleven-year-old speed and, as would become apparent, overconfidence, I stuck my hand up and out, hit rewind and what I thought was play. Waiting expectantly for the first few beats to come in, beats whose timing by this point I knew intimately, I realized very soon that something had gone awry.

Foregoing the unspoken “no leaving the fort” rule, I made some room in the roof, popped my head through and saw the tape advancing, in crispy crackly recording silence.

“Uh oh,” I said, before stopping the tape and hitting rewind then play again.

“Uh oh,” the tape replied, before starting the song—a few beats further in.

Hearing the evidence of my finger faux-pas we replayed it over and over, laughing to tears as eleven and twelve-year-olds in forts do. And then we just listened to the song again. And again. And again. Trying now to come in with the “Uh oh,” just as we’d try to keep pace with Ani.

That “uh oh” was the sound of me confusing buttons—and coming to feminism. It was a literal record of Kathleen and I on the cusp, or in the midst, of discovery. In the four minutes and roughly 400 words that is “Fuel,” Ani DiFranco talked us through America’s history of racism, capitalism, music, consumerism and activism.

As young girls, we couldn’t always decipher her lyrics. For example, we didn’t know what lynching was. Nor could we figure out what she meant by “we can choose between the colours of the lipsticks on

the whores because we know the difference between the font of twenty percent more and the font of teriyaki.” But we knew it was important.

Throughout and especially at the end of the song, Ani claims that beneath everything she’s singing about, beyond all of the injustice, ignorance and greed in the world, “there’s a fire that’s just waiting for fuel.” At once a promise and a threat, this lyric forecasted what feminism would come to mean for me, how I would come to see the world through a feminist lens.

Watching shows like *My So Called Life* on TV after school; listening to friends talk about almost getting roofied and almost getting raped; reading books by Wollstonecraft, hooks, and Butler, I found images and words that mirrored my own inner frustrations and inflamed my desire to rebel. In other words I found a fire. And with every sexist movie, racist cartoon, and homophobic hallway comment, I found fuel.

Fifteen years (and approximately the same number of Ani albums) later, Kathleen and I are still friends, and we are (still) feminists. We know what lynching is and we know...well we know a little bit more about what Ani meant when she sang about choosing between “the colours of the lipsticks on the whores,” but it’s still a confusing lyric.

Susan is no longer a goth punk; she’s actually an environmental lawyer, but her unconventional gender presentation and eclectic political taste in music effectively changed my life. Her influence and the subsequent introduction and influence of Ani Difranco sparked my adolescent and early-adult identity escapades: an adventurous exploration of rave style and punk music, hair dye and piercings, photography and poetry in high school; a powerful curiosity that led me to the Women’s Issues Network, *Bitch Magazine*, and the Women’s Studies department in university.

Fifteen years (and a B.A. and M.A. in Women’s Studies) later, the fire is still burning and there is no shortage of fuel—but I often waver between embers and inferno. I am still just as angry, just as astounded, by misogyny, capitalism, and patriarchy as I used to be (once I’d learned that these words were the reason for my teenage angst). And I still strive to put anti-racist, non-discriminatory, inclusive theory into practice in my life and work (like my professors did when I was their student). But I’m also no stranger to defeatist fatigue and the ever-looming temptation to surrender to the status quo, two critical symptoms of sexist smoke inhalation.

As rewarding and depressing, thus exhausting, as feminist-ing can be, I suppose the fact that I am still, after everything, anxious to learn, que(e)ry, change and change the world means that this slow burn is in no danger of going out.

I’ve long since lost the mix tape—maybe Kathleen has it in a shoebox, or maybe we wore it out—but in my head I can still hear my younger self in cassette-quality clarity:

“Uh oh,” I said, the verbal equivalent of realizing that something’s terribly wrong, thinking it could be trouble and knowing you’d better act fast to change it.

If this isn’t the definition of being/becoming a feminist, then stop, rewind, and hit play again.

What Makes Us Beautiful

M. Bell

It's hard to say just *when* I started to consider myself a feminist. I don't think I ever described myself that way until I was nineteen or twenty. Like so many others, I didn't understand the word. *Feminism*. Noun. Belief in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes. *Feminist*. Noun. [?]. Do you believe men and women should be treated equally? Yes. Are you a feminist? [Silence].

When I was a kid, I thought my primary goal in life should be to find a husband. I've always been very pragmatic; this life-mission bounced around in my little Barbie-blonde head along with my dreams to become a famous writer (at the time I wrote short stories and plays in which I forced family members to act), a very unfeminine (traditionally speaking) obsession with science fiction, and a fear of boy germs (no returns!).

Of course, there were a few bumps early in my husband-hunting. The first came in grade six, with this conversation:

Friend: High school boys love tall, blonde girls. It's all they want.

Me: Well, I can't wait for high school then!

Friend: No, you have to be *thin* too.

The second came in grade seven, when another girl told me that, "boys don't like girls that are smarter than them. None of the boys like you because you're too smart. And weird."

And yet, so naïve.

I found the solution to the first bump when my mother joined Weight Watchers and encouraged me to diet with her. I was five foot three, and weighed about one hundred and fifteen pounds. I didn't want anyone to know what I was doing, so I created my own Weight Watchers manual using dietary information from the Internet and a notebook. I was allowed fifteen "points" a day, which equaled roughly 800 to 1200 calories. I also had to exercise at least half an hour before each meal. I would wake up and do jumping jacks to "earn" breakfast.

As for my second problem, that was a bit harder to deal with, though, as a blonde, I had the powers of prejudice on my side. The first thing I did was march home and demand my parents pull me from the school district's gifted program. I refused to participate in math competitions, citing what my peers usually had to say about them: "why bother? I'll just lose to some Asian boy." I not only allowed but encouraged my mother to make a charitable donation of my favourite childhood book series, because I was embarrassed by their presence on my shelves. Let's be honest, *Animorphs* were never cool, and they certainly weren't earning me any points as I got older. Who had time for reading anyway? Or writing. Or drawing, or anything I used to be passionate about. I had a food journal to keep, sit ups to sit, and jumping jacks to jump. By high school, I was going to be a new person. I was going to be the perfect girl.

I entered grade eight at five foot five, one hundred pounds, in low-cut jeans and a crop top. Submissive, insecure, and desperately seeking validation.

Did I get the reaction I was looking for? Oh yes. But I didn't realize it right away. On the first full day of classes, a boy in my drama class referred to me as "beautiful" in an acting scene and stroked my cheek. I thought he was making fun of me, and smacked his hand away.

What follows are irrelevant clips of thirteen-year-old life. A boy flirts with a girl, and the girl peers over his shoulder, looking for laughing friends hiding in bushes. A boy asks a girl to hang out, the girl says no, assuming it's a practical joke and she'll be stood up. Such is life.

I had wanted boys to like me. I had wanted to be tall, blonde, thin, and beautiful. While waiting at the cross-walk near the school, I finally realized what I'd accomplished when I heard a male voice behind me.

"There goes the hot grade eight."

I looked around. There were no other girls in sight. Behind me, two older boys were grinning at me. One waved. I waved back. Then the cross-walk beeped, the little man flashed, and I ran across the street.

A surprising thought crossed my mind: *They only like you because of your looks. They don't know anything about you.*

Then another one: *What's there to know?*

Really, what was there to know? I was obsessed with my body. Everything I used to be I had either deliberately suppressed or let fall to the wayside. All my time and effort had gone to the pursuit of male attention. I had gotten it. So why was I miserable?

Even though it would be another six or seven years before I gave it a name, that was my first step toward becoming a feminist. I realized if I defined myself by my physical appearance, then other people would too. And I realized I wanted to be loved for who I was, not what I looked like, and that I needed to take a huge step back. I needed to become myself again.

It took some time. I tore up my food journal, and regained the weight I had lost within six months. Some of the habits I had picked up doing the "dumb blonde routine" lingered until high school graduation, and I didn't come out as a science fiction nerd until my second year of university. Now I publicly babble about comics and Star Wars (and even *Animorphs!*). I read, I write. I bite my nails and eat cereal in bed. These are the things that make me beautiful. I still hope to fall in love one day, but I'm sure as hell not "husband-hunting," and I don't hide who I am or deny any of the things (or people) I love. I'm not completely over it; every so often I'll run to my roommates screaming, "do I look fat in this?!" Such is life.

A year ago I started volunteering with my university's sexual assault centre. Two years ago, I was assaulted by a man I met in a bar. Such is life. In the end, it was just another push in the right direction.

I'm learning.

All these lessons are clichés. LOVE WHO YOU ARE. It's not as easy as it sounds, but I'll take that under consideration. *Don't try to be the perfect girl, you already are.* Can't say that either, I subscribe to the idea that everyone is flawed. BE YOURSELF! Thank you very much, after school specials and bathroom graffiti.

They do have a point though.

Feminist. Noun. (1) A person who believes everyone, regardless of their race, sexual orientation, and gender, should be regarded and treated as equals. (2) A person who sees people as beautiful for who they are, what they love, and what they choose to do. (3) Me. I am a feminist. No silence. No question.

The Glove

Adriana Berlingieri

I peddle hard, straighten my back, let go of the curved handle bars and guide the bicycle around the curb with my knees. We moved to our new house when I was in grade one. That was two years ago.

I jump off my bike and let it fall to the ground in front of the porch steps, my usual parking spot. I scraped my knee and stained my shorts with my cool slide into home base. I run up the stairs and into the house and past the living room, through the dining room toward the voices. My legs become heavier as I approach the kitchen.

Dad sits silently in his usual spot at the head of the kitchen table. Mom's Uncle Vito sits next to him in the men's corner, leaning on the back of the chair with his elbow bent. His belly flows over his tight belt and he tugs at the edges and sleeves of his old blue suit. Uncle Vito's big dark eyes and large bushy eyebrows always have a stern expression. The men sip homemade wine from short, round glasses. Aunt Carmela sits at the other end of the table. Her feet rest on the chair's bars to keep them from dangling several inches off the floor. Aunt Carmela always smiles. Mom, with her back turned to them, prepares lunch. Mmmmm ... I breathe in the aroma of tomato sauce simmering on the stove.

I better be on my best behaviour. Uncle Vito is the eldest uncle of the family in Canada, and Mom says that makes him extra special.

I walk into the kitchen and greet Aunt Carmela. "Alló!" she exclaims and jolts from her chair, cupped hands flying up. She kisses me on each cheek and holds my face between her hands and I bend over and allow her to squeeze my face for several long seconds.

I move around the table toward Uncle Vito with some hesitation. "Ciao, Zio Vito." I bend toward him and kiss both cheeks. I know what's coming. He pinches both my cheeks in between his thumbs and first fingers and proclaims, "this one is Calabrese! She has some meat on her! You should be in the kitchen helping your mother and learning to cook!" Zio Vito glares at Mom, who silently stirs the sauce. I look at her, then at Dad.

"You shouldn't be out playing boys' games!" Zio Vito continues.

Silence. I set the table.

After lunch, Zio Vito and Zia Carmela leave, and Dad decides to take my younger brothers Marco and Peter and myself to Canadian Tire. I love going to Canadian Tire! Maybe while Dad looks for tools, I can take a quick detour to the sports section.

We make our way to the sports department. Marco and Peter and I scatter among the aisles filled with tennis rackets, badminton kits, and footballs, basketballs, volleyballs, and soccer balls. I stand in front of the array of baseball gloves hanging from steel rods. Dad stands slightly behind me and says, "pick one." One by one I slip gloves onto my left hand. I flex my fingers and punch the center with my right hand. Too small. Too big. Too stiff. Too soft. Then I see it, a black leather Cooper with tan trimming and stitching. I slip my hand into the mitt. Perfect fit. Punch. Punch. Perfect.

Inside Out
Kate Bojin

Second row from the front
Inside the ivory tower
Thinking outside the box

Gender only part of the equation
Race, class, sexuality, ability
Intersecting oppressions
Mind searching
Heart racing
Eyes wide open

To the world of
new rhythm, rhyme, reason

This dance unfamiliar
I don't know the words,
But have been singing it for years
This chorus disturbing
Resistant to exploring

This systemic
Repression
Exclusion
Discrimination

The world transformed
As an unequal equation of
Power
Access
Control

Over discourse
Hearts
Minds
Private
Public
These spheres seem hard to crack

Under the pressure
of an uncertain path
Eyes glare
My heart judged
Opinion devalued
by this new dance
I start to surround myself with sisters
feel this rhythm, rhyme anew

As my sisters and I reject exclusion and fear

From the second row
To life

I Taste
Hear
Touch
This elusive
f-word

i am it. It is me.

I Am
Sasha Burden

"You're just a feminist."

Said like it's a dirty word, spit out of the mouths of babes.

Breathe in. (I sigh,) I don't know how to react.

I didn't know what it meant. *"You're just a feminist,"* said with anger.

"Feminist! Ugg, here she goes again."

Here I go again?

I say that women deserve respect.

Here I go again?

I say that it's pro-choice or no-choice.

Here I go again?

I say that that the curve of my body and the heave of my breast does not define me.

Here I go again?

I say that that no means no, and that *"maybe next time"* is not an invitation for more harassment – it's a fuck off and let me be.

Here I go again?

"Feminist! Pffh".

I didn't know that speaking my mind made me a feminist. But if wanting equality, if wanting to control my sexuality without judgment make me a feminist, if refusing to submit to patriarchal roles make me a feminist, if vocalizing my belief that women are people make me a feminist, then that is what I am.

I.

Breathe in. (I sigh.)

I know how to react now.

"She's just a feminist."

Yes.

I am a woman, a lover, a sister. I am an activist, a reproductive freedom fighter, I am a safe walk, I am a place to talk. I take up space and I celebrate my body.

Sisters.

I.

I cannot be silenced.

We.

We cannot be silenced.

“Feminist, Ugg”

I gaze. Eyes lock.

Breathe in. (I sigh)

Feminist. Feminist.

My brain fires back and the words spill out of my mouth:

“Yes. I am a feminist.”

I keep my gaze.

Oh, the threat of the gaze.

Silence.

Silence.

Gaze.

“Hello, my name is Sasha.”

Feminism: A Turning of the Mind/A Frightening Dream

Bonnie Burstow

I was moved to write this piece as the last call for papers appeared in my email inbox. I was still reluctant. I was busy with thesis students. I was trying to pull together a major international academic conference. Anyway, what could I personally say that I hadn't already? Then I realized that while I typically wrote from a feminist perspective, even at times waxed highly personal, there was a nagging aspect of my story that I never told, that I did not know how to tell.

The Beginning of Feminism

As a woman born in the prairies in 1945, there was no women's movement that I could turn to, for no such animal existed. I simply knew that I was someone who did not fit in—I did not dream of becoming anyone's wife; at twelve, I dreamt of becoming an English professor or Canada's representative to the United Nations. I spoke of these things to my mother. She looked worried, said nothing. I spoke to my father. "What is the girl talking about?" he exclaimed. "She'll get married and have babies like every other girl." While a part of me wondered why I was so out of step, such words and responses grated on me, and in that grating lay the beginnings of my feminism. I could not follow the path expected. I was a childhood sexual abuse survivor, moreover, and while no one talked about such things in the 1950s, in the way that I saw girls looked at, talked about, I sensed that I was not alone. Either something was wrong with me, or something was profoundly amiss with the world. How does one know which?

I first began developing what could be called a concrete feminist analysis in the opening years of the 1960s. While by far the most qualified, Dr. Marion Smith was passed over as head of the English Department at the University of Manitoba. More significantly, I came across Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex." Eureka! Being a woman was like another identity of mine that I understood better—being a Jew. It too involved systemic oppression, could be approached accordingly. Herein lay direction.

In the late sixties, in England, I went on relevant demonstrations, attended meetings with other young women rebels, employed the term "women's movement." In the early seventies, I was in Toronto, again attending demonstrations, hanging out with women who called themselves "feminists," and reading the writing of the early radical feminists. Then one day, I hit another level, a more harrowing level. Quite simply, I had a dream that took my breath away.

A bit of family history. My family had always been involved in social causes. Despite his legendary temper, I had been closest with my father, in part because we were the most political family members, in part because he rushed to the aid of others, in part because I was always painfully aware of his vulnerability. He'd had a serious heart condition, and would frequently pace the halls of our house, clapping at his heart. He was also someone who had repeatedly landed in psychiatric institutions and had been subjected to hundreds of electroshock treatments. By now he was long dead—had died of the last heart attack.

The dream: I was in a long narrow hallway. In the distance, I saw a plain pine coffin, the traditional burial vessel for Jews. As I drew closer, I could make out enough features—the gaunt face, the jet black to graying hair—to know that the body inside was my father. He was dressed in his good brown trousers, but he was shirtless and was clutching at his chest. More distressing still, he was groaning, and on his chest were open wounds from which fresh blood spurted.

"Dad, what's happening to you?" I cried in dismay. "Oh, Dad, is there something I can do for you?"

