

An Introduction To Feminist Theory

Contents

Introduction	2
Why Feminism?	3
- The Church, Capitalist, Family, Media, <i>Justice, Health and Education Systems</i>	
What is Feminism?	7
- Common Ground Across all Feminisms	8
- <i>Primary</i> Feminisms: Women's Liberationists & Radical Feminists	9
- <i>Secondary</i> Feminisms - Conservatives (anti-Feminism), Liberal, Marxist, Socialist, Anarchist and Radical Feminisms	10
- <i>Tertiary</i> Feminisms - specific groups and themes	14
Conclusion	19

Appendices

Appendix 1 - References	20
Appendix 2 - Glossary: Some Key Words used by Feminists	22
Appendix 3 - Feminist Theory: A Readings List	23

© Copyright Suzi Quixley 1997 & 2008. (Based on previous handouts © 1986, 1989, 1994 & 1995.)

Introduction

This article has been through many stages of refinement over the past 20+ years! I would particularly like to thank students in a unit entitled *Working with Young Women* between 1986 and 1988 at Edith Cowan University (W.A.) for continuing to insist that I articulate and clarify the various meanings of *feminism*.

A single book has been instrumental in developing my understanding of *feminisms*. Whilst first published in 1978, to my knowledge it remains the most clear, concise, accessible source on feminist theory available. It is:

Jagger, Alison M & Rothenberg Struhl, Paula (1978) **Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations Between Women and Men**, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York

I particularly like the way it lets proponents of each *stream* of feminist theory speak for themselves! The book does this by using short (1 - 6 page) *snap shots* to demonstrate points of view on the key tenets of each type of feminism. I could not recommend this book highly enough for anyone who wishes to engage with *Secondary Feminisms* (except *Anarchist Feminism*) in more detail.

I am very aware that this handout does not sufficiently address the impact of post-modernism (which could be described as a form of *neo-liberalism*) on feminist thinking. This is an area for future development, although I have to say that I see its impact as very similar to *Conservatism* or *Anti-Feminism*. This is because of its relativism, and preoccupation with individualism. Post-modern thinking essentially denies the structural imperatives which, I believe, continue to severely constrain women's lives. I would go as far as to say that it is no accident that post-modernism emerged as a major force in academic institutions at about the same time as Western governments focused on the notion of *individual responsibility*, and many young women in the academic sphere distanced themselves from the very notion of *feminism* and argued that we are living in a new, enlightened, post-feminist, era.

Yes ... many of the references are old. One day I'll get around to updating the stats. But has anything really changed?

Suzi Quixley
(April 2008)

Why Feminism?

Feminists argue that the world is sexist¹.

Sexism is the method by which the oppression of women is institutionalised, legitimised and perpetrated within this society. It is frequently so internalised by members of society, that it is perceived as *normal*, *natural* or *true*. For example, the notion that *knowledge* exists only if it can be rationally (ie. *emotionlessly*) argued, places a particular value on knowledge. It makes knowledge an essentially male-defined commodity, since men are taught to think in this way. (Generally, women are taught to think in more flexible terms, in preparation for *their role* as the nurturers and supporters within society.)

Definition of *human nature* is another abode of sexist assumptions. Until recently, few questioned the idea that to be biologically male or female predetermined a pre-set role in society, beyond the limits of those physical differences. *Masculinity* and *femininity* were perceived as *natural* outcomes of biological differences. This type of definition led to the legitimising of clearly differentiated *sex role stereotypes* for men and women in society.

Social structures such as hierarchy as a means of organisation, and the family as *the building block of society*, similarly took on a status as *normal*. Both these assumptions function in a sexist way, because they have covertly operated to maintain women's structural powerlessness in Western Society.

Another covert sexist mechanism is the *official invisibility* of women, world wide. A great deal less information is collected about women than men, which *perpetrates the myth that what women do is less important, less noteworthy, less significant*. Women are **made invisible by policies and priorities that discount the importance of collecting information about them²**. This makes it difficult to demonstrate much of the oppression suffered by women.

Sexism means:

... that men are more important than women;
... that therefore their work is more important than women's;
... that women are intended (or were designed) to complement men;
and therefore
... that women in society are defined in relation to men.³

¹ See **Appendix 2 - Glossary: Some Key Words Used by Feminists**, for definitions of *sexism* and other words used throughout this article.

² Seager & Olson 1986:9

³ Rowland 1984:9

Feminists challenge these assumptions, and seek to redress the inequalities brought about by a society based on these beliefs. They argue that men (sometimes qualified to describe Anglo-Saxon, able-bodied, heterosexual, middle class men!) determine the values base of society. That because they are the dominant power group within society, men have the means to very significantly influence the culture of the whole society. That they determine the dominant culture. That this occurs through all systems within society - the media system, the capitalist system, the church system, the *justice* system, the education system, the *health* system ...

The Church System

It is interesting that Christians have largely discarded the details of Judaist beliefs (the Old Testament) in favour of New Testament teachings. One major exception is the continued belief in a subordinate role for women, despite indications that the **direct** teachings of Jesus advocated a more equal role. Some of the implications of this have been:

- Women being treated as property, to be passed from father to husband, on their wedding day.
- Promotion of the role of women as the nurturers of men and children.
- The location of women's lives in the domestic/private world and of men's in the public/social world.
- Women's lack of right to control their own bodies/reproduction.
- The delegation of women's work to a servile function which is not economically valued.

The Capitalist System

Worldwide ...

... women constitute half the world's population, perform nearly two-thirds of its work hours, receive one-tenth of the world's income, and own less than one-hundredth of the world's property⁴.

Within Capitalist systems, structural power is held by those with the most money. Accordingly, women have little say in how that wealth is distributed. Indications are that 10 times as many women as men are dependent on pensions or benefits, and women are 5 times as likely to be living in poverty as men⁵. Further, that women continue to take primary responsibility for duties in the private sphere, including taking responsibility for 90% of childcare⁶.

⁴ A 1980 United Nations statement quoted in Seager & Olson 1986:101

⁵ Gardiner & O'Neil 1987:2.

⁶ Watkins et al 1992:149.

Under Capitalism, women have constantly provided a reserve labour force. The vast majority of people in part time and casual employment in Australia and throughout the world continue to be women⁷. With the exception of war time, women have been largely located in servile occupations (clerical, sales, nursing and teaching)⁸ and, despite the so-called *equal pay provisions*, the average wage for women continues to be significantly less than for men⁹. This is because the occupations women typically fill are treated as less valuable work than *men's jobs*. The sexual division of labour is a convenient mechanism for retaining women's dependence on men, and their likely poverty if not in an economically-based relationship with a man.

A 1984 survey¹⁰ found that if hidden unemployment was included (eg. young women undertaking domestic responsibilities rather than registering as unemployed), 83% of young people not connected to the workforce or education were young women. With increased unemployment, there is little reason to believe that this situation has markedly improved.

The Family Structure

The *nuclear family* is a system jointly established and maintained by both church and capitalist values. It is in the interest of organised religion to maintain such a system, embodying as it does, all the social requirements related to women's role. Capitalism benefits greatly from the consumer demands of many small isolated units, each of which require (an ever increasing) stock of goods and services which can be mass produced.

The Media System

Another *outreach program* of the Capitalist system, the media is owned and controlled by men. Over 50% of media revenue in Australia comes from advertising; women spend 80% of the money outlaid on consumer goods¹¹. It is therefore not surprising that the media continues to portray heavily stereotyped images of women, narrows feminism to equal pay for equal work, and trivialises the Women's Movement (which includes a range of ideological positions) to *ball-kicking lesbians who hate men*.

⁷ As at 1984, women held 77.8% of all part time jobs (Eccles in Broom 1984:84). A similar pattern emerges worldwide (Seager & Olson 1986:Section 19).

⁸ Currie quoted in Morgan 1986:7

⁹ In 1984 women's average income in Australia was 76.4% of men's (Jones in Broom 1984:106). A similar pattern emerges throughout the Western World, and in the Third World percentages frequently fall below 50% (Seager & Olson 1986: Section 19).

¹⁰ Anderson & Blakers 1984:5

¹¹ Game & Pringle in Broom 1984:69

The Justice System

Clearly dominated by men, the major areas affecting women are related to violence and protection. Indications are that the vast majority of young women in custody are under protective orders of some kind, generally related to being victims of sexual abuse or being sexually active¹². Further, it seems that young women committing criminal offences are more harshly treated than young men committing similar offences¹³. Tax laws discriminate against women earning their own (*second!*) income; equal opportunity legislation does not include comparative value clauses, nor does it guarantee employment security for women being sexually harassed; criminal law penalises sex industry workers but not their clients; few States legislate against husbands raping their wives; in practice, the onus remains upon a woman to prove rape *beyond any conceivable doubt*.

The Health System

The legitimate self-doubts, tensions and fears arising from women's training (... women really only have a *choice* of two roles - as a sex object or as a wife/mother!!) are consistently treated as neuroses¹⁴. Women are taught to accept the authority of doctors who *know*, to accept drugs of dependence to block their tension, to use drugs with known side-effects and possible linkages with cancer to control their reproduction¹⁵. The health system as a whole has not contributed to improving women's self concept, and arguably has not contributed to improving women's physical or mental health.

The Education System

This system reflects and reinforces the predominant sexist values of society. Teachers pay significantly more attention to boys in class and assess the same behaviour in different ways¹⁶ (eg. girls *gossip*/boys *discuss*; girls *giggle*/boys *laugh*). Many girls are still discouraged from studying maths and sciences, when recent studies show that 63% of jobs require maths¹⁷, 83% maths and science¹⁸. Approximately half as many girls as boys study computer skills¹⁹. Despite the fact that numerous studies argue that single sex classes favour girls' learning, few such classes exist. (Is this because they reduce boys' learning?²⁰) Despite the fact that most women will spend almost as much time in the workforce as men (on current estimates, 50% versus approximately 65% of their

¹² Gardiner & O'Neil 1987:4

¹³ *ibid*

¹⁴ Roberts

¹⁵ *ibid*

¹⁶ Morgan 1986:13; Spender 1982

¹⁷ Hutchison quoted in Morgan 1986:9

¹⁸ Ingvarson & Jones quoted in Morgan 1986:9

¹⁹ Morgan 1986:9

²⁰ *ibid*

life²¹), young women still perceive a narrow range of occupational choices for themselves - a view that is reinforced by parents, career guidance officers, teachers and media.

In light of the experiences and barriers that women must deal with, women need feminism!

What is Feminism?

I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is. I know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat ... (Rebecca West²²)

It is a general law that naturally dominant elements and naturally dominated elements exist ... the rule of free man over the slave is one type of domination; that of man over woman is another. (Aristotle²³)

I know it's old fashioned, but I do feel that women just are inferior to men - in almost every way. So women should concentrate on being just that - women - and leave the rest to men. I'm sure everyone would be a lot happier. (Janet Pearce²⁴)

Feminism is the theory and lesbianism is the practice. (Ti-Grace Atkinson²⁵)

In the context of Aristotle's comments, it is interesting that one of the many resurgences of feminism - the one commonly called the *First Wave of Feminism* around the turn of this century - developed (at least in part) out of the frustration of women involved in the movement to abolish slavery. It emerged as a result of the continuing status of women as little more than slaves.