For several moments, he just peered at me piteously. Then he raised his hand and pointed to a wound. "Bonnie, it's what you do, what you think that is making my body bleed," he answered. "How can you hang around with women's libbers anyway? Don't you know that they are all lesbians?"

I woke in a cold sweat. I knew I had dreamt something profound. I had dreamt of the death of the patriarch. It was not an anonymous patriarch. It was my own father, and I was hardly a disinterested or innocent bystander.

This special collection by *RFR* and the CWSE asks us to address how we came to be feminists. For me, anyway, there are number of answers. I became a feminist because I felt the sexism of society. I became feminist by reading feminist works. I became feminist via the women with whom I associated. I became feminist through the protests which I helped create. I became feminist joyously by hosting feminist feasts, feminist sedars. Another answer, though, is that I became feminist with pain and with difficulty, much as years later, with difficulty I became a Jew who opposed the Occupation. I became feminist facing the difficult reality that this is a hard struggle, for the “adversaries” of whom we speak—and no, these patriarchal terms never feel right—are people that we love. Our fathers, our brothers, our sons.

I could not be the thinker I am today without feminism. Feminism informs the classes I teach, every work that I have penned. As a therapist, it lit my way as I increasingly became aware that if therapy is to be playing on the right team, it must be built on an awareness that social causes underlie private troubles, and that our personal way of dealing with these must be respected, must be looked to for guidance. Therapy must be grounded in political solidarity, not only an ethics of compassion, hence the publication in the 1990’s of my best known work, *Radical Feminist Therapy: Working in the Context of Violence*. It has sensitized me to the centrality of caring, compassion, gifting, what is thought of as “women’s ways of being,” but what are ultimately human ways of being. At the same time, loyal in my own fashion, I remain my father’s daughter. While he was not critical of the psychiatric system that so demolished him, as those familiar with my activism are aware, my primary focus as an activist has always been psychiatry. I approach it, however, first and foremost as a feminist.

I think that in the end, despite errors and omissions, I have found ways of being true to myself. Like so many around me, I work to bring about the day where no one remembers the last time a woman was raped or beaten, where everyone lives cooperatively, where there is space for difference, whether it involves race, madness, sexual diversity. I work for the day that no one frets over driving the last nail into the coffin of the patriarchy, for everyone, women and men alike, views patriarchy as a mistake of the past.

How I became a Feminist
Anna-Celestrya Carr

I first stood for trees
A voice for the working class struggle
Now I am exploring space

Humble Teacher, High Priestess

Christine D'Angelo

I suppose I became a feminist in the most ordinary of ways. And yet, the result of that identity and the power it has had in redirecting my life has been nothing but extraordinary.

As part of a generation of institutionally-produced feminists, my initial encounter with those powerful ideologies was in a first-year Women's Studies classroom. I remember feeling as though I had stumbled upon a voice of truth that had been left unarticulated by other disciplines. It is a voice that still fights to be heard within conventional academic confines, even as its relevancy is continually disputed on university campuses. So what drew me to such a controversial and (arguably) unpopular subject? My romantic self might say it was fate, that is, the direction that I've always been pulled in and the only thing that ever felt completely right.

But in truth, it was the women. Women writers, thinkers, and adventurers; grassroots organizers and professors; friends, fellow students, and activists. They provided the sketchings of a map—not to be faithfully followed, but constantly amended. Because of those remarkable women who called themselves feminists, I too knew that to be my name. And by unabashedly embracing that title, feminism moved from my head to my heart, where it could truly begin to amend my worldview. Feminism was something I was to be a part of, and it was to be a part of me.

Looking back now, seven years since my love-affair first began, feminism still speaks to my most intimate experiences. It offers an entry point for understanding our troubled world, and even suggests principals by which to live in it. Moreover, feminism provides hope and an approach with which to tackle all the troubles it unearths.

It is a far-reaching politic with multiple arms that engages every facet of our complicated lives and overlapping identities. Feminism has taught me how to truly see the people that I encounter daily, as much for their sameness as for their difference. Though race, geography, and borders might distance us, we are never so far apart that we are not still connected. And we are never so different from one another that we cannot find reason to work towards common goals. Where is feminism not applicable, except in a just world?

And yet within this global view, feminism has provided avenues for exploring the very local, the very personal. Though emphasizing the particularities of our locations on this earth, it pushes us to continuously question the identities that we associate with place. It has reminded me of the many births and deaths that make up the generations of one's family tree. It has excavated memories of how my ancestors have moved across this earth, that I should end up in the very place I call home. It has allowed me to revise the question, 'where are you from?' so that instead it reads, 'where might I have been from?'

These processes of self-exploration and understanding have been my road to self-acceptance. Feminism's light has guided me to reconcile with my body and taught me to love its womanly capabilities. It has buttressed my sexual exploration, informing me of endless possibilities and personal limitations alike. Reuniting me with myself, feminism has been a space in which to validate my spirituality; teaching me of the symbiotic relationship between body, mind and spirit. Of course, there are many paths that might lead to such knowledge, but feminism was mine.

Feminism *is* my spiritual practice. It is an outlet through which my soul might live out its goals in this lifetime. It has given me clear eyes with which to see new visions. It is the sweet song to which my ears have become attuned, and a language so loved by my tongue that at times the two conspire on their own. Feminism has taught me to feel with sensors that extend beyond my body to detect things that only the heart knows are there. It teaches the healing power of love and the transformative power of pain; the consequence of words spoken and stories left untold. It has taught me the unequivocal truth of things seen and unseen.

Humble teacher though she is, feminism has taught me all this by reiterating the value of my womanhood and reminding me of its meaning. It has ignited my search to find and know the Woman in me. For there where She lies is a great and unexhausted power, indeed, a natural force. At the very least, I have learned to honour that force. For it holds the power to change the world, one feminist at a time.

Am I a Feminist!

Yara Doleh

A good question indeed
What defines me as a feminist?
Where was the starting point?
Was it when I went against all odds?
Leaving home at the age of eighteen
Not very ordinary at that time and at that part of the world
Or was it when I saw my closest friend getting married
After being swept by “love” ... she later denied “it” existed
I decided to become totally independent, never rely on a man
And decided to further my education so I can obtain my own status in the world
Was it then that I felt powerful and above the world?
Or was it at the age of twenty-seven when I decided to break free
From all chains of traditions and religious dogmas
And my virginity was lost
But my spirit was found
Or was it when I woke up one day and decided to cut my hair
After thirty-six years of long, feminine hair
I cut it as short as I could, and my heart was dancing as fast as it could
And none loved it because I had defied the norm, I had altered the routine
By doing so, I have become “different”
Or was it that “time of the month” (called period)
That gathered all my frustrations and my thoughts
To start studying menstruation and women’s changing moods
And digging deep to find a solution, to get the whole idea clarified
Don’t get me wrong ...
I love my two sons, my father, my brother and my husband
But what I don’t like is living according to their standards
Or any man’s standard
I want to be free and not limited
I don’t want to be judged or underestimated
I want to live as a woman and be accepted and not pitied

Does this makes me a feminist ... or may be just a rebel?

Where does it end ... if it ends at all?

Alas!

Look at me now

Stay-at-home mom

No independence

No risky dreams

Totally in the shadow

Am I a feminist after all...?

Or am I simply a fake?

Recollections of a Feminist

Rose Fine-Meyer

My mother, a strong feminist and independent thinker, encouraged my political and social consciousness through regular family discussions about politics and social issues. From an early age, it was clear that although I was privileged to have options about my future, they were framed in what it meant to be female. Facing numerous differences, my brother and I lived in the same home but not in the same world. My upbringing was wrapped in a protective coating. My family and my friends were cognizant of the numerous challenges confronting people around the world and we supported a number of charities, but my mother specifically engaged in providing for women in need by donating clothing and household items on a regular basis.

I therefore developed a strong sense of social awareness and the unique difficulties facing women, so it naturally followed that I would become an active supporter of social justice, advocating for change to government policies. In high school, a number of my friends and I protested school regulations, and I often wore a wide variety of buttons on my jacket to support a number of “causes”, including women’s rights. My closest friends and I defined ourselves as feminists, and challenged teachers and administrators.

My family supported my activism and my decision to major in political science at the University of Toronto. In between attending classes, I was active in a number of organizations, including one that helped the last of the draft dodgers find a home here in Toronto. I was outspoken about major issues facing women, including day-care, abortion, and equal pay. I read feminist newspapers and journals and discussed women’s issues in my political science classes and in cafes around the university. This was an exciting time, filled with enthusiasm and commitment, as we felt we were paving a new path for the future. I challenged the traditional hierarchical structures within society and our political institutions that continued to create barriers for women. I felt entitled to have it all: career, home, and children, but I also understood that being a feminist meant waging an ongoing battle to ensure all women had equal opportunities for their future.

As a teacher starting in the 1980s, I included women in my course narratives, visually on the walls of my classroom and in the films and materials that I incorporated. I joined the “women’s forum” at my school and regularly raised money for a local women’s shelter. Strong women held positions of responsibility at the Toronto Board of Education and this provided meaningful role models for all female teachers.

Although I worked with a number of independent women, I was still aware of the gender divide. I confronted gendered discrimination when I was pregnant with my second child. Faced with being removed from my school because I had requested half-time status, I was able to reflect on the discrimination of women in the workplace. I had other friends who had experienced sexual harassment and others who were passed over for promotion because employers expected they might have another child.

I faced gender injustice again when the father of my children decided to leave our home, insisting that my abilities to effectively manage full time work, home, and child care meant that the children and I would function well on our own. Many of my friends, who had achieved both personal and career success, faced the same outcome. Independence apparently came at a cost. Strong women could be viewed as intimidating and unattractive.

Becoming a mother of two boys increased my feminist commitment. I wanted them to grow up accepting women as equal partners. Both sons had girlfriends as “best friends” when they were very young and were comfortable sharing common interests with girls or boys throughout their teenage years.

My interest in women’s history eventually defined my graduate work. I went back to university in 1994 to upgrade my history qualifications and wrote about *Les Filles du Roi*. My Doctoral thesis, ten

years later, focused on the ways in which historical narratives about Canadian women were implemented into secondary school history curriculum in Ontario. Interviewing educators and feminist activists for my thesis brought the 1970s temporarily back to life for me: that communal commitment to challenge the status quo and advocate for change. The feminist movement argued for the right to a shared place within society, and feminists were committed to that outcome. It was clear to me, forty years later, that not all our hopes had been fulfilled. I joined the Ontario Women's History Network (OWHN) and the Canadian Voices of Women (VOW) because they celebrated and promoted the experiences of women.

Supporting women's rights to education, economic, social and political progress is still central to my beliefs. I co-authored a book with Pat Staton and Stephanie Kim Gibson, entitled *Unfolding Power: Documents in 20th Century Canadian Women's History*, for secondary schools, in order to place women's narratives into history courses in the province.

While teaching a gender equity course at the University of Toronto, it became apparent that the word *feminism* had become tainted by those who labelled gender equity as really "male bashing." This is the new challenge for feminists today: to break through the now distorted perception of what gender equality really represents. Being a feminist means supporting the right for women and men to equal opportunities, in education, family, and work, but it also means ensuring that women have free access to child care, in order that they are able to maintain the same advantages. There are still significant challenges related to gender equality within society, as women continue to face abuse and discrimination, often silenced for their opinions and actions. I'd like to see the issues of gender equality play a stronger role in school curriculum and the work of feminists to effectively challenge societal structures, drive new research and advocate for equal opportunity, and continue to shape educational reform in Canada.

Critical Feminist Imagination(s): Institutional Ethnography, Intersectionality and Public Sociology

Daniel Grace

Aligned with Burawoy's (2004) concept of "public sociology"—intellectual work that is concerned with an engagement of wider publics and transcending academic audiences—I wish to reflect on my struggles with turning feminist commitments into research that matters to people in the everyday world. My feminism is one that recognizes women's rights as human rights; an understanding of the need to examine power inequity, hegemonic masculinities and pervasive systems of patriarchy. I will briefly comment upon how my feminist imagination and public sociology has been fuelled by my training in institutional ethnography, intersectionality and experience in transnational HIV/AIDS research with women.

To start, I wish to say something about the alternative sociology, known as institutional ethnography, that has informed how I conceptualize my personal and professional work as a sociologist. I also will note some important work in the field of intersectionality that has forced me to complicate my feminist-oriented sociological work. These two scholarly traditions have shaped my commitments as an activist and academic. First, I will say something about institutional ethnography. Rather than divide sociological work into four quadrants with the possibility for overlap (see Burawoy 2004), institutional ethnography is clear with its starting point: the lives of everyday publics. Developed by the Canadian sociologist Dorothy Smith, institutional ethnography (IE) allows for a consideration of complex processes of social organization. I am fortunate to have Dorothy E. Smith, PhD, as a co-supervisor of my doctoral research; her feminist work is a source of tremendous inspiration. IE as a critical research strategy provides me with a method of inquiry focused upon the process of discovery. It recognizes interview subjects to be active and knowledge practitioners of their everyday work practices.

Institutional ethnographic research has produced an impressive body of interdisciplinary feminist scholarship over the last twenty years. Ethnographic work in this academic tradition is rooted in a critical feminist (social) ontology and has explicated the complex ways in which social and institutional forces translocally coordinate the everyday/everynight worlds of varied publics—from persons living with HIV and AIDS to mothers, sex workers, social workers, teachers, doctors, nurses and government employees. For example, examining institutional complexes, this mode of ethnographic inquiry has allowed me to map networks of text-mediated social relations that are organized around health care and social service provisions in and beyond the Canadian context. This is a feminist sociology for people.

For institutional ethnographers texts set words, images, or sounds into a "material form" (Smith 2006: 67). IE uses the concept of ruling relations to highlight how people's actions are coordinated both locally and translocally. Texts—be they print or electronic, words or visual images—are replicated at varied times in multiple sites. The standardized operating modes of institutions relies upon this replicability. Aligned with Carroll's (2004) review of IE as a critical research strategy, I work to produce critical institutional ethnographic research that maps and critiques "the logics and priorities of entrenched power, and shows how those priorities are instantiated and inscribed in texts and extra-local relations that reach into everyday life" (p. 166).

In addition to IE, intersectional research traditions have also informed my feminist research. In their discussion of the social determinants of health, Hankivsky and Christoffersen (2008) argue that intersectional research approaches are needed to account for the multiplicity of lived experiences by women in the everyday world. I take my definition of intersectionality from Hankivsky and Christoffersen (2008) who define it as "a theory of knowledge that strives to elucidate and interpret multiple and intersecting systems of oppression and privilege" (p. 275). For example, I am interested in examining the intersection of multiple axes of oppression (including, gender, sexual orientation, 'race'/ethnicity, and class). Interest in intersectional research grew from a critique of 'race'-based and gender-based

research that was unable to account for the complexity of lived experience in the social world along various points of intersection (McCall 2005). McCall (2005) explains that the possibility for “multiple and conflicting experiences of subordination and power required a more wide-ranging and complex form of analysis” (p. 1780). In addition, Hankivsky and Christoffersen (2008) argue that health determinants such as gender are problematically conceived and applied in research and policy spheres. For example, a lack of focus upon how gender interacts with other axes of oppression “essentializes the experiences of women, reifies existing inequalities among different groups of women and arguably leads to the production of faulty and incomplete knowledge” (Hankivsky and Christoffersen 2008: 273). As these scholars point out, the complex issue of how to study intersectionality—questions of methodology, theory and (inter)disciplinarity—require continued attention.

My current dissertation research in law, HIV/AIDS and women’s rights also builds upon the theoretical and methodological skills that I have developed through research with women in India (geographical focus: Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka), Ecuador (geographical focus: Pifo, Quito, La Esperanza and Checa) and Canada (geographic focus: Toronto, London, and Victoria). For example, I have had the opportunity to do some front-line work in the field of HIV/AIDS both in Canada (working at homeless drop-in centers and needle exchanges in Ontario) and transnationally (working on HIV/AIDS prevention and education among women’s community groups in India). While these research opportunities had academic outcomes (for example, scholarly publication and presentations focusing upon women’s rights) their starting and ending points were in the everyday world: the experiences, concerns, needs and understandings of people living with or vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

To conclude, I would like to say something about the potential connections between institutional ethnography and interdisciplinary when conducting feminist, public-oriented work in the social world. In my own research I have found that institutional ethnography and intersectionality offer important theory-method challenges when researching questions of health, social inequality and gender. While there are important differences between these perspectives, both approaches grew out of feminist praxis and present innovative theory-method packages for researchers and broader publics. I find that both approaches can be conducted in interdisciplinary research environments; both focus upon qualitative research methods and resist essentialism and the reification of epidemiological categories; and both help researchers and activists attend to the role of social structure upon individual and community health. I also see these approaches as offering the possibility for the integration of (critical) community-based and participatory action research approaches when conducting research with vulnerable populations.

I have tried to provide in this short piece a taste of the critical feminist scholarship that has informed my social justice work within and beyond academic institutions.