Increasingly, the herstory²⁶ of women's challenge of the status of men in Western and other societies is being documented. Feminism is not a new ideology. However, little of the thinking of women prior to this century is available to us now. This is largely because of women's lack of access to the means to publicise their ideas - lack of access to formal education and hence the ability to write ideas down; lack of access to the means of publication of their ideas.

²¹ ABS quoted in Spender 1982:

²² source unknown

²³ quoted in Jagger & Rothenburg Struhl 1978:67

²⁴ ibid

²⁵ ibid:68

²⁶ as distinct from *his* story!

This article will focus on feminism as it has been explored in Australia. It is an attempt to outline the main developments in feminist thinking during this, the *Second Wave* of feminism²⁷. The *Second Wave* is generally considered the period since the 1960's when the Women's Movement grew out of the Civil Rights Movement in the West.

There are major problems in focusing on this particular re-emergence of feminism. It is largely culturally-specific. One of the most significant weaknesses of current, Western feminism is that it is largely constructed from the perspective of Anglo-Saxon women. Aboriginal women and women from non-English speaking backgrounds in Australia (... and women of colour from elsewhere in the world), have been justifiably critical of the white, middle class, *first world* mentality of the women's movement in the West. Only a small minority of the Women's Movement have been particularly concerned with exploring feminism in a cross-cultural or global context²⁸.

Common Ground Across All Feminisms

Feminism is not a single, readily defined ideology. It involves a series of complex interactions of ideas - both newly-developed thinking and adaptations of pre-existing (*male*) philosophies and ideologies. Most individual feminists have an analysis drawn from a range of sources. However, most also share some commonalities in their experience of being a woman in a male-defined, male-controlled (patriarchal) world.

Many feminist theorists have attempted to define the common ground across the range of feminist ideologies. Typically, they include most or all of the following in their definition:

Most feminists²⁹ would accept that any definition of *feminism* must include:

1. an analysis of the means by which women are oppressed by men within our society ...
2. which, to be fully understood, requires both an intellectual and emotional experience of that oppression ...
3. ... and necessarily leads to a personal/political incentive and commitment to achieve social change ...
4. ... in a *collective* manner with other women.

²⁷ Some young women are currently describing themselves as *Third Wave Feminists*. This emerging thinking is discussed briefly, later in this article.

²⁸ In particular, *Women Spirit* and *Ecofeminism* are discussed briefly, later.

²⁹ ... but by no means all! For example, women who believe men can be feminist would not accept Item 2; women who see social change as predicated on individual change would see their individual achievements as modelling options to other women, and would not accept Item 4 as part of their *feminism*.

Rosalind Delmar³⁰ proposed that the term *feminisms* should replace *feminism*. Given the wide range of perceptions of *feminism*, and, indeed, the variety of approaches to theory described by advocates as *feminism*, this word has real value. Often, feminists hold opposite views on key issues affecting women. **That is why the term *feminisms* has been adopted for the remainder of this article.**

Primary Feminisms

*Social unrest springs from an awareness of social inequality and a personal discontent. These problems are seen as social problems needing collective action, rather than individual issues with personal solutions.*³¹

The early Women's Movement grew out of the Civil Right Movements of the 1960's. As with any *new* political movement, the Women's Movement concentrated on what they were **against**, rather than what they were **for**³². Essentially, the Movement was a reaction against the role struggles women had experienced within and across different Civil Rights groups, and the different male-based ideologies which underpinned them. Mitchell and Oakley described two main theoretical streams which initially emerged - **Women's Liberationists** and **Radical Feminists**³³. There are many different interpretations of the primary tenets of these two schools of theory. The following are generally accepted as the major distinctions:

Women's Liberationists	Radical Feminists
Attempted to incorporate and develop existing ideologies (eg. Liberalism, Marxism, Socialism)	Attempted to define a new, women-centred ideology.
Based on a social analysis	Based on a biological analysis
Tended to advocate modification of existing systems (eg. society as a whole, or the movement of which they were a part)	Tended to advocate complete change of systems, through developing new ones, and seeking to work in new ways.
Aimed for reform	Aimed for revolution
Existed in the form of either formal, traditional structures (eg. committees, Women's Electoral Lobby), or as secondary groups within other movements (eg. a women's group in the Black or Gay Rights Movements)	Existed in the form of informal, new/alternative structures (eg. consciousness raising groups, study groups, action groups)

³⁰ Delmar in Mitchell & Oakley 1986:9

³¹ Rowland 1984:3-4

³² *ibid*:4

³³ Mitchell & Oakley 1986:1

Secondary Feminisms

From the mid-70's onwards, the Women's Movement was preoccupied with ideological questions! Debate raged on the key issues of ideological division - *abortion, sexuality, class, race, motherhood, the family ... work*³⁴, issues of organisational structure, visions of the ideal world and *means versus ends* (and other aspects of the process of social change).

Jagger and Rothenberg Struhl (1978) identified 5 main streams of thought during this era - *Conservatism, Liberalism, Traditional Marxism, Socialist Feminism* and *Radical Feminism*. This paper argues that a sixth school - Anarchist Feminism - was also a significant *ideological player*. *Conservatism*, they argued, was relevant to feminist theory, but should be viewed as *anti-feminist*, rather than *feminist*.

The following outline the major tenets of each stream.

Conservatism (Anti-Feminism)

1. Denies that women are oppressed.
2. Claims that human *nature* is determined by innate (biologically-based) factors.
3. Argues the existence of universal psychological and biological differences between women and men which determine behaviour.
4. Claims that *natural* differences, and the resulting inequality (... or, some would argue, *equality*³⁵) are just.
5. Argues that male aggression (biologically based) is the key factor in leadership, and hence in the (legitimate) patriarchal development of society.

In practice, then, a Conservative would argue that the *status quo* should essentially be retained. Where necessary, return to more sex role stereotyped values and structures would lead to a more effective society. They would conclude that to encourage women to explore *male* areas of involvement/behaviour in society is to doom them to failure and unhappiness, and the society to inefficiency or collapse.