However, I do not wish to imply that feminist oriented sociological work is straightforward. Recognizing the intersections of oppression and privilege in the everyday world is one thing, but doing work that is accessible and meaningful to people outside of institutionalized academics is challenging. This is a challenge worth taking. I look forward to continued work that will allow me to use my feminist imagination(s) to work with publics committed to the principles of social justice and situating women’s rights as human rights.

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My Feminism Does Not Include Silence Tricia Green

I am starting this discourse with silence –
through lack of self-knowledge,
through lack of self-awareness,
through lack of education.
This silence has been passed on
from generation to generation
from parent to child,
in a vicious cycle of emotional barriers
that holds us back from transformation and self-revelation.
This silence is in all realms of my reality
as a black woman,
at home, in my family, in the privacy of my bedroom,
at work, at school.
This silence is a burden that I wear.
There is a pain;
there is dis-ease, stress, illness,
and mental un-clarity.
But all silences must come to an end
as to survive, at one point in our lives or another;
we find words that galvanize us into action.

Without the word or proper understanding of the philosophy, I became a feminist the summer that I disclosed fourteen years of childhood sexual abuse to my family. For fourteen years of my life I was silent. I did not speak of the various moments that my body was abused, appropriated, disrespected and violated. I could not speak.

The summer before I started university, I stopped the cycle of violence and silence that plagued me. In my last semester of high school, I intellectualized the years of sexual violence by working on the topic of child sexual abuse. In the literature, I was encouraged to tell someone, to seek help to stop the abuse, to seek legal recourse against the abuser, to allow myself to be embraced and supported by my family as they help me through my trauma. Taking the advice to heart, I decided to tell the women in my family what had happened to me. I broke the code of silence about incest, rape, and violence, and told my mother, sisters, and aunt (who at the time was married to my 'uncle'); I was further traumatized in the disclosure of the abuse, more so than the abuse itself. My mother, aunt and sisters could not understand how I could have been abused and violated for so many years without telling them. There was a backlash. I was to blame, I was shameful, disgusting, an adulteress, a slut. What was particularly interesting was that all of the women in my family are themselves victims of violence (incest and rape), and none of them had disclosed or talked about their stories. But rather than drawing together as family, as a community of women, with a shared pain, I became the scapegoat for breaking the silence.

When I was accepted into McMaster University for Women's Studies and Sociology, I saw an opportunity to break the cycle of silence by learning feminism. I wanted to be part of a community of women who wanted to break free of the chains that surround womanhood and to stop the consumption of ourselves at the hands of perpetrators. I wanted to find a way to thrive, not just survive. I thought how better to end woman and child abuse than to make it visible, to remove it from the private sphere of shame and blame, move it into the public sphere of education and justice. I hungered for an understanding of how to satisfy women's need for survival through choices.

Charlotte Bunch, in Self-Identification and Political Survival, states that the purpose of talking about the self is not to advance abstract knowledge about women, but to better understand our strengths and weaknesses as women. For me, first through my undergraduate and later through my graduate studies at the University of Toronto, I used my experiences as storytelling tools. I have told my story of surviving child sexual abuse many times in various discourses, in the private and public spheres of my life. Yet it is when I tell my story as a mother that I realize the missing piece in the discourse. While I had told my story many times to other women or to men that I had been intimate with as an explanation for my many unresolved sexual issues, I had never told my story to a child or a youth. Why would this be any different than telling my story to an adult? It was different because of the developing minds of the young. If the women in my family who had experienced violence told me their stories when I was five, would I have understood it enough to tell someone that my cousin was violating my body? Instead, at the age of five, I was not prepared for this primal betrayal by men in my family and community. For a long time this has been the source of my feminism, this fear of men and my search to find a system of support from women who understand that to keep it secret or buried is not healing. To truly heal we must uncover the veil of secrecy that shrouds this despicable behaviour.

Now, through the early stages of mothering a daughter, my feminism has allowed me to break the many cycles of violence that persisted in my family. As a form of resistance to incest, it is important that little girls become demystified about their bodies, so that when they tell about someone touching them, using the right word, it is clear and unmistakable. For me the cycle of sexual violence and emotional numbness stop with her through age appropriate language and stories.

She knows the word 'vagina,' uses it freely to communicate to me, and I remember at the age of three her holding a hand mirror between her legs to see what her vagina looks like. She knows what privacy is and can tell me when her privacy is invaded, even if it is just to close the bathroom door. She knows her birth story and talks to new mothers about how they gave birth. Through openness and age-appropriate language and stories, she knows far more than I did at this age, and she knows when she wants new information she just has to ask and I will tell her.

I have further broken the cycle of sexual violence that started when I was five years old by telling my daughter about good and bad touch. When my daughter turned five, the main abuser in my life was arrested and charged. During the two year court process, I explained to my daughter what I was doing whenever I had to take her to day care early to get to court, or ask her dad to take her for an unscheduled overnight visit so I could purge the emotions from a day at court.

When I disclosed years of sexual violence to my family, I felt (still feel) a large sense of resentment for breaking the veil of secrecy. However, as I continue on the path of healing from sexual violence, I am aware of myself as a woman, a mother, and a feminist and I know that I cannot compare myself to or be defined by the women in my family. I choose to resist the oppression and control of silence. We have done grave harm to ourselves by being silent and the world has done grave harm by silencing us.

To my daughter:

Let me envision for you a future that holds a form and practice of feminism that is expanding and empowering.

Why didn't you tell?
Tricia Green

Why didn't you tell?
Why
Didn't
You
Tell
?

those four words
asked with a tone of self righteous indignation
as if you walked in my shoes
as if you can ever conceive of the reasons that

I
Did
Not
Tell

Have you ever felt powerless?
As if your life is not your own?
As if you can be shaped and shifted to suit the desires of
some one more powerful than yourself.

Image a child, controlled and powerless
by her abuser
by her family
with no one to tell
with no one to understand
sympathize, empathize, rationalize
but instead
to learn how to box it away in a small part of her mind
splintering, fragmenting, slowly killing who she is

Why
Didn't
You
Tell
?

And if I did, who would have protected me from the judgments?
Who would have protected me from the shame?
Who would have protected me from the blame?

Who
Could
I
Tell
?

And when I told,
finally,
years of waiting,
of barely living,
beyond survival
moving to thrive
what did they say?

It
Was
An
Affair
!

So

Why
Didn't
I
Tell
?

Because I knew
Intuitively
That no would believe me
and that
was
not
good
For my survival.

Feminism is Fairness

Leigh-Anne Ingram

It still amazes me how many people today will still scrunch up their faces and look at me with hesitation and say, “You’re not a FE-MI-NIST, are you?”, drawing out each syllable, as if it is a dirty word. Despite the progress that has been made around the world to liberate women (and men) from sexist oppression, it can still feel dangerous to be a feminist today. Sometimes I imagine myself as Wonder Woman, with metal bracelets to fend off people’s disdain and criticism (but without the skin-tight hot pants). Now, when I say feminist, I don’t mean a secret Sarah Palin-complain-to-your-girlfriends-at-home feminist, I mean a bold-faced-Eve-Ensler-I-support-woman-friendly policies feminist.

As far as I can remember, I have believed strongly in the equality of men and women, while recognizing their differences. Even so, I did not have the language to describe why we still need feminism until I took my first women’s studies courses in university. I remember a particularly powerful moment, when the professor asked us to imagine Ralph Waldo Emerson writing his philosophical treatises about individualism and self-reliance, while behind him, his wife cooked his meals, cleaned his house, and took care of him. This arrangement is not unique. Millions of men and women around the world live some form of this arrangement even today. Often, it is the men that get the public face and accolades, while women’s contributions go unacknowledged. It is unfair, and that is why I’m a feminist.

Although I went to an all-girls’ high school, it wasn’t until I got to university that I was confronted with some of the harsh realities of being a woman. I learned that six of my friends were victims of sexual violence, but *not one* of their abusers was ever charged, confronted, or punished. The women were all from different racial, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds, and not one was immune to violence. That is unacceptable, and that is why I am a feminist.

Being a feminist today means wanting to free women and men of all walks of life from the straightjacket of patriarchy. It also means understanding that it is impossible to consider gender without acknowledging how it connects to race, class, sexuality, geography and other aspects of human identity. Being a feminist today means pushing for more representation of women of all racial and cultural backgrounds in positions of power in government and all sectors of society. It means validating women’s roles as mothers and care-givers, and preventing child abuse, rape, and sexual assault. At the same time, it means having policies that support men as fathers and partners, and generally rethinking the way we socialize young boys and girls, so they can have the freedom to live their lives happily and authentically.

Feminism is an opportunity for men and women to step back from traditional racist, patriarchal relationships and question them. Most people would say that they support fairness and democracy, so why aren’t most people feminists?

I look forward to the day when sexism is out dated and when you can have an open conversation about gender equality, instead of whispering, “You ARE a feminist, AREN’T YOU?”

My Story: 'It is less about how I became a feminist' than 'Ain't I a womanist/feminist?'

Marilyn Patricia Johncilla

Sojourner Truth was one of the first feminists to speak about her lived experiences at the Second Convention of Women's Rights Movement in Akron, Ohio, in 1852 as she bared her breasts asking attendees: ".....Ain't I a woman?" (hooks, 1981:160). Although Truth was talking about sexism at that time, over time we have come to understand that feminism is much more than a social and political movement to end sexist inequality. If we have not, we will be dismissing Black women's experiences that go far beyond sexism to include racism, classism, ableism and other oppressions that structure our human relationships in this capitalist society. I raise the following question in this article, ain't I a womanist/feminist in order to interrogate how I became a feminist and how has feminism shaped my worldview? In answering this question, I engage with what I learned from my ancestors through African indigenous knowledges and womanism, because truth be told, I was born into womanism and this was deeply ingrained into my psyche by the women who surrounded me. Alice Walker (1983) first identified womanism as Black women's experiences of resistance, support, survival and wholeness of the entire Black community. She adds "womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender" (p. xi).

While Western individualism may lead to believe that all my thoughts and feelings are only my own, African cosmology teaches me that I am a product of historical and sociological processes in which my thoughts, feelings and actual being are also shaped by the experiences of empowerment, struggles, memories and resistances of my ancestors. The social, political, cultural and even psychological and emotional patterns constructing who I am have been passed down to me through generations, and in turn I will pass my patterns to another generation. I did not come to feminism as an outsider, because I am a transnational African Caribbean indigenous womanist who migrated to Canada, and I share some of the lived experiences of many other African Canadian Black women. These shared experiences grant many of us an African Canadian insider community knowledge of transnationalism, anti-colonialism, African indigenous knowledges and womanism, knowledges that are central to Black consciousness/feminism (Johncilla, 2006).

I am a feminist in part because I practice and carry memories of African indigenous knowledges and womanism about Black women's leadership experiences in spite of my separation from my African indigenous homes in Africa and Trinidad and Tobago through Trans-Atlantic slavery and globalization. Indeed, I learned the practices of womanism from my ancestors, including my mother, grandmother and othermothers¹ who were leaders within their communities at home. I believe that my experiences with, and of these women prepared me to take up my present womanist approaches to epistemology, pedagogy and research even within a not always hospitable academic space. My ancestors taught me to accept the claim that African people carry memories within their bodies and to resist the amputation of this knowledge. To reject this lesson, I would be to suffer from what Stuart Hall (1991) calls "a process of historical amnesia" (p. 20). I have not only come to feminism, womanism and African indigenous knowledge as an adult; I have embodied these liberating practices over time through learning them from my ancestors and women like my mother, my grandmother and othermothers.

The women who have influenced me in my life may not have explicitly identified themselves as traversing the terrains of African indigenous knowledges or feminist and womanist epistemologies, but their shared values, beliefs and actions of equality were undeniably and consciously grounded in a culture of liberation that included the use of traditional, local and folk knowledges of resistance for social, economic and political transformation. My memories of what the women who surrounded me in Trinidad and Tobago did are what Collins (1990) and Lattas (1993) call 'sites of self-empowerment,

¹ According to Collins (1990), othermothers are unlike blood mothers in the Black community who share mothering responsibilities.

resistance and transformation', which are central to the standpoint of Black feminism. I remember these memories through my stirred emotions, cognitions and intuitions, which are also central to practices of African indigeneity.

My mother was a local community philosopher, and my grandmother was a community mid-wife and healer woman with a deep knowledge of folk medicine. My othermothers were the Spiritual Baptist leaders, schoolteachers, local politicians, higglers², managers and community organizers. These women taught me about womanism through their actual everyday practices and through storytelling. The value of their knowledge is legitimated within the conscious liberating concepts of difference in Black women's experiences and is located in their commitment to motherhood, work, family, institutions, the community and to stopping violence against women. Many of these women were single mothers, poor and homemakers. However, within these experiences they claim an Afrocentric womanist consciousness that brought about liberation, change and empowerment.

My mother, grandmother and othermothers had knowledge of local concepts and folk traditions that were handed down to them from previous generations, and that liberated them from colonial and patriarchal oppressions. In passing on this liberated knowledge to me, they prepared me for the task of writing about Black women's leadership, from an anti-colonial perspective of storytelling and through paradigms and practices of African indigenous knowledges, feminism and womanism; structures that have become the central core of my academic research.

As for African indigenous knowledge, my shared experiences with the women of my community in Trinidad and Tobago passed on to me the liberating knowledge of Black women's leadership. I learned that storytelling, a womanist practice (Hudson-Weems, 2004; Collins, 1990) and an African indigenous practice (Semali and Kincheloe, 1999; Elabor-Idemudia 2000), informs me that knowledge does not have to be validated only through written text. Validity also comes from oral narratives, memory, history (Collins, 1990; Dei, 2000a; Mclsaac, 2000; Smith, 1999), visual and artefactual representations. This is the same as saying; I know who I am because of the historical womanist teachings I received from Black historical women and those of my community in Trinidad and Tobago.

Conceptualizing feminism has not been an easy venture for me as it also wasn't for the Black women who have come before me. African women have been liberated in pre-colonial and post-colonial periods, and in antiquity through rulers like Yaa Asantewa of Asante in Ghana, Nehanda of Zimbabwe and Queen Nanny of Jamaica, the revolutionary obeah woman and herbal healer of enslavement time. These were historically empowered women who were already practicing feminist principles, easily identified as womanist epistemologies, given their power as competent rulers and warriors.

I believe that there is power in the term womanism, while I do not dismiss or put aside the value of feminism, and do choose either term at times. While I embrace both terms, the term womanism fits better within the context of my lived experiences and the research I conduct on Black women's leadership. The womanism of which I speak addresses liberating experiences of transnationalism, anti-colonialism, African indigenous knowledges and Black consciousness that make me a conscious advocate for the equality of women and men in all social, economic and political spheres of life, both locally and globally. I am also a womanist located within the halls of academia and located in my commitment is the liberation of Black women from all oppressions forced upon us like racism, sexism, classism, ableism, ethnocentrism and other exploitations that complicate and marginalize the significance of our experiences. These multiple locations have afforded me a critical voice for speaking and writing, similar to that of other Black feminists in academia like Patricia Hill Collins, Alice Walker, Angela Davis and Carole Boyce Davies from the United States, and of course, my sisters like Angela Robertson, Dionne Brand, Patience Elabor-Idemudia and Notisha Massaquoi, right here in Canada.

To reiterate the question: 'how I became a feminist and how has feminism shaped my worldview?' While time and space are difficult to measure, I would prefer to answer the question, 'who influenced

² Higglers are women vendors, marketers and traders making a living. The word is Jamaican derivative, but the practice is common to other African and Caribbean nation states.

me in my womanist epistemology?' While at times it is easy to interchangeably use womanism and feminism, at times I prefer to use the word womanism like Alice Walker (1983), because I am a Black woman in support of the survival and wholeness of the entire Black community. Furthermore, I am a transnational, African Caribbean indigenous womanist moving to new arenas. Ain't I a feminist?

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For My Sister(s)

Aida Jordão

Mine is the age-old story of the undesired female baby. But my family was of the atheist bent, progressive in all respects, and this story in such a context is unexpected. Indeed, the rejection of the infant girl did not happen when I was born. As the first-born, I was the apple of my father's eye and he spent hours watching me make little baby movements and sounds, recording them in small day-books that I have treasured all my life. So this is not exactly my story; I was not rejected because of my sex.

My extended family included a terrifying great-grandmother who sat stiffly in bed dictating orders to my mother and aunts, and a grandmother who sourly disapproved of any cross-gender play. Bisavó Maria José screamed at my girl-cousin and I when we played rambunctiously and upset the potty by her bed: *Essas meninas parecem uns rapazes*. To her dismay, we behaved like boys. Avó Maria de Jesus drew a firm line on the kitchen floor when she forbade me to touch my cousin Alvaro's toy soldiers; she pushed a ragdoll into my chubby arms to distract me from the strategic boy's games that fascinated me. We were aware of the difference between boys and girls and the compulsory feminine or masculine behaviour expected from our respective sex. The heterosexual family model was the norm in Portugal and my parents expected the second child would be a boy, to create the little *casalinho* in miniature that would mirror them.

Encouraged by an old aunt, I would shout up to the stork who nested on the abandoned tobacco factory chimney to bring me a baby brother. *Senhora Cegonha, traga-me um maninho!* My aunt and the passing neighbour ladies smiled and muttered to each other in low voices what I can only imagine were admonitions against my mother for allowing so much time to elapse between children. I was already five years old and in danger of being irredeemably spoiled as an only child.

Finally, my mother started to swell up (incomprehensibly to me) and everyone patted her belly and said there was a boy in there. I thought it was all a bit creepy and what did the stork have to do with it?

One night, I was brought to Avó Maria's and my mother was taken away in a taxi. No one explained anything to me and I suffered terribly with an imagined forever separation. The next day I went to the downtown hospital with my old aunt who sternly forbade me from talking to the stork sitting on her usual perch; there was no need now as my repeated requests for a brother had gone unheeded. For, when we got to the maternity ward, there was a fat little baby girl sleeping with her face all scrunched up. I'm told I said *ugh* and was duly reprimanded. My sister was brought home and my aunts and girl cousins and I all took pictures with her. During this photo session there was talk of a party that had been cancelled. My cousin and I, both six years old by now, protested loudly. We loved parties. My aunt said, *O teu pai só queria uma festa se a Clara fosse um rapaz*. My father would not celebrate the birth of my new baby sister Clara because she was a girl. And that was that.

With the cancellation of the party, I learned about the devaluation of women's lives, and from then on I tried relentlessly to be a boy. I refused to spend time with my mother, who was on maternity leave and trapped at home with a leaky, demanding infant. I preferred the exciting public places my father frequented; surprisingly and satisfyingly he took me to the library, the record store, the cinema, and his friends' *adegas*. I held onto his large hand, taking three steps to his one, keeping pace with his manly life. I was always tiny for my age and wore beautiful dresses hand-stitched by my aunt so I was not the proverbial tomboy. But I believed I had the mind of a boy.

We immigrated to Canada, and encouraged by the distance from my other relatives, I did only the requisite housecleaning forced by my mother but no embroidery, no cooking and certainly no babysitting. My studies took centre stage and I revelled in getting better marks than the boys. I was elected president of my high school, a manly position I thought. Maybe I was doing all this to impress my father, who I admired to bits, and to make up for Clara and I not being boys. It took a long time to learn that being a clever student and a dynamic leader was a human accomplishment and a right for a girl. I don't remember when I accepted that I could be a woman and also do what I believed was in the

male domain. Or when I stopped doing it for my father and started honouring my mother with creative and intellectual tasks.

By my early twenties, I was working with Toronto's Nightwood Theatre and the Company of Sirens, creating and performing in feminist plays that might make a difference to how girls and women are valued and value themselves. I began with the desire to correct the injustice my baby sister suffered for being born a girl, and have worked for many decades to fight the oppression of women everywhere. Even now, in the so-called post-feminist age, that is still the heart of my struggle.

Believing is Seeing ¹

Jim Lang

In important ways, my recent (2008) Ph.D. thesis is the written account of the approximate sequence through which I experienced a profound transformation in the way I do philosophy and in the ways I attempt to make sense of the world. More apropos of this specific work, it also radically changed the way I think about the problem of indoctrination. When I began this program of studies I was motivated to find a hermetically-sealed formula for indoctrination that would provide me with an unassailable tool with which to do battle with those who “indoctrinate”² in the name of religious education, or who teach creationism in the name of science. This was also my motivation in 1971 when I finished my master’s degree on this same subject, but decided not to pursue the Ph.D. at that time. In hindsight, I’m glad I waited 37 years, because the philosophical tools that facilitated my transformation were simply not yet available at that time. Then again, having spent three decades outside the academy and thus without a lifetime of academic scholarship to defend or accommodate, I was likely more open to transformative possibilities. I suspect the latter claim has some merit, but in many ways these are imponderables. I can report that the program of studies in which I immersed myself was, in several important aspects, unlike anything I had experienced in dozens of philosophy courses that I took in the latter 1960s and early ‘70s. Instead of the adversarial parry and thrust of the philosophical tradition I recall so well, which was often more about playing “gotcha” than anything else (the closest thing to intellectual satisfaction in those days, from my recollection, was skewering a colleague or fellow student on the cold spike of logic) I found respectful dialogue, careful attention to detail, yes, but no rewards for “gotcha’s” as in the old days—dare I suggest, bad old days. More importantly, woven among selections from the canon I was offered new and intriguing works by people like Donna Haraway, Iris Marion Young and Elizabeth Ellsworth. Initially, I resisted—“This doesn’t look like philosophy...”—but since these professors appeared to be treating the works seriously, I acquiesced—and began to read.

I have struggled to find ways to describe what happened next. Biblically, “Saul on the road to Damascus”³ comes to mind, but, since I also have a life in the visual arts as a producer/director, I prefer an image from the movie, *The Truman Show*. The plot involves a character played by Jim Carrey, who is unwittingly the subject of a continuing type of reality TV show. It appears that he lives in a suburb of a community like those we see every day and that he works in a company like other persons. As viewers, we discover that his whole world is a construct built for the TV show and that he has never known anything else, having been prepared from birth for this role. One morning as he’s leaving for work, he is startled when a large movie-style light crashes into his lawn. He looks up into the apparently empty blue sky, then down to the crushed light, trying to figure out what just happened. Puzzled, he moves on, able to shelve the experience for the time being at least. My first readings of Code and Haraway struck me like Truman and that movie-light—like becoming aware of the edge or limit of something that I didn’t know had an edge or limit; or, perhaps more significantly, becoming aware of what I had previously taken as given now suddenly becoming visible as a construction. Suddenly, everything was different, but it took time to absorb and begin to accommodate the emerging implications.

Today, I still struggle with ambiguities and doubts but my transformation is much farther along and its fruits extend beyond the scholarship of my thesis. I now see the world very differently and this has generated intense feelings about the ways I performed knowledges in the past, offending many people, including my immediate family, in the process. I also experienced—and continue to experience—a deep humility on discovering how little I understood/understand and how much I needed to understand; but more than anything, I remain so excited I can barely contain my enthusiasm. I have loved philosophy from my first course on the ancient Greeks to this day and for me, there is nothing like these new awarenesses—a whole new philosophical universe to be explored. In spite of the clash of emotions, logical ambiguities and rather harsh views of the larger philosophical community that seem to

come with the territory, I find my new work profoundly and deeply satisfying, especially as I learn better ways of knowing, however difficult and painful the consequences.

I think Minnie Bruce Pratt said it well when remarking that in taking the route of difficult knowledges, “I learn a way of looking at the world that is more accurate, complex, multi-layered, multi-dimensional, more truthful...I gain truth when I expand my constricted eye, an eye that has only let in what I have been taught to see.”⁴ In Megan Boler’s words, regarding the difficulties I’ve had in the past in reconciling my religious friends and family with my then hard mainstream epistemological position, I gain “the relief afforded through the opportunity to move beyond the pain inherent to ‘separation’ and distance from others.”⁵

I have witnessed some philosophers express the reasons for their choice to do traditional linguistic/conceptual analysis versus post-structuralism/feminist philosophy - they prefer the clarity and precision it affords, they say, and appear to do so without any apparent sense that this decision could involve moral issues. For my part, I cannot interpret my decision to engage with feminist work as morally neutral because for me to ignore the critiques of standard analytic philosophy and its adherent mainstream epistemology would be disingenuous at best and constitute morally-objectionable fraudulent scholarship at worst. Thus, I consider my decision to take feminist, post-structuralist theory seriously to be morally required, not merely in academic terms, but also in terms of its implications for social justice. As cited by C.G. Prado, Foucault says: “Modifying one’s own thought and that of others seems to me to be the intellectual’s reason for being,” and further, “When I write, I do it above all to change myself and not to think the same thing as before.”⁶ In this, I am in complete agreement with Foucault.

As for being a male working in feminist theory, with all the attendant dangers and contradictions, I draw strength and encouragement from Sandra Harding, who said, “Men must not be permitted to claim that because they are not women, they are not obligated to produce fully feminist analyses. Men, too, must contribute distinctive forms of specifically feminist knowledge from their particular social situation.”⁷

¹ This is based on a short piece I wrote as the opening comments I used to address my committee, Professors Maureen Ford, Dwight Boyd, and John Portelli, and my external examiner, Lorraine Code, at my PhD thesis defense in 2008 in the Department of Theory and Policy Studies, OISE, University of Toronto. http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/tps/Programs/History_Philosophy/Faculty_Staff/Jim_Lang.html

² I use scare quotes because of the contested understandings of this term.

³ From a story in the Christian Bible. Saul, a Roman citizen, was so dramatically converted to Christianity—described as a lightning flash—that he is said to have fallen off his horse. See Acts 9:3-9, New International Version.

⁴ Pratt, Minnie Bruce. *Identity: Skin/Blood/Heart*. In *Yours in Struggle*. Ed. Bulkin et al. New York: Longhaul Press. p. 17.

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I am Happy Because I am a Feminist

Hae-Joung Lee

When I recognized myself as a woman, I became a feminist

When I encountered feminism for the first time, I was a twenty-year-old undergraduate student in Seoul, South Korea. There were a few feminist groups on campus that held seminars on women's studies and addressed gender issues in the university and broader society. At the time, I was an active part of a student Marxist group. As a member of the group, I had studied Marxist historical materialism and participated in demonstrations against the capitalist government and companies. I believed that revolution in the labour class was inevitable in human history, and I regarded myself as a warrior in the revolution. For me, the feminist movement seemed unimportant to the people's real liberation. I thought that those engaged in feminism were naive and weak because they didn't address the universal perspectives for all people's emancipation. Like many Marxists, I believed that my colleagues and I were strong and united regardless of gender.

However, my perspective was changed entirely in the spring of 1998, after an 'accident' with myself and one of my closest female friends. She was sexually harassed by a male student who was a mutual friend. At that time, the feminist groups on campus had been addressing cases of sexual assault by demanding public apologies. With support from the campus feminist groups, my friend demanded a public apology in the hopes that it would prevent future assaults by this student.

After the apology, more 'accidents' started happening to us. There were a lot of strong opinions about the sexual harassment and the public apology. The student common space on campus was covered with hand-written posters, focused not on the pain of my friend, but on the 'human rights' of the male students. One person compared the public apology to witch hunting.

The most painful part was that most of my male colleagues in the Marxist group worried more about the male student's situation than my friend's. I had believed that we had the same dream to make the world better together, but as male Marxists, they wanted to make the world better only for men. So, I couldn't help recognizing that "I am different from them and I am a woman." It was, actually, the first time that I recognized myself as a woman. This was the only thing that I obtained in that painful spring. I began to search for 'sisters', my new colleagues.

While living as a feminist, I have learned the way of being stronger with other women

After the 'accident', my female friends and I formed a study group. We read about feminist thought to understand our experiences in the language of theory. Though we didn't have background knowledge in feminism, we were very excited. We read and talked about gender issues, such as family and gender, violence against women, and the gendered division of labour. While studying feminist theory, we began referring to each other as a feminist.

At the end of my undergrad degree, I began leading an informal learning group with other feminists that conducted alternative educational activities. We designed feminist curriculums for undergraduate students and ran training courses for female mentors. We worked together and shared personal experiences and life histories, and empowered each other and constructed new worldviews. We invented names for ourselves. I called myself Ba-Ram, which means freedom. I grew as a feminist and learned to be stronger with other feminists.

Feminism always gives me productive and positive energy

I am now studying sociology of education, and am interested in the relationship between gender and education. As a feminist researcher, I often feel anger and rage at this world. From violence against

women to under-representation of women in faculty and congress, women's realities are still severe and harsh. However, I know that the lives of women are not always subordinate to the dominate power.

I don't work as much with male colleagues, and only a few male friends remain beside me. Instead, I have a lot of female friends and feminist colleagues and I am always trying to empower my 'sisters.' Through my relationships with them, I am happy and stronger. Since I am standing in the resistant position against male professors in the university, the possibility of getting a job in the patriarchal academia is very slim. Instead, I am interested in living and working in the male-dominated academic society and I have a lot of ideas to empower oppressed women and to resist and transform the world. Above all, feminism makes me admit myself as I am. I am not a pretty girl. I am not a white and native English speaker. I am not a rich person. Though, I am happy because I am a feminist.

A Woman's Story*

Kwai-Yun Li

I stand in front of fifty students from the Women and Gender Studies program at the University of Toronto, Mississauga, and read from my book, *The Palm Leaf Fan & Other Stories*.

I read "Sometimes Life Makes You Cry", a story about two Chinese girls, Mei Ling and the narrator, who were born in Calcutta and grew up in Tangra, a suburb of Calcutta, low-lying and dotted with fish farms and tanneries.

We sat by the hibiscus bush, at the edge of the marsh, overlooking the fish farm, our legs tucked under our skirts to avoid the mosquitoes.

Mei Ling had four books on her lap. These were awards for the highest marks in Math, Health Science, English Composition and English Literature.

"Mother is very proud of me." Mei Ling said, hugging her books. "She said I can go and study in a university. That is, if I can continue with my scholarship. She can't afford to pay for my schooling."

"What about your brothers?"

"Woody is not interested in school. He likes working in the tannery and loves cock-bird fighting. Fahlin doesn't like school either. But Mother wants the boys to stay in school."

We squinted into the setting sun and watched as a man threw grain into the fish pond. The fish jumped, splashed and wriggled, while the reflection of the orange, red and yellow clouds in the pond shimmered and danced.

I rested my chin on my knees, and closed my eyes. "I wonder if there are fish farms in Taiwan." I said. "I want to go to the university in Taiwan and study Chinese Literature."

Mei Ling laughed. "Yeah. You love Li Pao's poems. He was always drunk. He wrote something about drinking wine with the moon. He drowned, trying to fish the moon out of the water. Didn't he?"

"Yep. That one." I laughed.

"Do you think you will be homesick when you are in Taiwan?"

"I don't know." I looked towards the fish ponds. With the rapidly fading light, trees and bushes softened into waving shadows. "What about you?"

"I want to be a teacher. I told Mother that I could earn more by teaching in a school than working in a hair dressing salon. I am tutoring three seven-year-old students right now. Tutoring pays well."

"Didn't your mother want you to get married in three years time, when you turn sixteen?"

"I hope not. I want to finish my schooling and then teach for a few years. Then I will think about getting married."

We sat and watched the moon floated across the ponds, breaking into shiny pieces when the breeze stirred the water. The ponds calmed as the sky deepened from dark blue to black. Then the mosquitoes chased us indoors.

I continue reading the part in which the narrator is speaking about her encounter with Mei Ling once again, six years after leaving Tangra,

That evening, Mother sat in front of the family altar, her rosary in her hands. I sat on the bed, folding the laundry. I told Mother about my meeting with Mei Ling. "She is only eighteen, Mother. Too young to get married. I don't think she wants to get married."

"What she wants does not matter." Mother said. "Aunty Lee wants her daughter to get married, so Mei Ling is getting married."

"But, Mother, I don't think Sien and Mei Ling like each other. What is wrong with Sien?"

"Nothing's wrong with Sien. He's a little slow, that is why his mother, Mrs. Leung, wanted a smart wife for him. So that she can have smart grandchildren. There is a wrinkle in the sleeve on the blouse you just put away."

“What do you mean about Sien being a little slow?”

I started on the diapers. My three month old niece needed her diapers changed every half hour. Fifteen dirty diapers soaked in a metal basin by the water tank, soap suds and yellow blobs floating on the surface of the water. “Doesn’t Auntie Lee want her daughter to have a smart husband?”

“Auntie Lee wanted a good match for Mei Ling. Mr. And Mrs. Leung have a big tannery, and Sien is their only son. Careful, babies have tender bottoms.” Mother took the diapers that I had folded, checked each one over, and re-folded them. “Mei Ling is quite lucky to marry into the Leung family, she will have no worry in life.”

“You mean the Leungs will have no worry, with a smart and hard working daughter-in-law.” I got down from the bed, and stacked the baby clothes in the chest under the bed.

“Auntie Lee has done well from this coming marriage.” Mother put down her rosary, and turned around to face me. “I heard that she got large sums of money. Woody and Fahlin can have a tannery of their own.”

I slammed the pile of diapers into the chest. Mother rose and walked over. “You clumsy girl. If you keep this up, I won’t be able to find you a husband.”

“Good,” I muttered.

We discuss arranged marriage. From the audience, a man in his late twenties says, “arranged marriage works,” and adds, “in our culture, your parents arrange for you to meet the girl. You talk to her, and if you get along, you get married.”

When Mei Ling gave birth to her first child eleven months after the wedding, her mother-in-law told Mother. “It is all that girl’s fault. She cried when she was told to marry my son, and she cried on her wedding day. Now look what has happened. Not only could she not produce a son, her daughter is deformed! Must be my karma to get an ungrateful daughter-in-law.”

Mrs. Leung was very disappointed when Mei Ling had her second child. “Another granddaughter! Can’t the girl get it right? What did I do to deserve this?”