Liberal Feminism

1. Believes that women are equally capable of reason to men, and therefore should have equality of opportunity, since reason is the basis of effective social functioning.
2. Claims that women's structural/legal rights should be the same as men's.
3. Argues that women should have equal access to social resources as men (eg. income, education).

³⁴ Rowland 1984:10

³⁵ That is, *equal but different!* This phrase appears throughout the conservative literature.

4. Views psychological differences between the sexes as likely to be learned, rather than inherent.
5. Believes that individuals should be able to achieve within society in accordance with their talents, and the demands for their talents (ie. a market-driven approach).

Liberals do not challenge the current political and economic structures to any significant extent. A Liberal Feminist would feel that, should the legal barriers to women's participation in society be withdrawn, then women, like men, would be left *free* to achieve within society according to their skills, and the demand for their offerings. Within the *private sphere*, women and men should be free to identify and live within their own preferred social structure, without legal interference.

Marxist Feminism

1. Views women's oppression as based in the capitalist system of social organisation, and therefore argues that it has a primarily economic base.
2. Sees sexism as a symptom of class oppression, which would be resolved by a socialist revolution.
3. Argues that housework is not economically productive in its current form. (Most argue that to industrialise the functions of domestic work, and therefore move it from the *private* to the *public sphere*, would empower women through joining the workforce, and hence, the workers' struggle against capitalism.)
4. Believes that women constitute *property* in the bourgeois family, and that they will be liberated by entry to public production.
5. Argues that the social/sexual/emotional aspects of women's lives are insignificant politically, because they fall within the *personal/private sphere*.

Because Marx wrote little about *private* life, a Marxist Feminist would see issues within this realm as outside the priorities of a social change movement. Therefore, the existence of the family structure *per se*, is not an issue needing challenge. Similarly, issues of individual sexual preference and identity should not be the subject for social/political action.

Socialist Feminism

1. Views *class, race* and *gender oppression* as a complex series of interactions, based in a capitalist system of organisation.
2. Places a major emphasis on understanding the effects of cultural institutions and analysing these in the context of a *classist* society.
3. Recognises notions of *relative oppression* - that is, that all women are oppressed in several basic ways, however, the impact and degree of this oppression depends on a range of other factors (eg. class, race).
4. Frequently views achievement of an androgynous society as the ultimate goal for change, with *positive discrimination* (or *affirmative action*) as an essential interim strategy.

5. Rejects the dichotomy between *private* and *public* work, placing a high importance on analysis of the role of the family in society.
6. Argues that sexuality must transcend *commoditisation*.

A Socialist Feminist, therefore, wouldn't necessarily see women's oppression as the single most significant form of oppression within society. No particular form of oppression is automatically more oppressive; the oppression of many individuals and groups within society are interrelated and all derive from the dominant white, male, heterosexual, middle/upper class ethos. They would emphasise the need to understand the role of culture in oppression.

Anarchist Feminism

1. Believes that authority/power automatically corrupts, therefore decentralisation of power is a key political goal.
2. Seeks a society where all members are *participants* with *consensus* used as the basis of inclusive decision making.
3. Recognises women as a particularly depowered group in society.
4. Advocates the development of collective structures of women to act to take their rightful power in society.
5. Argues that it is essential to work in a totally non-hierarchical manner, because the *means* and *ends* of social change are the same.
6. Stresses the importance of women's control over their own bodies and lives at all levels.

An Anarchist Feminist would reject the use of *depowering structures* as tools to attempt to create social change ... change is only genuinely useful in the long term, if the means used to achieve it are legitimate. Accordingly, they would argue that women must organise for action through local, collective structures. An Anarchist Feminist would ultimately envisage a self-managed society in which all members take direct and active responsibility for their own actions ... as distinct from the idea of *chaos* popularly (and inaccurately) associated with anarchist thought.