“Arranged marriage is cruel for the women,” says a Japanese woman in the audience. “In our culture, we have to do what our husbands tell us. We have no choice,” she adds.

I continue reading. The narrator meets Mei Ling for the last time five years later just before she is leaving for Canada to marry the man chosen for her by her mother,

A woman with a child in her arms came out of the doorway as I put my shoe back on. She wore a shapeless and faded dress and a pair of flip flops two sizes too large, her lank hair tied back with an elastic band, and her face red and puffy from the chemical fumes in the tanning fluids.

The woman stopped. “Hey, long time no see.”

I squinted. “I am sorry, you look familiar, but I... Mei Ling! I didn’t recognize you. I have not seen you for a long time.”

“Your bio says you came to Canada on an arranged marriage. How did it work out?” a woman from the back asks me. I laugh. “From the way the story goes, you can probably guess that my arranged marriage didn’t work. I wrote “Sometimes Life Makes You Cry” from my personal experience. It is a woman’s story. It is my story.”

*Excerpts of, “*The Palm Leaf Fan and Other Stories*,” included here are used with permission of publisher, TSAR publications. The book was published in 2006.

Falling is Like This

Katie MacDonald

For me, falling in love with feminism meant falling out of love with the world. I pursued classes in my undergraduate degree based on their pedagogy and ended up as a Religious Studies student in a Feminist Criminology course. I was moved by feminist writings and I was addicted. The more feminist ideas, critiques, and perspectives I came in contact with, the more I lost my ground. Questions of how I should live, how others were (and weren't) living, haunted me.

I let feminism inside me and at first it turned me angry. Angry at the world for inequality, fury at apathy, and frustration with the complications I now felt with every step I took. My fury, my rage, my disappointment all fueled me to destruction. I looked around me and saw oppression and wanted nothing more than to rip it up. I became a police force that didn't allow for alibis, reconciliation, or rehabilitation. Nothing was good enough. I wasn't good enough—never feminist enough.

I tore things down. I deconstructed. I pulled apart. I broke down.

Lost in a world of destruction, of alienating others, exhausted from breaking, I needed a change. Feminism built me back up. It has now filled me with hope, energy and love. I am moved by writings about working with love, of coalitions, of passion and community. I am interested now in building, changing, moving and engaging. The feminist communities I am drawn to, who on a daily basis fight against a world of violent inequalities, have moved and inspired me. Feminism has brought me to a place where I work both through and with love. Although this is an exhausting struggle, it is one that leaves me at the end of the day with a community.

Still, I want to break things down. I still want to end the oppression that I see everywhere, but I also want to build things up in its place. My feminism evolves as I do and I am so grateful for the dynamic movement, theories, people, and change that are all called feminist.

Perverted System
Esperanza Maggay

We are swaying
among the stale
under scents
of the Montreal metro
system

It's a system.
And we are all in it.

And it's not clear
why
I enjoy
staring
so ever intently
at men's crotches,
but I do, and
no one notices

cuz I'm the
most beautiful pervert
in the system.

morning drawer
Kerry Manders



one

morning drawer
Kerry Manders



too

morning drawer
Kerry Manders



thee

Kerry Manders: *morning drawer*

Old tattered album. Respect the tatteredness. The tatteredness is the secret: portrait of the family memory. Album, memory, cemetery, abandoned. One goes forward, sowing the stones of grief behind oneself. Album of abandonment. Faithful to the abandonment. Respect the abandonment. To the question: how have these frail objects survived, how have they resisted, will they resist the teeth of time? not to respond. (Hélène Cixous, 1997:179)

morning drawer is a tripartite portrait of a private dawn. Opening my drawer, I discover a tattered old album that I inherited from my Grandma, who is no longer with me. Drawing together and drawing out my mourning, my pictures of my Grandma's pictures memorialize my feminist becoming at the same time that they document the very act of remembrance. Some of the photographs are wrinkled, ripped, and some have whole pieces torn out of them. Of course there are computer programs that correct such imperfections—that fill in the gaps to achieve a seemingly seamless whole. To me, though, such technology erases rather than preserves history. I like the photographic tears (tears?), literal traces of time passing but also figurative scars; the photographic body is marked in ways that the absent corporeal body must have been, visibly and invisibly. Some photographs in the album are missing altogether: these absences are present(ed) and accentuated by empty photo corners that hold both nothing and the memory of many things at once. What became of those pictures? Were they destroyed? Or are they in another's album—thus not lost but found elsewhere, removed and re-presented? There's a moving story here I'm longing to tell.

"When did you become a feminist?" I cannot answer the question of "when." Long ago, back then, yes, but now and later, too: the temporality is tricky. Becoming: present participle of "to become," an ongoing action in the present. Becoming feminist, I look forward, toward a coming into being inexorably and complexly in motion, future-oriented. Coming and going, my gaze is necessarily simultaneously directed backwards, toward my own past but also towards a history that exceeds me. Within and without the photograph albums, I recall the firecracker of a Grandma that I recently lost, as well as her mother, the great-grandmother that I never knew but for whom I create an elaborate, and largely speculative, biography. The little that I do know: her husband died in 1928, not long after the twins were born. She had nine children at home and a farm to run; she raised the crops and the kids, insisting that each of her six daughters receive post-secondary education. (Im)possibly, I see and feel the "auto" in (of?) her biography. I'm especially drawn to pictures of my Gram as a young woman, before I met her (or she, me), and to photographs of my mother as a young girl. I compare photographs of the three of us at roughly the same age, hoping to see vestiges, echoes, of myself in them (or them in me).

The impetus to sentimentalize is strong, but I eye the old photographs looking not only to connect with my female lineage, but also to separate—to regard (in the multiple senses of that word) the distance between my life and the lives of the women to whom I'm related. I'm not sure any of them would have self-identified as feminist. Some found—find?—feminism radically uncomely ("the boys won't want to date you"). Conduct unbecoming.

morning drawer contemplates mediated memories of my female ancestors in/of especially domestic spaces, rendering public a putatively privatized record of the past—in this case, a family photo album tucked in a dresser drawer. The inexorable fragility of both my grasping and my losing of gendered historical moments is the cornerstone of this photographic triptych. What will become of the albums I've inherited, and the albums I'm creating? More mementoes, *memento mori*.

And each time in thirty, forty, fifty years, when one comes to the album of dust, each rare time of attention, there is a slight trembling of the flicker of fear that the photo which holds only by a worn torn gold corner, by a spot of old old glue, should fall.

Some have fallen, inside. Photos of people fallen one after the other, crumbling of years, time has slowed so brutally, a city falls into another, a grandmother of a mother meets an unknown cousin by a stroke of memory without law. (Cixous, 1997:179)

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Feminism in Cars

Laurel Mitchell, The Miss G__ Project

I became a feminist in cars.

Not in any one car in particular—there were probably three or four cars, including mine, that served as feminist caravans that year (and whose dashboards doubled as the Miss G__ Project head offices). This would have been 2005 or 2006, when The Miss G__ Project for Equity in Education was first getting started and a subtle but definitely-there rumble was starting to grow.

I became a feminist in cars squished between two eager young women or sometimes jammed up against a box of flyers or postcards. The soundtrack usually included a boisterous mix of Salt 'n' Peppa, The Be Good Tanyas, Sleater Kinney, Le Tigre, and Sarah Harmer, among others. Good road trip music—someone usually brought a mix CD. The occupants of the cars included close friends as well as would-be compatriots I'd just met. We came from a variety of different backgrounds, places, family histories and raced, classed, sexed and gendered perspectives and we'd come together under the banner of a simple goal: to get a Gender Studies course into the Ontario secondary school curriculum. But, looking back, I think it was in the intimate spaces of these small four-door sedans where the feminism really happened, developed, and grew into something that would ultimately have a real political influence.

Getting Gender Studies in high schools was an idea hatched in a dorm room at the University of Western Ontario between Sheetal Rawal and Sarah Ghabrial, two of the founding members of the Miss G__ Project. Lara Shkordoff then jumped on board after Sheetal made an impromptu speech at a campus International Women's Day event, and Dilani Mohan soon joined up as a resident financial expert and gave the Project its name (Miss G__ was an unnamed woman who was one of the first women in America to attend university and whose mysterious death was attributed to "overuse of her brain"). I was later recruited for my web and graphic design skills and general internet nerdiness and Jenna Owsiank later joined up to serve as the UWO chapter head. We quickly got to work telling everyone we met about the Project and writing to Members of Provincial Parliament. Steeled by a politicized feminist consciousness that was being nurtured in our university courses and other experiences in activism, we began to gather a critical mass of supporters around the province.

Collectively we spent a good part of the last five years making various forms of public pronouncements about the urgent need for critical studies of gender and the complex intersections of sexism, racism, heterosexism and other forms of oppression to make their way into Ontario high schools. We pointed to the very real problems of gender-based, sexualized and homophobic violence and harassment in our high schools and in our communities and argued that without education, policing is simply an inadequate option. We talked to young people of all genders about self-esteem, femininity and masculinity, body image, sex, and identities and found them hungry to participate in these conversations and to share their experiences. And we pressed the Ministry of Education to include some of the silenced stories and perspectives of women, people of colour, and queer communities (including those communities marked by gender, race and sexuality) into the curriculum as something more than a tokenistic sidebar in a textbook.

But back to the cars. As the rumble grew, we found ourselves regularly traveling around the province rallying support, making alliances, attending (and sometimes crashing) conferences, going to meetings, sitting on panels, and fostering Miss G_ chapters at other universities and high schools. And a funny thing happens when you put a group of politicized young women (and a few men) together in a small car for a few hours: they talk.



© Laurel Mitchell, the Miss G_ Project at Pride 2007, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Inevitably we talked at length about our high school experiences, revealing stories about our awkward bodies, our sexual histories, boyfriends, girlfriends, families, fabulous teachers, misogynist teachers, and our experiences with violence and harassment. These conversations extended into our present realities and more recent histories and were never separate from exchanges about pop culture, politics, power, feminist theory, critical race theory, fashion, books, and music. Our foremothers would have likely called it Highway Consciousness Raising. It was where we explored feminist theory as practice, where we felt out and talked through the ways gender, race, class, and sexuality had influenced our lives and choices. These road trips were often where we got personal enough to make the political continue to matter, regardless of how tired or discouraged we got along the way. Cue up Salt 'N' Peppa's "None of Your Business" or Le Tigre's "Hot Topic" and you'd have a car full of rabble rousing young people with diverse knowledges, resources and experiences all ready to march into Queen's Park (after dabbling in a little croquet on the lawn, perhaps).

On one of our earliest road trips, just blocks away from Queen's Park we pulled up next to a news van of a prominent Toronto television station. Riled up and excited, we shouted to the crew about the event we were about to host. The response from one of the cameramen ("what is it, a wet t-shirt contest?") echoed an early response of one of the MPPs ("what is it, a beauty pageant?"). It would be a little while before we or our demands were taken seriously. But just last fall, Sheetal, Sarah and I found ourselves in a car on that same street, driving away from the Ministry of Education buildings, having just met with Ministry officials to go over the latest draft version of the Gender Studies course slated to hit high school classrooms in September 2011.

Looking back over the last five years, I have often found myself doing feminism in board rooms, on campuses, in classrooms and on government lawns and stoops. But for me, it was the spaces stretched between not only home and somewhere else but also between isolation and community, between angry frustration and doing something, and between powerlessness and influence that we bridged on those road trips that really made me the feminist I proudly call myself today. And that's part of what we hope Gender Studies in high schools will accomplish by sparking these kinds of eye-opening conversations and exchanges not only in classrooms but also in hallways, community centers, bedrooms, dinner tables and everywhere in between.

Turning the “Screw” Pam Patterson

My father raped me again. I pleaded again to my mother to leave him. She said, pick up your clothes and get dressed, carry on.

But not for long.

I stopped his arm when he raised it to wack me. Of course, later at home he beat my mother in front of me. Finally, I dragged her out of the farm house on New Year’s Eve. Me with my small zippered suitcase made of lime green patterned canvas and my stuffed rabbit. At a neighbour’s, him pounding at the door, her sobbing under the covers, me screaming at her to shut up.

Later, I thought of justice and fairness, ideals never seemingly realized. I wanted to be heard. I was involved in the anti-war movement in the late 60s. But it was men who led us. Men who told me that to be feminist would only weaken the socialist cause. Because? I asked. Be my lady, they said. Be my lover, they said.

As a WASP, it was expected that I would be a success. Go to university, get a career, make a good living. I became exhausted and ill.

“Carry on,” my mother said.

“Carry on,” my male professors told me as they grabbed at me around their office desks. “You are an excellent student. Just get through. You will be fine.”

Now, after having a cancerous breast lopped off and still living with this now chronic autoimmune disease, I am in constant pain. And I “carry on.” I “carry on” for the women who I feel expect it of me. Does this mean I am a feminist? Theoretically, I suppose. But the pain and abuse are what have affected, and continue to affect, my world view. This is not a political ideal or theoretical construct. It is my continuing desire to be heard and most of all understood, and if screaming my pain will take me closer to this, so be it. My feminism’s not, nor ever was, about “sisterhood,” but rather about stopping that arm from destroying what shred of me that might be left.

Becoming Feminist

Sharlee Reimer

I regularly ask myself if I can call myself a feminist, or, more importantly, if I am feminist enough. It may not look like I have any uncertainty about this categorization from the outside—I loudly identify as a feminist; I work on gender; I'm a teaching assistant in women's studies courses. But I ask myself this question because the power of feminism, to my mind, lies in its constant self-questioning and refashioning with the aim of doing better social justice work—or at least the kind of feminism to which I ascribe and aspire does so. Feminism is a way of understanding the world that cannot be separated from the world in which it is developed. If we read the work of feminist author bell hooks (1981, 2000, 2004) for example, she explains how the world has become deeply invested in white supremacy, capitalism, hetero-patriarchy, and individualism, among other oppressive systems of social organization, each of which operates with and through each other. As the Combahee River Collective states, "the major systems of oppression are interlocking" (Freedman, 2007).

As a person and a feminist with a good deal of privilege—I am a white, newly middle class, able-bodied ciswoman and a PhD student who has only been with men—my understanding of the world, my place in it, and the actions that I take in it are constantly in motion. To borrow Simone de Beauvoir's (1971) phrase, I was not born a feminist—I became one, or, as I will describe here, I am becoming one. In high school, for example, I thought that feminists were selfish, whiny women who over-thought what they claimed were oppressions. I didn't know then about the histories of oppression that informed the world that I knew. I didn't know about the oppressions that touched lives of people—generally women—who came before me, people I knew and loved, as well as people I didn't know. As far as I can recall, my loved ones never used the language of feminism and oppression explicitly though I now recognize that despite not ascribing to it explicitly, feminist analyses of oppression nevertheless informed their thinking.

They never gave voice to their struggles, but I can now see the evidence of those struggles in what was not said. Maybe my loved ones were silent because no one would listen, or maybe they believed that the way that they were treated was just 'how it was,' or maybe they were so overwhelmed that they lacked the time and energy and language to articulate their resistance. Perhaps it's because feminism was (and remains) a four letter word. Or perhaps it's because they were taught that their struggles were less meaningful than those of others, and, as the cruel irony that keeps white supremacist capitalist hetero-patriarchy in place, they internalized that message and passed it on. Implicitly, though, these struggles were unmistakable: the personal is political. Most likely, it was a combination of these things—of essentially not having a safe space to talk about what was going on—that silenced them. And I fear now that I may never know the histories and struggles of the people whose lives have shaped mine. But, of course, communication is not a one-way street—were they silent, or did I not hear? Did I not have the language to understand? I recognize now that I contributed to not making a safe space—for a long time, I wasn't willing to hear. I didn't like the idea that I experience oppression, and I believed that I lived in a meritocracy in which the playing field is even—a society in which ideals of freedom and fairness are mediated by one's willingness to 'work hard.' I believed that anyone could succeed with enough effort, and my working class background and white privilege made it very easy for me to ignore evidence to the contrary.

I didn't begin to think about myself as a feminist until I started university after several years of working in the restaurant industry, and even then it took a while. I recall being captivated by a gendered analysis of *Jane Eyre* in my first year English class and pursuing ideas along these lines in other classes. In third year, I took an Introduction to Women's Studies class. I was still not ready for the materials we took on. I was very skeptical about the possibility that the world was so different from what I knew—*knew*—it to be. By the end of the year and with the help of an exceptionally patient professor,

though, I was increasingly willing to consider that all of these interlocking oppressions weren't just 'coincidence' or made up by people who were self-interested.

In my fourth year I took a course on feminist theory, and that is when my feminist consciousness really started to develop. It was amazing. I was in a room full of brilliant, committed women, and it felt like home. It was then that I realized how uncomfortable I was most of the time. Having found people who seemed to have such similar investments as I did was a huge relief, and I flourished in it. It was in undergrad women's studies classes that I began to see the ways in which identity categories could divide people fighting for similar causes. I began to see that while it is important for women to carve out a "room of one's own," to use Virginia Woolf's (1932) phrase, feminist thinkers have tended to be very exclusive, drawing hard lines around, for example, who counts as a 'woman' to the exclusion of people whose racialization, gender, sex, sexuality, class, location, among other identity categories, do not fit into dominant categories. And not recognizing these connections and intersections does nothing but distance people from each other and invalidate connections that lead to further alienations, thereby facilitating further oppressions. And though I have pulled back from the self-righteousness that I then engaged in, I still feel the anger: I was looking for a revolution. Somewhere to direct my rage.

I tell this brief and necessarily partial story—about many parts of which I feel a great deal of shame—for anyone who, like me, is new to feminist ideas. I tell it too because we are socially trained to focus on products and not processes. Over several years and with the patience of people who were willing to help me think through issues and to offer me a safe space in which to explore feminist ideas, my thinking has changed dramatically, even though I was certain that it never would. And it will continue to do so. These changes would not and could not have happened without interactions with these people—this process has been absolutely crucial to my feminist practices, and I share it because I think I was once in the position that many people find themselves in: this learning is hard and uncomfortable! And it continues to be hard—I know I will probably look back some day and see problems of which I am currently unaware in what I've written here, and that terrifies me, but I can't let it stop me. Fear is a powerful emotion that people (especially people with privilege) use to justify their inaction, and that is not ok.

So, as a closing that I hope will be an opening, I will share with you what I've learned: first, there is often no unequivocally right answer, just a series of strategies that necessitate varying degrees of compromise. Am I happy with that? Not at all, but as I said, this is a process. If there were easy answers, the problems that feminism addresses would already be solved. Second, as many feminist thinkers tell us, before we go pointing the finger elsewhere, we must look at ourselves and our own oppressive practices. Third, we need to listen better, and then listen some more. And fourth, realize that widespread change won't happen overnight or in isolation. We need to work together. As I say all of this, as I survey the history of my feminist thinking, I am also reminded myself of how much more work I have to do. As my understanding of oppression and privilege and complicity and strategic moves changes and develops, I become a feminist, or I get closer to being a feminist. As I learn to question myself more, to do a better job of opening myself to criticism, to be a better listener, I become a better feminist. I will never be feminist enough, but the only way that I can ethically move forward with my life is to keep thinking and rethinking, struggling and reworking, and trying and failing, learning from mistakes, sharing what I've learned, and trying again. This is the only way I know how to contribute to a project that is trying to build a better, more equitable world and to work towards becoming the feminist I aspire to be.

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I'm a Feminist

Chrystine Robinson

I'm a feminist. I didn't wake up one day saying I was a feminist. It was subconscious. I never would have admitted I was one because I thought feminists were crazy ladies who thought they were Gods. I've learned now that being a feminist means believing that women have equal rights to men. I proudly say I am a feminist.

Please Don't Use the "F" Word

Nadine Robinson

I may be a feminist, but I don't want the label.

I grew up in the seventies, being told I could have it all. I wouldn't be "limited" to being a mom, a nurse, or a teacher. I could be the Prime Minister or a doctor or an astronaut if I chose to. I could have a career and a family. I still wanted to be a teacher, but my mother wanted me to aim higher.

My mother was the first person I knew to get a divorce (and be the one who asked for it). I got to explain to my class what divorce meant in show-and-tell in grade school. She took me for walks in nature and made me hold a garter snake. She also baked cookies with me.

I played the record "Free to Be You and Me" dozens and dozens of times. My love for this record is almost cultish, and I have since had my father digitize the record so that I could play it for my children. I can recite parts of most of the songs, and quote them liberally. I loved the positive messages of sharing and caring and that girls and boys could achieve whatever they set their minds to.

I have always been a believer in fair play and following the rules. My mom will tell you that "it isn't fair!" was one of my most common rallying cries. Portions of cake cut at the table had to be fair, time spent choosing television shows had to be fair, taking turns doing dishes had to be fair, there was no point playing board games unless the rules were adhered to fairly by everyone.

I didn't notice gender "unfair" at school because I excelled in both academics and sports. I didn't notice a lot of difference in opportunities between boys and girls, other than boys played a lot rougher in the school yard until high school. I remember my male physics teacher in high school telling me I would go nowhere in math and science (somehow my A average seemed unimpressive to him). I had planned to go into civil engineering to hopefully one day take over my grandfather's firm in Etobicoke, but one comment attached to a poor mark on one test changed the direction of my life.

It wasn't until I started work part-time that I noticed gender differences more critically. Why was I being asked to get coffee and not the guy my age that started the same day as me? Why did he get promoted before me? Why did men stare at my legs so much? I wasn't staring at theirs.

These things didn't sit right with me and they surely didn't seem fair. I quit job after job when I felt I wasn't being treated fairly, when I was being paid too little for doing too much work, or when a male colleague stuck his hand down the back of my top.

Why was I getting \$6 an hour to write a technical manual that the guy before me was paid \$18 an hour to do? I stayed because at that time my friends were only making \$4 an hour, and it was easy work. I didn't complain.

At university I didn't notice a lot of gender differences other than how few women were in the engineering program (perhaps more women also had experiences like me, and also chose to pursue a degree in business).

Close to graduation, I realized that only having male friends wasn't healthy, and I started to cultivate a strong network of women around me.

As my career progressed, so did my awareness of sexual harassment. Once, the male human resources manager propositioned me. How was I supposed to cry foul on that? I quit that job too. Everyone was still trying to figure out what sexual harassment meant, and I noticed that if you didn't play along, you were labelled a feminist.

"Feminist" became a dirty, derogatory word. Like the swastika corrupted by the Nazis, feminist became tarnished by the male workplace. "You're not one of those are you?" A male colleague would say following a highly inappropriate remark. "Oh, no, of course not," I would reply laughing. I turned to women. I asked a powerful, strong, beautiful woman at work if she was a feminist. She said, "No! I shave my armpits and I like men." I learned that feminists were unattractive lesbians and man-haters – clearly I could not be, and was not, a feminist.

It became easier to tell who was sexist, because men at work would start up conversations with strange questions like, had I baked anything good that weekend or, had I bought any shoes? I would tell them I had been canoeing and camping, but it rarely helped.

It didn't take me long to notice that the guys that golfed, or went for beers together, seemed to fast-track up the corporate ladder, and the girls that frowned at sex jokes and didn't socialize over a drink were marginalized by the in-crowd. I learned what the old boys' network was pretty quickly and I tried to be more like the guys, making the right kind of jokes or at least laughing at theirs. It didn't make me all that comfortable at first, but it did improve my upward mobility. I drew the line when I was asked to go to a strip club with a male client and work colleague, and was then asked to strip for them. I just didn't want to be a turtle with a hairbrush strapped to its back in a world of porcupines any longer. I quit. My resume became a patchwork quilt of uncomfortable moments, glass ceiling strikes, and pay inequity.

When I had serious live-in relationships, I didn't understand why I fell into the caretaker and housekeeper role. Why wasn't he doing his share of the housework? Cleaning? Laundry? Cooking? Why wasn't I making him? I also learned that sex seemed to be about the man's orgasm.

When I married and had children, I felt myself slipping away back to sometime around the nineteen fifties. I was June Cleaver, without the dress, but I worked full-time too. I slept less and became more depressed. I blamed it on postpartum at first.

Why was I trying so hard to be everything to everyone? Succeeding in many respects but feeling soulless? Whose expectations was I living up to? I still wanted to be a teacher. I started to hate Oprah for telling me that I could have a career and a family seamlessly ... funny though, she doesn't have children. I hated Martha Stewart for focusing on such superficial stuff around the house, stuff that no woman with a career has the time to do.

I stayed at home for a year after the birth of each child. I watched myself take pay cuts as I transferred from the high-tech start-up world to good stable jobs (one of us had to). My high-flying career careened into the runway after I moved to a new city to follow my husband's career goals. On the surface I had it all. I had the "all" that "they" said I could have, but I didn't know who I was or what I stood for.

I am still working on those questions but there are things I have figured out. I will be the best "turtle" I can be. I will teach my daughter and son that they can be whatever they want to be, even if it is a "just" a teacher. I will teach them about similarities instead of differences in genders, races, sexual orientations. I will strive for fairness for them and me. I will be realistic with them about how hard it is to be a parent, and how easy it is to fall into gender roles. I will let them choose which fights to fight and which ones to walk away from, but I hope they chose to fight instead of quitting as much as I did.

I was born a feminist, because I have always believed in being fair. Although I've seen improvements in organizations and in marital, parenting, and sex roles, we still have "a long way to go, baby." Yes, I believe in equal rights and opportunities for women and in equal pay for equal work. By definition I am a feminist, but I would still rather you didn't call me one.

the tumble of mishap(pen)ing
Brandy Ryan

to write a **W**orld pushed into
we body e**ch**o steal and fly
this question of where **A**nd going to become
the making punished by ar**T**

there n**O**w a edge
a particular **F**rame of mind call it /

let**T**er into being
t**H**e lie in language curves
interiority m**E**lts out

being is/**W**as something some internal thing
o keep the form – but form f**O**rless hear
“you may not reach over the rope, **M**iss”
i seek **I**etter outside terms
wanting neither the **N**arrative nor the snap shot

Journal to Here

Renee Sagebear Albrecht

1959

- On the first day of Kindergarten, I learn to tie my laces into a bow and operate the wall-mounted pencil sharpener. I convince my mother I'll be fine without an escort home. Like a tangled pony I track strange streets searching for home.

1979

- Quit smoking, start jogging and in the hour before dawn, sit cross legged, drawing breath through my nostrils.

1982

- McMaster University's Sociology of Women course requires reading Adrienne Rich's, On Lies, Secrets, and Silence. "*Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves.*"

1984

- Because of raw horror as the novel begins, I nearly give up reading The Colour Purple. Afterward I write Alice Walker a thank you.
- I discover the unfamiliar comfort of floor to ceiling books written by and for women in The Toronto Women's Bookstore and purchase Mother Wit by Diane Mariechild, "*... for humanity to survive women must come to know their power.*" (Mariechild, 1981:xi)

1985

- March 8, International Women's Day
- Serendipitously join the culmination of women's bookstores and presses springing up around the world the day I open Women's Bookstop in Hamilton Ontario.

1988

- Women gather to write and read about the routinely unconscionable at The Second International Feminist Book Fair held at the University of Montreal.

1990

- Organizers of the Third International Feminist Book Fair in Barcelona welcome women from "the most intelligent political movement on the planet."
- Dr. Nawal El Sadawi exhorts that religious tomes foster women's docile ruin.
- Principal of the German Green Party, Petra Kelly, connects poverty, denied education, brutality, greed, and environmental ruin to women-hating. In time she is found murdered.
- A 1990 survey shows Courage to Heal, a guide to recovery from incest by Laura Davis and Ellen Bass, is the number one book sold in Canadian Women's Bookstores.

1995

- In Feminist Foremothers, Sandra Butler writes about her evolution to feminist author of Conspiracy of Silence, the chronicles of sexual abuse and incest disclosed at the Sexual Trauma Centre in San Francisco. Butler asserts that women, by living our political vision, will change others.

2000

- In October of the millennium year, in Canada and around the world, women march to National capital cities.

2001

- Women's Bookstop closes.

2002

- Nawal El Sadawi campaigns to become president of Egypt. Imagine if she had won?

2007

- After a vacation of mackerel fishing, gathering clams, picking blackberries and squid at low tide, I move to Nova Scotia.
- The town librarian shines on my request to start a women's writing group.

2008

- A women writer's conference is held in the town court room.

2009

- Canadian stamps feature Rosemary Brown's portrait. As the first woman to lead the NDP in B.C., valued Federal Member of Parliament and head of MATCH international, Rosemary Brown integrated justice for women.
- "...To be Black and female in a society which is both racist and sexist is to be in the unique position of having nowhere to go but up!" Rosemary Brown 1973 (quoted in Kome, Penney, June 2, 2000)

2010

- A managing editor from the National Post qualifies her support for feminism. She admits that feminism empowers her to expect an egalitarian relationship and career but discounts Andrea Dworkin's and Catherine MacKinnon's work, though recent police statistics confirm that, worldwide, pornographers are common and well connected (Owens, National Post, February 5, 2010).
- Jo-Ann Wallace sites National Post report: "*[out of 134 countries] Canada placed 38th on education for women, 60th on health of women, and 62nd in political participation of women .*" Wallace concludes, "And unsettling the status quo is always ... well ... unsettling." (Wallace, National Post, February 5, 2010)

Cherished, unsettling, works of stature include: Rachel Carson's Silent Spring, Rosalie Bertell's No Immediate Danger, Barbara Walker's Women's Encyclopaedia of Myths and Secrets, Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English's Witches, Midwives and Nurses, and Anne Cameron's Daughters of Copperwoman.

“... She learned which seaweeds were good, she learned how to swim, how to dive down and gather abalone, sea urchin and crab, and she learned how to find and catch and cook...” (Cameron, 2002:19).

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Of Leopards, Fierce Women, and Feminism

Magaly San Martin

No one can really pinpoint the exact influences that lead us to make choices in life. In my case, perhaps it was my grandmother who, suffering the stigma of having children out of wedlock, made sure I knew about the heavy price women pay for straying from prescribed social paths. Or maybe it was Malvina, my Jewish aunt who shared my childhood home with my grandmother and myself and who encouraged my insatiable appetite for all kinds of reading material. She lent me copies of popular women's magazines like *Vanidades* (Vanity), and books of fairy tales. Tía Malvina also entertained me with stories from the Old Testament about Ruth and Esther gave me copies of my favourite comic book *Jungla* (Jungle).

I especially loved that the main heroine of *Jungla* was Mawa, who was kind of a female Tarzan. A white woman with raven black hair, Mawa always wore what I thought was a very cool one-piece leopard skin leotard. Fierce and untamed, Mawa took care of herself and knew how to handle dangerous weapons like daggers. Her faithful companion was a black male servant and two majestic leopards. She also had Victor, her boyfriend, an American she was always rescuing. Mawa represented an incredible role model for me growing up—she was not at all like other women and I loved her for it.

As a girl, Mawa made me believe that I could be the heroine of my own stories. I jumped around on the beds in my house, wearing nothing but undergarments and carrying a kitchen knife, imagining that I would save boys I knew from danger, just like Mawa. Perhaps my need to prove myself worthy as a girl was because of the story my grandmother had told me about my birth: according to her, when I was born my father had been so upset that I had not been born a boy that he had walked out of the hospital in disappointment. I think that at some deep psychological level I found in Mawa the worth that had been denied me as a child for being a girl, she made me realize that girls were just as good as boys, just as adventurous, brave and fierce.

In the early 1970s Chile experienced the birthing pains of trying out a new model for social change—socialism via democratic elections. At the time my personal world received its first seismic tremor. Lord Cochrane Publishers, who published *Jungla*, was nationalized and became Editorial Quimantú. For my beloved comic this meant serious changes. First Victor, the American boyfriend, was killed off as a character; then, Mawa's black male servant was promoted, acquiring great strength and power. He became the new main hero of the comic. Both of these changes seemed fine to me except that they also chose to get rid of my heroine, Mawa. This upsetting move made no sense to me, why get rid of a strong and powerful female character?

In 1974 the military coup in Chile against the democratically elected government of Allende brought us to Canada. Fleeing the military dictatorship made me grow up really fast. I became involved in the solidarity movement in Canada with no time for reading comics. My political participation and education taught me about the injustices of class but I was becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the role women were assigned in political and social organizations.

One day I borrowed from the library Marilyn French's *The Women's Room* and Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will*. I don't know why I chose these books, but they made a lot of things clearer for me. From then on "feminists" became my new larger than life role models. My desire to emulate the feminists I had read about influenced many of the decisions I made as a teenage girl—in high school I refused to take typing class and at home I did not learn to cook (decisions I now regret) because I did not want to be steered into typically female activities. I also became convinced that I had the right to make my own choices about my sexual and other life experiences. I continued to participate in politics, but sexist attitudes deeply bothered me.

During my first year in University I took my first Women's Studies course and my world further unravelled. I became more familiar with feminist theories but also with practical knowledges. I remember that one of my assignments was to take a week of Wen Do, a martial arts practice

specifically focused on women's self-defense. Doing Wen Do took me back to Mawa, my beloved childhood heroine who used her intelligence and physical strength to keep herself and those she loved safe. Wen Do taught me that women's bodies are sources of great physical strength, confidence, and self-defined beauty.

In 1983 I became involved in the Latin American Women's Collective (LAWC). This experience was one of the most foundational experiences in my life and led me to write my Master's thesis, "*Picking Up the Thread: An Oral History of the Latin American Women's Collective in Toronto, 1983-1990.*" (San Martin, 1998). Participation in LAWC made me grow politically and allowed me to forge relationships with women that were profound and passionate. Doing politics in this new environment meant something very different from what was typically favoured within parties of the left. Rather than keeping emotions and political analysis separate, we women fully expected to become friends and to develop emotional attachments through our political work. We became a front against the sexist left but we also became aware that the white feminist movement didn't welcome us as equals (San Martin, 2006).