Radical Feminism

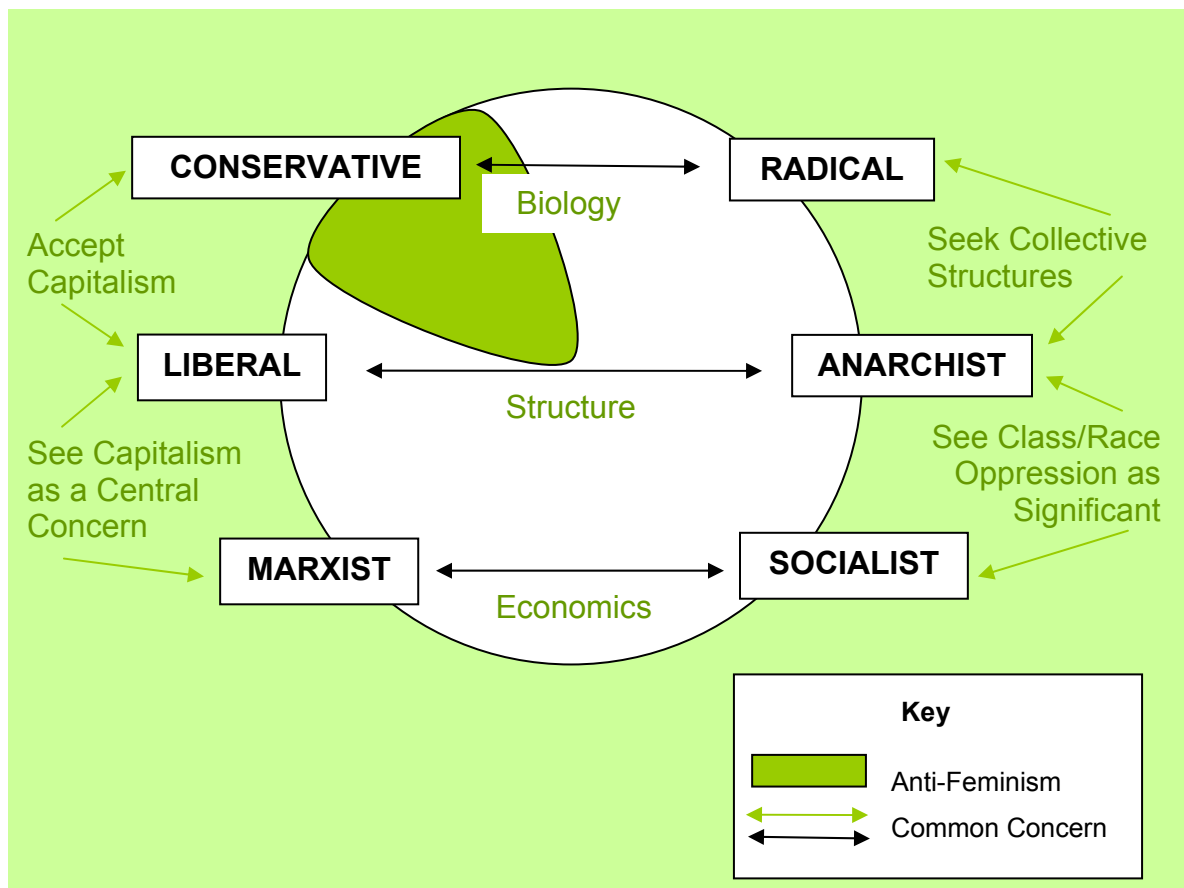
1. Claims that the oppression of women is the oldest and most profound form of exploitation within society, and is almost universal.
2. Sees gender oppression as underlying all other forms of oppression (eg. class, race) and therefore argues that it must be challenged first to achieve any form of fundamental social change.
3. Views women's oppression as the form which causes the most suffering to its victims, although sexist prejudices of both victim and oppressor might eclipse its recognition.
4. Believes that oppression is based in biology, either through women's child bearing capacity or through men's aggression, or both.

5. Views heterosexuality as the major socio-political institution used to oppress women³⁶.
6. Argues that genuine relationships can only occur between equals, therefore, women's potential is only fully realised in a lesbian relationship.

A Radical Feminist would believe that *labour* and *love* must be separated. For as long as women accept existing social structures designed and controlled by men, they will be enslaved. Some Radical Feminists are particularly interested in the area of reproductive technology, as a possible means (if controlled by women) of freeing women from biological constraints, and hence from society's extensions of these biological factors (eg. into social structures and *norms*).

One Way to Conceptualise Secondary Feminisms: The Feminist Theory Circle

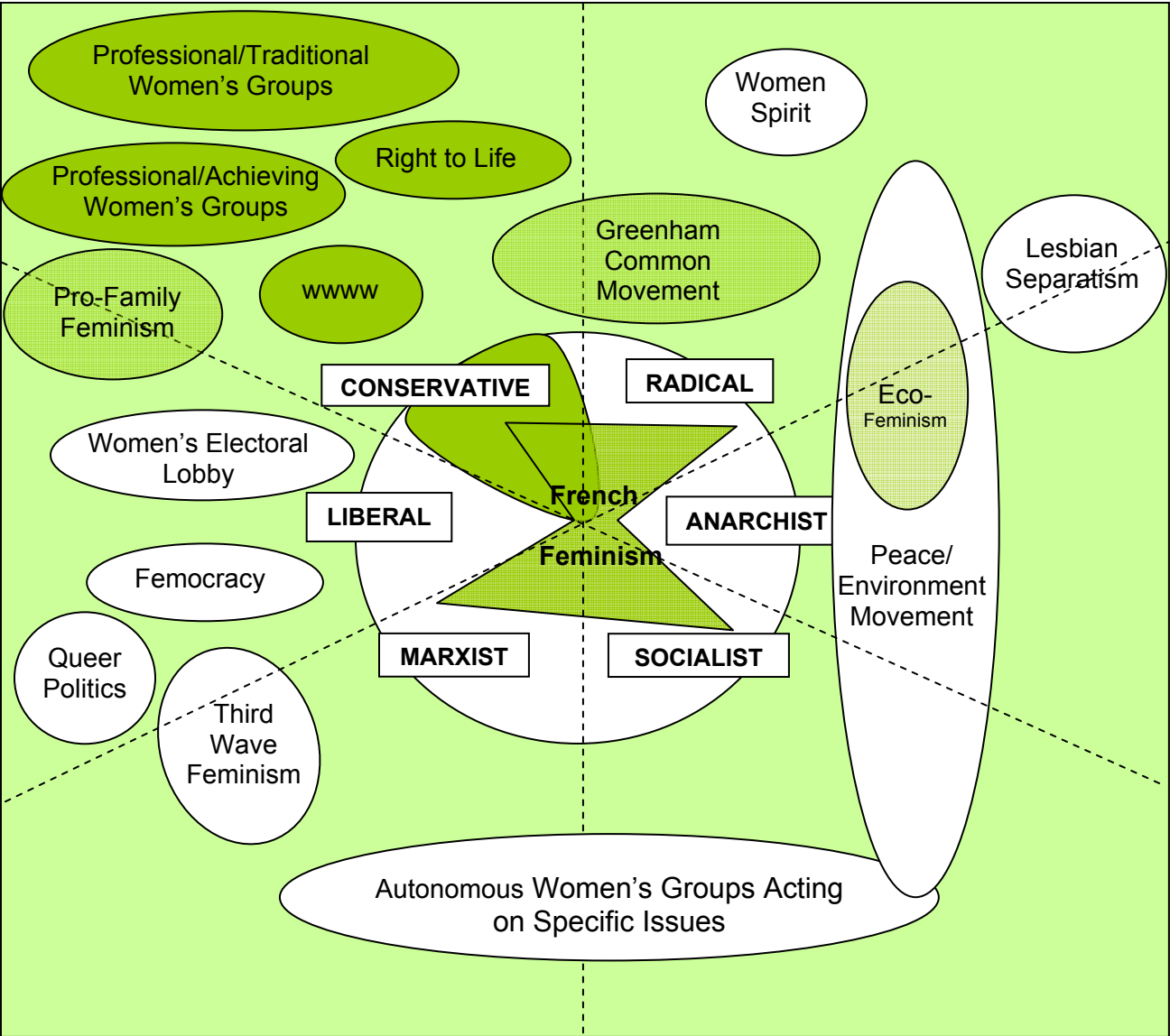
The following diagram attempts to describe the relationships between the different streams of feminist thought. **It is really important to note that very few feminists would fully adhere to any single theory.** Most develop their own analysis, drawing on the ideas outlined above, and could be placing at several different points within the circle, with the exception of anti-feminism.