United in our understanding of the intersectionality of class and gender, we fought against sexism and discrimination. Of course not fragmenting our intellect from our emotions was not always easy. Sometimes when disagreements and differences arose, it was very messy and painful. Nonetheless, my female world became the focus of my life even though I continued to be involved in long-term, heterosexual relationships. For the most part my life revolved around my female friends and my feminist political activity. My feminist political choices also led me to choose areas of work that had to do with women's issues. I worked at the Working Women Community Centre and Nellie's Housing Project, places that were run as feminist collectives and that aimed, sometimes naively, to put feminist theories into practice. When I worked in non-feminist organizations my focus was always on issues that directly affect women like violence against women, poverty and immigration.

Feminism has been the prism from which I have understood the world. It has given me the elements to try to change the world and the hope to continue to make the effort to live these politics in my skin/body. I am grateful to all the women who have taught me, and I still look up to other women who continue to teach me about life. Most of all, I thank my aunt Malvina who made me want to be the central character in my story. And, like Mawa, I know I also look great in a faux leopard skin leotard!

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Mother
Mary Woo Sims



Portrait of mother, Chen Vong Nui, Woo Kin Wen

Feet bound by my own mother
Why mum? It hurts! I scream.
I learn my worth is to be attractive to men.
I refuse to be crippled like my mum – I want to run.
Be a peasant! Yells mother.
I'm a peasant and I'll be free to run.

Girls don't need an education my parents say.
I teach myself how to read Chinese.

My father's best friend is childless and has an adopted daughter.
She's lonely. My family gives me to her.
I have no choice.
My family? Where is my family?

An arranged marriage to someone I do not love.
My peasant feet allow me to run. Run far away.
I leave my country.

I meet a man I love. We marry.
My girls will have a different life than I did.
All my children, boys and girls will have the same chance to succeed.

I do my best to make it happen.

My four daughters!
They will have an education.
They will know they can do anything if they put their minds to it.
They will choose who they love, whom they marry, if they marry.

They will know that they hold up half the sky.

Born into a society where the birth of a boy is celebrated.
The birth of a girl is a burden.
Mum died in 1996 at the age of 63.

Her daughters have an education.

We can do anything we put our minds to.
We choose who we love, whom we marry, if we marry.
We hold up half the sky.

Women of the world, mothers, daughters, sisters, nieces

Hold up half the sky.

Feminism: A Profound Paradigm Shift

Bonnie Slade

I learned about feminism in undergraduate Women's Studies classes in my early twenties. Reading feminist texts led to one of the most profound paradigm shifts of my life. Feminism not only gave me a framework to understand my lived experiences, but it also provided a language of empowerment and a vibrant tradition of activism within which to work for social change. I began to view my world in a completely different way.

I was the first person in my family to go to university; in my early undergraduate days I was a little lost, partly because I had no role models, but mostly because I failed to connect with the content of the courses. I initially studied history and I was bored by a curriculum that almost focused entirely on the activities of rich white men of the past. I was curious about the lives of ordinary men and women, especially women, who were invisible in these narratives except as anomalies. I found myself focusing on gender issues before I was ever introduced to feminism.

It was a matter of chance that I discovered Women's Studies. One day after a game, I asked a woman on my intra-mural hockey team what she was studying. When she told me Women's Studies, I was immediately interested and enrolled in the program. I learned theories of oppression, the history of the women's suffrage movement and access to education for women, and read women writers like Virginia Woolf. Courses covered major world events, like the French Revolution and the fur trade in Canada, but approached the topics from a broad perspective that started with how gender, race, class and sexuality shaped people's experiences, not just focusing on privileged men. I had found what I was looking for and I became engaged academically and in the community.

Becoming a feminist meant I reconsidered my experiences in a new and critical way. In high school, for example, I had never questioned why I was not encouraged to pursue an engineering or mathematics degree when I excelled in math and science. I realized that, like many young women, I was subject to gender streaming, a practice that has contributed to the persistent under-representation of women in engineering.

These reflections lead me back to how our mothers negotiated their identities in a patriarchal world. My mother stressed to my sisters and I that we needed to get an education so that we could be self-sufficient. As a working class woman, she felt that education was the ticket to a better life. Yet, beyond her words about self-sufficiency, her entrepreneurial skills and her intelligence, she was not self-sufficient. In her relationships she took on a traditional role, taking responsibility for all household work. At Easter and Christmas she got up at six am, cooked all day, served the meal, and then was the first person to get up and clear the dishes. The men in my family never did dishes, or cooked meals. As well as the domestic work, my mother also managed the family restaurant with a staff of over ten employees. As a role model, she had strong leadership skills and espoused the need for her daughters to be able to take care of themselves while fulfilling the traditional role of wife and mother.

My new feminist worldview in university caused tensions in my family. I began to challenge my mother's use of the word "girl" for woman, and I also started speaking up at the dinner table at holidays. I proclaimed one year at Thanksgiving that everybody should take their plate to the kitchen. This mild corrective, intended to assist my mother and acknowledge her hard work was not well received. My mother proceeded to clear the table as she had always done, telling me to be quiet in an angry and embarrassed manner. Clearly, challenging these power relations is a difficult issue.

With the combination of negative media images of feminism and neoliberal policies that stress individualism, the appeal of feminism has diminished. Because of the increased visibility of women in workplaces and higher education, many people assume that women are making significant gains in these realms, and think that feminism is no longer important. At the most recent International Women's Day rally, over 2,000 women and men demanded action on many issues including defending public services, rights for temporary foreign workers, access to affordable childcare, employment rights, good

pensions, and violence and exploitation. Identifying how these issues are interconnected as part of a larger struggle for social justice, and working for social change, is a feminist project that I want to be a part of.

Feminism

Joan Smith

Females are uniting and working world-wide
Endeavouring to make a difference with joy and pride;
Many obstacles have they moved from their way
Integrating within cultures and genders every day.
Never again shall women or their rights be held back
International feminist coalitions are moving in fast track.
Sisters, and brothers, we all can love each other and unite
Making it a habit to respect each other, and human rights.

Journeys in Shaping my Worldviews

Elizabeth Stafford

Becoming a feminist appears to have been a destiny for me, although identifying as such took graduate studies at university for me to see the connection. I was discouraged during my working years from identifying as feminist, but was conscious that something was not right, or not equal, between the genders. However, when more encouragement presented itself during graduate studies, I could not deny my consciousness any longer. This is my story.

As a young child, my mother modelled for me that a woman needs to be independent and strong and does not need to follow conventional societal values. She was a career woman during the 60s when most women were stay-at-home moms; she was the breadwinner of my family. Despite her strength, I witnessed the pain and hurt in my mother's eyes when my father verbally objectified other women in her presence. I accordingly learned that objectification is painful. Ironically, my father verbally expressed to me that I could do whatever a man does and to never give up on my dreams, whatever they may be. Without a doubt, my mother and father had a strong influence on me.

Television also had an effect. As a teenager, there was an abundance of TV programs displaying violence and women were depicted as weak and helpless victims. This influenced an early dream of mine to become an advocate for women as a lawyer prosecuting rapists.

As a young adult, I realized shortly after beginning my first job in 1980 in a male-dominated organization that my colleagues were more interested in how I looked than in my ideas. I did not recognize this as oppression at the time, although it did infuriate me. I went back to school to get a university degree in business to prove that there was more to me than just being an object of their adoration. But after completing an undergraduate degree and returning to work, I still couldn't get ahead in my career. My managers told me that my management ideas were not appreciated. So, I decided to leave behind the status quo thinking in the workplace to return to management school at the graduate level to find some answers.

As a middle-aged person in graduate studies, I was introduced to feminist theory. It answered many of the questions I had about the objectification and oppression of women and validated my strong feelings against marginalization. It offered an explanation about why my ideas were not appreciated in the workplace. I found in feminist theory a strong connection with my philosophy towards work and life. Because of my work experience I was compelled to advocate for more equitable environments in the workplace and in business schools for women, and I did so by incorporating feminist theory into my graduate research. To prepare for my research, I attended a Women's Studies course for the first time. I found in this course a safe place where I was not persecuted for having breasts and a viewpoint. The Women's Studies course had such a profound impact on me that my view on the world changed drastically upon the realization that I am a feminist.

Feminism has been engrained in me and has made me a more compassionate and empathetic person, and hopefully one day, a competent business manager or academic. Without a doubt, feminist theory awakened a repressed spirit in me that is true to my heart and soul and grounded in my lived experiences. Now, I realize how I arrived here. Moreover, I view the world now with eyes and mind wide open. I've come a long way.

The United Church Minister's Wife Keeps the Fridge Stocked with Welch's Grape Juice

Sheila Stewart

My parents told me they longed for a girl. They had two boys, aged seven and twelve. I was "the wee late one" as they say in Ireland. My parents and brothers emigrated from Ireland in 1955. I was born in 1959. My father was a Presbyterian minister in a village in Northern Ireland and became a United Church minister in Canada. I grew up quiet in the manses of my father's congregations.

What was this longing for a girl? A child who would stay close, or as an aunt said, "you'll be a comfort to your parents in their old age."

I wonder when I first heard the word feminist. Shortly after I started Queen's University in 1978 at age eighteen, I got involved with a small newspaper called *The Feminist Forum*. Feminism had not reached the English and Philosophy departments at Queen's, but I saw the film "This is Not a Love Story" on campus. I took part in my first Take Back the Night march in 1981. I didn't speak in any of my philosophy classes over the four years, nor did I connect that with being a woman or feminism as I was coming to know it.

My mother didn't have a pulpit. My first book of poetry, *A Hat to Stop a Train*, is about my mother's life in Ireland, her work as a minister's wife, and my relationship with her. In each church where my father served, in Brechin, North York, Stratford, Waterloo, Montreal, and Morrisburg, a row of ministers' pictures runs along a wall, a row of men and sometimes a recent picture of a woman or two. Where are the ministers' wives? My mother answered calls from distressed congregation members, cooked for shut-ins, served tea to the choir, starched clerical collars, and kept the house stocked with Welch's grape juice in case someone in hospital needed communion. We were United Church! How we envied Catholics their wine and confession boxes. We listened to Dad's sermons at church and the dinner table.

I wrote poetry to understand more about my mother and my relationship with her. When I look at my poetry book now, I feel I was hiding behind my mother.

When I began working at Parkdale Project Read, a community-based Toronto literacy program, in 1989, we were an all-white collective. Very slowly and bumpily the collective diversified, challenged first by a black woman on the board of directors. The word "feminist," like so many words, can help and hinder, create community and exclude. Some of us are still learning from the 1980s and 90s challenge of white feminists by women of colour. We slowly uncover layers of oppression, try to catch ourselves looking at forms of oppression that target us, while often slowly learning to identify our own privilege and the complex ways that stereotypes and assumptions shape our thinking and acting.

Having identified as a feminist as a young woman, what does it mean now? Others may be post-feminist, but I am still working on it. I prefer the word "becoming" to "become," identifying now as a work-in-progress. I want to change the question, "how did you become a feminist?" to "how are you learning to become feminist?" How are you unlearning the stereotypes that underlie your thinking? How are you bringing your learning into action?

Sometimes I have felt I'm not a "good enough" feminist or that I haven't been a "good enough feminist mother" to equip my daughters to face the world. Poet Marilyn Dumont in her collection *A Really Good Brown Girl*¹ writes,

You are not good enough, not good enough, obviously not good enough. The chorus is never loud or conspicuous, just there.

My mother dwells at the edges of my writing. I try to uncover the threads between shame, silence, and grief, part of the back story of why I was attracted to literacy work, to helping other people learn to read and write, and think more about the ways language shapes our lives. I'll end with a recent poem,

My mother washes

my sheets at the big
basement sink. How to get rid of red

cement. She would know

better than me. Read, read,

read. Contain-

(h)er. Between the pages,

my mother and I –
what do we speak?

– our mouths opening closing.

Turn down the covers. My nightie laid on top.

Stained sheets

flapping

on the line.

¹Dumont, Marilyn. (1996). A Really Good Brown Girl. London, ON: Brick Books

With Open Eyes

Kiera Toffelmire

I remember so vividly the look in her eyes.

It was one of the first days of spring. Thousands of people flooded Kensington Market, an area of Toronto known for its liberalism and creativity. I was working on the top floor of an arts shop that day, one that began so ordinarily.

I was roaming around the shop, lost in a haze of youthful daydreams, when I passed her. Slumped into a corner, stood a middle-aged woman dressed in a frumpy tracksuit. Her ball cap was pulled down just enough to cover her eyes.

She was not alone. With his back towards me, stood a man, also middle-aged, dressed in sweatpants and a t-shirt. He was gripping the woman's arms and whispering aggressively. I could not see the woman's face, but I could sense by her body language how scared she was.

While I stood, paralyzed from afar, another woman browsing through the store noticed the situation and approached. "Is everything okay over here? Do you need help miss?" Asked the woman, who spoke with a confidence that silenced the man who, a moment ago, was speaking so maliciously.

For the first time, the woman with the baseball cap tilted her head up ever so slightly, and for a split second I could see her eyes. Piercingly blue and glossy, her eyes were filled with an overwhelming sense of loss. Loss of confidence? Loss of Self-esteem? Perhaps. I remember so vividly the look in her eyes.

Within seconds the man had grasped his wife's wrist and directed her out of the store. I followed close behind, wondering what the evening would entail for this woman.

Though I've always been an independent woman with a strong set of beliefs regarding gender equality, it was this day that really sparked a flame of activism. That fleeting moment of silence in which I caught a glance of that woman's eyes resonated within me, ultimately motivating me to get involved with various feminist communities across the city.

To me, feminism is the recognition of our choice and of our worth as women. It is the unwavering sense of pride that accompanies being born a female within whatever society we are born into. It is a sense of pride that provides us with clarity that enables us to embrace our own opinions and be forthcoming with our strengths.

Feminism is about empowering myself. It is about empowering the people around me, to challenge the injustices we may face. Feminism has helped me recognize that my opinions matter, and that I hold a valuable place within society. I hope that my newfound sense of clarity helps contribute to a greater society of people with open eyes.

Knitting the Feminist Sweater

Ursula Wolfe

"I can't wait until every single girl will take that risk to do exactly what she wants."
(Unknown)

What are the odds that I would end up a feminist? How did I become a feminist when I grew up thinking this thing called feminism was dead? Imagine my surprise when I found an active community of feminists in my early twenties. They're alive! This is what I've been missing for the past twenty-three years.

How did I gravitate toward something that I was told only existed in the past? Perhaps I was always a feminist, but did not identify with the term. I would rather think that feminist ideology has a way of creeping into our everyday spaces and lexicons. My grandmother, and her strength in overcoming the stigma of her parents' 1930s divorce. My mother, who set out on her own after divorcing her first husband who discouraged her from a university education. My "spinster" vocal teacher with a cigarette in one hand and a "fruity" drink in the other. My OAC writer's craft teacher who told us every day that her name was "MIZ," not "miss"? Was this my first glimpse at a feminism not dead? Was it these women who began the weaving of my feminist identity? Was it my dad's words of wisdom, "speak up if you want to be heard," or my first Ani DiFranco CD from my brother?

So how did I come to identify as a feminist? It was in university, where I elected to read feminist authors instead of my anatomy and statistics textbooks. There was something in reading bell hooks' Communion that affected me in my core. I discovered for the first time a secret community, a sacred history, a road map I could live by. Something clicked in my head.

After taking an introduction to Women's Studies class, I began the process of reconfiguring my past with my future. I feasted on feminism, gorged on it. The feminist juices ran down my face as I inhaled everything I could get my hands on. I joined the sexual assault centre because I was no longer putting up with violence in my life. I participated in rallies, attended lectures outside of class hours, and networked with amazing people. My life as a feminist took off. The indescribable feeling of sitting in on women-centred events left my limbs numb, feeling only my warm insides; produced an instant adrenaline rush, like standing on the edge of a cliff before you take a great dive.

Soon this academic feminism became a familiar sweater I could put on, wrap around me for comfort, show it off to fit in and admire other feminist's sweaters, a marker of those who get it and those who seemingly don't. I spent most of my life as a comfortable outsider in my brother's hand me down shirts. I always found freedom on the edge, and was now part of a whole culture built on probing boundaries. I was no longer alone and I embraced my feminist identity, with short hair, hairy armpits, and a dress suit.

My relationship with feminism now is being complicated by my constant redefinition of myself. Although the same principles are still with me, my feminism seems to be in constant flux, as my identity weaves in and out of sexualities, genders, and ethnic roots. The more I get involved in feminist academics the more I understand it less as a neat and tidy package of women's rights. When I sit in my feminist sweater now, I put it on, take it off, sew it up, poke holes in it, and test the threads for strength by stretching it out to see how far it will go before breaking apart.