³⁶ This is an example, and perhaps the source, of the popular 70's slogan *The Personal is Political*.

Tertiary Feminisms

Since the mid 1970's, many groupings of feminists have occurred. These tend to be based on a combination of theory, lifestyle and issue preferences. Frequently such groupings will combine women from a range of theoretical perspectives with a common concern in the same issue are (eg. environment, peace, abortion), or with a similar lifestyle preference (eg. lesbianism, alternate living). Because of the difficulty in defining these groups simply according to theory, **the following diagram is only a tentative approximation** of where some well-known groupings are located. There are a large number of groups, accordingly, the diagram only seeks to place those that are most prominent/vocal, and those of particular relevance in the Australian Women's Movement.



Greenham Common Movement: These groups are very difficult to place. On the one hand, they are part of the broad *Women's Peace/Environment Movement*. On the other, the *Greenham Women* are a distinct group who have chosen particular images and strategies to make their point. The component of conservatism evident in their placement on the diagram relates to the strength of the nurturing (traditional women's role) imagery used in their campaign³⁷. They link with the *Women Spirit* approach in terms of connecting women's desire for peace with their mother earth function - their closeness to children; their love of nature. Only women can really be committed to peace, because of their affinity with each other, and life! They are all part of the web of life.

Women Spirit: This movement is trying to recapture women's connections with the spiritual. They argue that women's spirituality has been suppressed by men throughout history, through the development of patriarchal structured religions such as Christianity. The interpretations of the infinite have been in terms that legitimise and institutionalise the interests of the dominant culture - hierarchy, a male god, development of a morality based on the oppression of women. The *Women Spirit* Movement is seeking a *new* form of spirituality³⁸. They are interested in finding old women's rituals, developing new ritual, rediscovering the unique connection between women, reclaiming women's control over their bodies through reviving women's health knowledge and crafts (herbalism, witchcraft, naturopathy, massage). They tend to be more cross-cultural than many other feminist groups, drawing on women's spiritual knowledge from across the world and throughout herstory.

Cultural Feminism: Providing an alternative lifestyle to that of the dominant culture is the key concern of the *Cultural Feminists*. They argue that women must have structural alternatives to their current existence with men. In urban settings, they tend to concentrate on developing groups of women who share resources, provide support to teach other, and offer cultural alternatives (eg. arts, music, social events) to women. Many of the women living in women-only rural settings, on a communal basis, could be described as *Cultural Feminists*. They play a role in modelling alternative structures for other women, rather than involving them culturally. *Cultural Feminists* generally aim to work on a collective/consensus model of living/decision making, hence their connections with Anarchism.

Lesbian Separatism: Is ideologically similar to *Cultural Feminism*, except that its proponents tend to be more involved in overt political activities (as distinct from cultural ones). Also seeking to work in a collective manner, *Lesbian Separatists* are often fundamental to the organisation of public political campaigns. Much debate has occurred on the subject of lesbianism and its role in the women's movement. *Lesbian Separatists* subscribe to the belief that women's capacity to achieve change is significantly limited if they are *collaborating with the enemy* (ie. living a heterosexual lifestyle). However, many believe that lesbianism has little to do with sexual activity as such. Some believe that one can be a *political lesbian*, that is, a woman who chooses to associate personally and politically only with women, regardless of their sexuality.

³⁷ Delmar in Mitchell & Oakley 1986:12; Watkins et al 1992:129

³⁸ Sometimes called *Goddess Religion* (Starhawk in Andolsen 1985:193-200).

There is a group of women within this movement who argue that celibacy is the best way to avoid oppressing others (including other women), and centering one's energy on social change. This is based on the belief that women cannot help bringing their social conditioning into personal relationships - sex role stereotyping can have a subtle effect on women's power relationships with each other, as well as between women and men.

Ecofeminism: Argues that science and technology are male developed and defined enterprises, which have played a key role in maintaining women's powerless position across many cultures, and destroying the future chances of life on earth. The idea that *man* has the right (or even the obligation³⁹) to control *nature* has been fundamental to Western thinking, in particular, for centuries. Since the industrial revolution, and especially since the advent of technologies which have turned the world into a *global village*, this thinking has become internationally dominant - to the detriment of whole societies outside the *First World*. Given their economic and social powerlessness within this regime, women have generally been the first to suffer the consequences of rampant *anti-nature* approaches to economics and social development. *Ecofeminists* are concerned with challenging the exploitative and oppressive relationship between humans and the environment. They believe that regaining respect for *the special strength and integrity of every living thing*⁴⁰ will necessarily lead to a more balanced power relationship between men and women. *Ecofeminists* see the war against ecological destruction as synonymous with the battle for women's rights. Arguably the predominance of women in the peace and environment movements is readily explained by women's particular affinity with the natural world. *Ecofeminism* shares a global/cross-cultural focus with *Women Spirit*, but differs from this movement in terms of its greater emphasis on social, as well as individual, change.