I live in two different kinds of feminism, sitting between the scraping of academic pens and the rally cries of activist communities. I sit between the theoretical classroom and a practical reality that twists and contorts our feminisms. My feminist practice in this climate sometimes feels too heavy, and I find myself tugging at that scratchy feminist sweater for some fresh air. It's not easy integrating a feminist politic into unknown environments, and I've learned to dance with my feminism in a world that is quick to cast you aside for fear you may be too disruptive. Together, feminism and I weave in and out of the

masses, twirling around them making them spin, but sometimes we struggle with who leads, and I have to stop dancing, because I need my own room to move, shift, and change direction.

I've learned to live strategically and creatively between dominant ideas of women, race, culture, and sexualities. At this moment, my feminism is about exploring the in-between, and knowing there are choices. It's about building my own identities as I explore the rich facets of myself as a questioning queer, sometimes gender bending, Polish and Ukrainian girl, who has East Indian and Irish ethnic roots. Feminism has encouraged me to explore myself as I exist by my own definition, and has enabled me to relax into a fluidity that allows me to be all of this and none of it at the same time. My feminism is about having the power within to do exactly what I want. It's about having fear, but doing it anyway, speaking when I don't think I can speak, gaining ground from my gut, and pushing it out. It's about not fitting neatly into peoples' collective imaginations about race, gender, sexuality, and abilities, and having a sense of pride when I crumble assumptions all to hell.

Like threads of a sweater, sewn into my fabric, the needle moves in and out creating form and structure. Moment after moment I take shape, I am becoming feminist, feminism is becoming me.

Why am I a Feminist?

Mary Wright

I was very young when I started taking charge of my life. Work and responsibility were what I knew then and now. I was born just before the Second World War ended in Jamaica, which was then a British colony. Growing up in Jamaica, most of us had to work at a very young age, especially girls, who helped support the family. I didn't know at the time that taking charge of my family and myself was what feminism was all about.

When I was four years old my mother had a baby. I was in charge of washing the baby's bottles. One day on my way back from cleaning the bottles I heard a woman in a house screaming. I went to her door to see what was happening and saw a man beating her. I knocked at the door and when he opened it, he stood facing a four year old girl, who herself would one day grow up and be beaten by a man. I ended up in that situation like many women, even here in Canada, being beaten and abused. I remember making a vow promising myself I would never let that happen to my mother, but it happened to me.

I asked the man who answered the door if the woman was his daughter, and why he was beating her. While he spoke to me, the woman ran out of the house and into the yard, where he began to chase her. I never forgot her screams, and from then on I decided to protect women. I began thinking of ways to help women. Later, I asked my mother why that man was always beating his wife? My mother just looked at me and said nothing. I knew she knew why, but she wouldn't tell me. I told her that I wouldn't allow Papa to beat her because he was not her father, he was just her husband.

I started to work when my mother could no longer do it herself, and I took over responsibility for my siblings when I was seven years old. My parents were poor, so some of us had to work. At the time I didn't know that Britain was our boss and all the sugarcane and bananas were for Britain. There was no work for my dad, just for me and my mother, but she could no longer work. Not only had the country just survived a war, but a hurricane had swept the island, killing many and damaging houses and land.

I didn't know anything about feminism or being a feminist until I came to Canada in the 1960s and saw women marching and talking about equality. I was a single mother and had to take charge of my children and my life or my husband would beat me. Black women like myself didn't think about the feminist movement. The movement was for white middle and upper class women, and I was too poor to belong. Poor black and white women were left out of the movement. It wasn't until the late seventies when all women could be a part of the movement. I often wondered if I would ever be economically and socially equal to a white woman.

As a young black woman living in Canada in the seventies raising my four children, I couldn't get any work so I was forced to go on social assistance and live in social housing, like many other poor single mothers. There was a constant fear of my children being taken away if I didn't play along with the system. There was too much to lose if I didn't take charge of myself. I decided to do just that and became an artist.

I have always written poems and songs, long before I came to Canada. When I started having problems with the social system, I continued to write, and though publishing was hard, writing was where I found my solace. At the same time, I began taking classes in ceramics and pottery and clothing design, in the hopes that I would earn extra money to support my family and to move out of social housing.

Through it all, I continued to ponder, what is feminism? who is a feminist? and, why did I become one? I have been a feminist since I was four years old, taking charge of my life and the people around me. My parents' power was taken away through slavery, but mine was evolving through modernization and independence.

The feminist movement started at a time when black people around the world were fighting for equal rights, especially in America. To me, black women have been feminist since time began. We were

often breadwinners, we took care of our homes, our families, our friends, our neighbours, our communities. Centuries ago in Africa women were the ones in charge of countries. They were the ones that told the men what to do, but they also worked side by side with men, until white people invaded Africa and took power away from women by killing them and replacing them with men. Even at that time, the women who survived ran businesses and farmed and, today, they continue to do so wherever there is any land left to farm.

Lady Stardust: Men and My Feminism.

Anonymous*

“People stared at the makeup on his face
Laughed at his long black hair, his animal grace”
—David Bowie, “Lady Stardust”

My feminism started with a man—a very, very pretty man.

I watched with rapt attention as his impossibly feathered hairdo rose and fell like a cloud in slow motion. His grey leggings were breast-high and skin-tight, and his black leather vest cinched his waist, causing his white-ruffled blouse to flow about his neck and arms. He sang and pranced around the television screen, unapologetically sporting eye-makeup and an androgynous wardrobe. My elementary-school self was madly in love with Jareth, the Goblin King in Jim Henson’s Labyrinth. So began my sexual awakening.

Years later, the effeminate vampires Louis and Lestat of Anne Rice novels became the foci of my burgeoning erotic curiosities. Then came Dr. Frank-N-Furter from The Rocky Horror Picture Show, and so on until I noticed a trend: the men I loved had long hair, languorous and wanton ways of moving, and beautiful faces. I loved and wanted effeminate men, and I was not an overtly feminine girl; as I was discovering my sexuality, I realised that I didn’t really have a cultural script with which I could articulate my desires.

As such, all of my early attempts at romantic relationships in secondary school were unsuccessful. I dated the musicians, the actors, the artists—the ones who were on the cusp of being what I wanted. But it seemed a lot to ask of my young male partners that they throw on a dash of eyeliner, perhaps try on a pair of heels, or even grow their hair out long. So I didn’t. It also seemed as if there wasn’t a socially acceptable way for me to escape putting on the performance of femininity that I so desired these young men do for me. So I didn’t. I didn’t have the words to communicate that mine was a queer femininity that desired a queer masculinity; it seemed unfair that the other girls who desired a straight masculinity had a script, while I was forced to improvise.

Not having the words to articulate my own sexuality, among other things, caused me to stumble into feminism in my first year of university. At this point, I was dating my current partner, fully owning that the glam-rock David Bowie and Marc Bolan of 1970 were the men of my dreams, losing my religion, and reeling from my recent success with scholarships. I was rapidly becoming sexually, professionally, and scholastically confident all at once; to the point where I thought I could burst from the pre-delineated image of femininity in which I felt caged. My partner, to some extent, was also caged in a masculinity that was not defined along his parameters.

However, even with all of this concurrent success and frustration, I was still afraid of the “f” word, mainly because I knew nothing about it but the hearsay of radicalism and hairy legs. What changed was the Internet. I cannot definitively say how many hours I have spent poring over feministing.com, but I can say that this online community allowed me to come in to my own, without stigma or gender policing, as a pansexual person. I learned more about feminism from this and other online communities than I ever have in a Women’s Studies class, and I continue to do so daily. Coming in to feminism has been an organic process of discovering new ways of being a person—male, female, trans, cis, queer or otherwise—every day. It has allowed me to abandon the idea that I need a script to conceptualise my desires, my goals, and my relationships; it has liberated me from strictly defined ideas about what my gender ought to mean.

Now as I stroll through my community, other queer masculinities catch my eye—the woman who looks like the oh-so-lovely-and-androgynous La Roux, or the woman who could be mistaken for a Jonas Brother were it not for a second look, or the Grace Jones lookalike—these women’s

masculinities make my knees weak in the same way as the boy with the scintillating stride does. I love it when people defy categorisation, and for me, that is one of the greatest purposes of feminism: liberating everyone to defy categorisation.

As feminism has given me the vocabulary to articulate my own ever-fluid identity with confidence, it has also irrevocably changed the way in which I interact with the world. In acquiring a feminist lexicon for my own purposes, I also picked up concepts such as “privilege” and “intersectionality” along the way, helping me understand not only myself, but my position in relation to the other selves around me. So while my feminism began with a man, it endures with a self and a community.

*Name withheld at author's request.

About the Contributors

Sivia Argentina Arauz Cisneros was born in Managua, Nicaragua. Her family arrived in Canada as refugees in the 1980s because of the Civil War, and though she grew up with Canadian cultural influences, she identifies as Mesquito, an Afro-Indigenous Nicaraguense, and also proudly calls herself Latina. She is a human rights activist, and is sensitive to the issues faced by marginalized communities, having experienced many of these issues. She graduated from York University with a dual-degree in Health and Arts. She values most her knowledge of flesh acquired through volunteering and working within the social sector for an inclusive, feminist, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive framework. She has written about racism and sexuality and organized spoken word sessions for AIDS awareness, marched in rallies, and coordinated the Latinas in Leadership Program on Violence Prevention.

Jessica Balmer is a freelance writer and editor. Her writing has appeared in Bitch Magazine, HEART Business Journal for Women, and The F-Word, among others. She has an MA in Women's Studies and Feminist Research, and a BA in Media, Information, and Technoculture and Women's Studies from the University of Western Ontario. jessica.balmer@gmail.com

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Kate Bojin is an amateur poet (at best), and considers her life to have begun after Feminism 101. She is an MEd student at OISE, University of Toronto, and has worked internationally for solutions to break the cycle of gendered violence. In the future she hopes to be surrounded by innovative and creative thinkers working to create sustainable societies. She loves making fun of Stephen Harper, songwriting and attempting to play guitar, and cooking with too much garlic. k.bojin@utoronto.ca

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Rose Fine-Meyer is a doctoral candidate at OISE, University of Toronto. Her dissertation, *Including Women: The Establishment and Integration of Canadian Women's History Narratives into Toronto Ontario Classrooms and Historic Sites, 1965-1995*, examines the ways in which women's narratives entered into history curriculum in Ontario. Rose received the Governor General's Award for Excellence in Teaching Canadian History in 2007, and has published a number of supplementary materials for secondary school history courses, and has contributed articles, workshops, and panels on Canadian women's history, local history, and working with archival materials. Rose is currently on the executive of the CCWH committee, the executive of the Ontario Women's History Network, and the Canadian Voice of Women, Ontario chapter.

Daniel Grace is a PhD Candidate in Sociology at the University of Victoria. His work deals with issues of health (with a focus on HIV and AIDS), law and human rights, technology (with a focus on HIV testing technologies), gender and sexuality, social inequality, globalization, political theory and transnational health and legal reform processes. He is trained in institutional ethnography by Dorothy E. Smith, PhD. Daniel is currently a sessional instructor in sociology at the University of Victoria and holds a Canadian Graduate Scholarship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) a UWW Fellowship in HIV/AIDS Research funded by the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR) and is a Global Health Fellow at Duke University. grace.dan@gmail.com

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Marilyn Patricia Johncilla, PhD, is a lecturer at the University of Toronto, and has also taught at the University of Western Ontario. Born in Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Johncilla is an independent scholar, educator, community activist, researcher, trainer, consultant, and cultural critic trained in the areas of diversity leadership, equity, education, and workplace issues. As an associate scholar at the CWSE, she conducts research in the area of Black women's leadership, African indigenous knowledges, womanism, and feminism. Most importantly, as an advocate for equity, she is committed to social justice where her expertise is central to the cultural resistance of African Canadian Women's Leadership. thedoc@drmarilynj.com

Aida Jordão is a popular theatre director, actor, and playwright, who is committed to feminist performance and Portuguese-Canadian projects. For over twenty years, Aida has worked with both professional theatre workers and community participants worldwide to devise original political theatre, in Toronto with Nightwood Theatre, Ground Zero Productions, and the Company of Sirens, and abroad in Portugal, Nicaragua, and Cuba. She holds an Acting Diploma from the Drama Studio, U.K., and an MA in Drama from the University of Toronto. Aida is currently a PhD candidate at the Graduate Centre for Study of Drama at University of Toronto, and an instructor in the Spanish and Portuguese Department.

Jim Lang earned his PdD after a thirty-three year hiatus at the University of Toronto, where he continues to publish and conduct research. His thesis, "*Indoctrination and Situated Knowers*" was supervised by Maureen Ford and predicated primarily on the work of Lorraine Code. He has since published several papers on feminist theory and presented at multiple conferences around North America. His most recent paper appears in the journal *Informal Logic* and is entitled, *Feminist Epistemologies of Situated Knowledges: Implications for Rhetorical Argumentation* (Vol. 30, No. 2 (2010). pp. 310-336). In it, I suggest ways feminist epistemological theory changes the format and style of philosophical argumentation. jim@jlang.com

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Kwai-Yun Li's Hakka parents emigrated from Moi-yen, China, to Calcutta, India, where Kwai was born. She grew up in Chattawalla Gully, in the old part of the city. She wrote *The Palm Leaf Fan* and co-authored *A Kiss Beside the Monkey Bars*. She is presently studying at OISE, University of Toronto. kwai.li@utoronto.ca

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Esperanza Maggay is a Canadian-born Filipino-Chilean living in Korea who suffers from an incurable identity crisis. After having lived in Toronto, Santiago, Montreal, and Seoul, she can speak four languages poorly. She drinks her coffee black; is obsessed with dance and the idea of artichokes (but not the two of them together); desperately wishes there was more straight male pornography available around the world; and has the bad habit of wanting freedom. As a pervert, Esperanza hopes that the little pervert dormant inside every woman can be awakened and allowed to step out into the public sphere without feeling ashamed or fearful of jeopardizing her femininity. She also hopes that the pervert in her male counterparts will soon realize the huge distinction between sexuality and abuse. esperica@hotmail.com

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Nadine Robinson, born in 1972, is columnist for Sun Media and a freelance writer. She started her career as an accountant, and has since worked in Mexico, Argentina, and Canada in high tech and international development. A move to Sault Ste. Marie cemented Nadine's direction into media relations and marketing. She teaches marketing and accounting at Algoma University and is currently pursuing her doctorate in business administration through Athabasca University. (*www.theink.ca*)

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Joan Smith was born and raised in Jamaica. She enjoys travelling, reading, writing, the arts, diverse work experience, and learning about different people and cultures. She earned her Certificate in Teacher Education in

1976 at St. Joseph's Teachers' College, and after migrating to the United States, she earned her Bachelor of Arts in Education and Art, and her Master of Science in Education at the City University of New York in 1993 and 1997 respectively. Joan's colourful career spans thirty years within many fields including art, writing, research, leadership, youth and community program development, and over sixteen years in the field of education as teacher/librarian, academic/literacy instructor, and school support worker. She is an active participant in community events including awareness, diversity, fairness, and women and workers' rights. *ojnami@aol.com*

Elizabeth Stafford, MSc, was raised in a nuclear family in the 60s before such a label existed. With no luck advancing her career in a male-dominated industry, she returned to school part-time to earn a graduate degree in management, where she was introduced to feminist theory. She is interested in applying feminism to management theory using a feminist phenomenological approach. She lives with her supportive partner and has been blessed with inspiring and supportive parents. *egstaffo@lakeheadu.ca*

Sheila Stewart is using poetic inquiry to explore the ways shame, grief, and silence can permeate learning, and is working on her PhD at OISE, University of Toronto. Sheila worked in community-based adult literacy for many years and coordinated the Festival of Literacies at OISE. She has done research on the effect of violence on learning and the complex ways stories and difference are taken up in literacy work. Sheila's poetry publications include *A Hat to Stop a Train*, published in 2003 by Wolsak and Wynn. *sheila.stewart@utoronto.ca*

Kiera Toffelmire is a twenty-one-year-old journalism student at Ryerson University. She lives in downtown Toronto with a number of roommates, four of which happen to be cats. She enjoys watching people walk through busy streets at dusk. If tomorrow were her last day she'd spend it eating tootsie rolls in the park with Kool and the Gang. Kiera hopes to one day be a freelance writer and documentary film maker.

Ursula Wolfe completed her education in Kinesiology and returned to York University to pursue her love of Women's Studies and work as a coordinator at the Sexual Assault Survivors' Support Line. This loving organization taught her a lot about herself as a feminist and gave her the opportunity to work hard to advocate for women's safety and justice on campus. She is passionate about women's health and healing, particularly as it relates to women's reproductive and sexual health. She is currently a volunteer counsellor at Waterloo region's Planned Parenthood. *urswolfe@gmail.com*

Mary Wright is a Jamaican-born author and explorer of the social universe, from the perspective of a black woman, an immigrant, a sister, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, friend, and observer. Mary has published three poetry chapbooks, a children's book, and a novel, *Healing the Spirit Inside Out*. She is a graduate of the Royal Conservatory of Music, and has released a collection of spiritual and inspirational music called *Shadow*. She has lead healing workshops for women, and provides art therapy for children in foster care. Mary is currently working on new books and a series of paintings.