Peace/Environment Movement: Many feminists have directed their primary energies into issues related to the environment and peace. Their feminism is the motivating force behind their commitment to work with other women to save the world (literally!). They argue that the survival of the human race (short term, for those primarily concerned with the nuclear threat; longer term for those focused on wider environmental protection), must be the first concern of the women's movement.

Autonomous Women's Groups Acting on Specific Issues: Many Marxist and Socialist Feminists work, within the context of the Women's Movement (rather than male-based movements) on a range of specific issues which particularly affect women. They may form *Action Groups* to tackle media representation of women, pornography, unemployment (primarily a women's issue!), health issues, Third World poverty ... or a myriad of other issues. Often, these women are also involved, working on other social/economic issues, in the broad left movement.

Third Wave Feminism: This is a currently emerging movement, largely comprising young women. Because it is still developing, it is difficult to categorise in ideological

³⁹ A Judeo-Christian belief based on the injunction from *God* to *man*: *Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.* (Genesis 1:28)

⁴⁰ Mies & Vandana 1993:14.

terms. Its main uniting element seems to be a concern with the way the Women's Movement operated in the past. (It is a matter of debate as to whether this is how the Movement **actually** was, or rather, how it was portrayed by the media.) A Post-modern/Post-structural influence is evident in the way many young women see women's experience as relative/situational, rather than a product of structural oppression. Accordingly, *Third Wave Feminists* appear to advocate collaborative approaches (including political work with men) and tolerance/valuing of individual differences. They generally talk about treating men and women equally, rather than affirmative action approaches ... this is why they have been primarily located in the *Liberal Feminist* area. However, there are certainly young women holding other values positions, who would identify as being part of the *Third Wave*.

Queer Politics: Closely connected with *Third Wave Feminism*, this school of thought also relates to Post-modernism, and seeks to challenge conventional cultural constructions of gender and sexuality. Many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people see themselves as subject to a common *oppression* - narrow, dichotomous social definitions of gender and sexual identity. There is some debate as to whether *Queer Politics* has a place in an analysis of feminisms ... particularly given that many of the young women who identify with this school of thought eschew the term *feminist*. (To publicly identify as a *proud dyke* in no way assumes an affinity with feminist thinking.) Given that *Queer Politics* includes some analysis of social power, at the very least, this school of thought shares key **questions** with feminisms. It is located within *Liberal Feminisms* due to its focus on individual identity, and limited focus on structural change - that is, commentary focuses on acceptance of individuals, irrespective of their gender/sexual identity.

Femocracy: This term has been used to describe a variety of women, playing different roles in public life. (Often, it is used as an insult.) In **this** context, it simply describes women who see their involvement in the system as having some part to play in improving opportunities for other women within the system. Largely, however, they see achievement as an individual matter. The role of the Movement is to open up opportunities, to legitimise the existence of women in senior positions, and to provide modelling for other women. Typically, *Femocrats* are concerned with issues such as women's career path, the fairness of employment processes and development of promotional opportunities for women.

Women's Electoral Lobby: Is primarily concerned with legislative reforms designed to tackle issues of equality or equity. Their interests are as varied as those of the Marxist or Socialist Feminists acting on specific issues affecting women. However, their emphasis is on modifying, rather than completely changing, the system. W.E.L. played a very significant role in the achievement of reforms such as Equal Opportunity Legislation, and are currently tackling issues such as educational opportunities for girls (eg. through lobbying Education authorities) and representation of women in the media (eg. through lobbying the advertising industry or the Broadcasting Tribunal).

Pro-Family Feminism⁴¹: In terms of belief, there is little to distinguish *Pro-family Feminists* from Pro-family Conservatives. However, the origins of their position is quite different, and the basis for their conservative arguments distinguishable from the Conservatives. Essentially, these women argue that women's biology does make them vulnerable in a patriarchal society. They suggest that to take a conflictual position against men is to use the very tactics that men use ... that is, feminism is fundamentally aggressive. It is to deny women's uniqueness (brought about by **both** social conditioning and biology). They suggest that women should take a new view of the family - as a unique and exciting opportunity to express women's ability to contribute to society in a different way from men. According to the *Pro-family Feminists*, women's energy should be devoted to having the family structure, and women's role within it, valued. This would result in men and women becoming *equal but different*.

WWWW (Women Who Want to be Women): Hold a traditional Conservative view of the role of women in society. They argue, similarly to the *Pro-family Feminists* that reinforcement of traditional sex role values in society will lead to women's uniqueness being more valued than it is now. *W.W.W.W.*, along with groups such as the *Right to Life Movement*, is church-based and heavily aligned with non women-specific groups such as the Moral Majority and the Festival of Light.

Right to Life: This Movement differs little from *W.W.W.W.* in terms of its fundamental values base. It is a specific-interest group which is particularly concerned with the issue of abortion. The connection of *Right to Life* with traditional church structures is more overt than that of the other anti-feminist groups. There also seems to be a higher level of involvement by men in its public face.

Professional/Traditional Women's Groups: A number of groups have emerged over the past 15-20 years which actively advocate the role of women as wives/mothers. Members work in a professional role as speakers, often travelling throughout Australia to perform their duties. They are popular on the Women's Guild/church women's groups/private schools' Mothers Clubs (and similar) circuit.

Professional/Achieving Women's Groups: Women in these groups have been described as *Queen Bees!* They are women who have *made it* within the male system, in their own right. They are generally professional women, from upper or upper middle class backgrounds, with a tertiary education. Many are involved with the business/corporate sector. They have achieved both socially (eg. *happily married* with or without children, or *sexually-appealing singles*) and professionally (a good job with high social status). They argue that there is no structural reason why women cannot achieve within the existing system; discrimination does not exist ... they achieved, and anyone else (male or female) can, if they make the effort. It's all up to the individual!

French Feminists: This Movement is the most difficult to categorise theoretically. It largely comprises academic women, and is based in the philosophy discipline. Most of their literature is written in a **highly** complex, analytical manner. Essentially, these

⁴¹ The writings of Betty Frieden (1981) and Germaine Greer (1984) formed the identifiable starting point for this movement.

women argue that the Women's Movement should not ignore centuries of intellectual thought. They seek to incorporate and re-analyse the thinking of key male social theoreticians (eg. Foucault, Marx and Freud). Insofar as they accept the biological arguments of Freud, they are Conservative; insofar as they argue an exclusive and unique Women's Movement, they are Radical; insofar as they integrate Marxist theory, they are Marxist; insofar as they explore the context of women's oppression, they are Socialist!

Conclusion

Feminism is a critical cornerstone of social justice. Any human services worker committed to human rights driven practice cannot ignore the importance of understanding feminism. Similar theoretical approaches could be used to analyse other social justice issues, such as racism, *classism*, *ableism*.

Feminist theory can also provide a basis for constructively critiquing the emerging men's movement. Are particular trends about social justice? or rampant individualism? or reinventing patriarchy?

References

Anderson, D.S. & Blakers, C. (1984) **Youth in Transition: An Annotated Bibliography**, Department of Education & Youth Affairs, AGPS, Canberra

Delmar in Mitchell, Juliet & Oakley, Ann (eds) (1986) **What is Feminism?** Basil Blackwell Ltd, Oxford

Eccles, Sandra (1984) *Women in the Australian labour force* in Broom, Dorothy (ed) **Unfinished Business: Social Justice for Women in Australia**, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney

Frieden, Betty (1981) **The Second Stage**, Summit Books, New York

Game, Ann & Pringle, Rosemary (1984) *Production and consumption: Public versus private* in Broom *op cit.*

Gardiner, Kelly & O'Neil, Michelle (1987) **What are Nice Girls Like You Doing in a Place Like This?: A Report on Young Women's Access to Youth Housing**, A Discussion Paper, National Youth Coalition for Housing, Melbourne

Greer, Germaine (1984) **Sex and Destiny: The Politics of Human Fertility**, Picador Books, London

Jagger, Alison M & Rothenberg Struhl, Paula (1978) **Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations Between Women and Men**, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York

Jones, Frank (1984) *Income inequality* in Broom *op cit.*

Mies, Maria & Shiva, Vandana (1993) **Ecofeminism**, Spinifex Press, Melbourne

Mitchell, Juliet & Oakley, Ann (eds) (1986) **What is Feminism?** Basil Blackwell Ltd, Oxford

Morgan, Dorothy (1986) **Girls, Education and Career Choice: What the Research Says**, Commonwealth Schools Commission through N.S.W. Joint Non-Government Schools P.E.P. Committee, Sydney

Roberts, Helen (1985) **The Patient Patients: Women and Their Doctors**, Pandora Press, London

Rowland, Robyn (ed) (1984) **Women Who Do & Women Who Don't Join the Women's Movement**, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London

Seager, Joni & Olson, Ann (1986) **Women in the World: An International Atlas**, Pan Books, London

Spender, Dale (1982) **Invisible Women: The Schooling Scandal**, Writers & Readers, London

Starhawk (1985) *Ethics and justice in goddess religion* in Andolsen, Barbara Hilkert, Gudorf, Christine E. & Pellauer, Mary D. (eds) **Women's Consciousness; Women's Conscience: A Reader in Feminist Ethics**, Harper & Row, New York

Watkins, Susan Alice, Rueda, Marisa & Rodriguez, Marta (1992) **Feminism for Beginners**, Icon Books, Cambridge

Glossary: Some Key Words Used by Feminists

The following definitions are very short and simple. The concepts which some of them describe are very complex! Therefore, these summaries are designed to be indicative, rather than full definitions. In some cases, understanding of words (eg. sexism) varies considerably. Here, they represent my opinion (which, in turn, is reflected in the way they are used throughout this publication).

Oppression: Rule of the structurally powerful over the structurally powerless. In order for oppression to occur, there must be a structural power imbalance between the individuals or groups involved in an oppressive relationship.

Domination: A tool of oppression. Domination is the means by which oppressors control the oppressed. Techniques used can be as overt as aggression, or as subtle as pacification.

Sexism: A specific form of domination used against women. Beliefs, attitudes, ideas or behaviours which (overtly or covertly) reflect the assumption that women are less important or valuable than men.

Gender: A way of describing someone's sex beyond biological differences. It infers a series of characteristics, abilities and behaviours which cannot be demonstrated as biologically linked with sex differences. Gender describes the social assumptions and expectations (and often, stereotypes) of someone according to their sex and therefore often functions as a subtle tool of sexism.

Dominant Culture: The means by which oppression is institutionalised - often to the extent that the oppressed believe that their status is *natural* or *normal*, or their beliefs *true*. A set of cultural norms define the expected behaviour of members of both oppressive and oppressed groups.

Patriarchy: The dominant culture within Western (and many other) societies. It involves the development and control of the rules of society by white, middle/upper class, heterosexual, able-bodied men. This group determines the definition of social issues and norms.

Equality: Treating two parties in exactly the same, or equally valued, ways.

Equity: Ensuring equal outcomes for two (or more) parties. (This might involve treating them in unequal ways until they reach the same point - equality.)

Feminist Theory: A Readings List⁴²

Andolsen, Barbara Hilbert, Gudorf, Christine E. & Pellauer, Mary D. (eds) (1985) **Women's Consciousness; Women's Conscience: A Reader in Feminist Ethics**, Harper & Row, New York

Barrett, M. (1980) **Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis**, Verso, London

Clarke, M.J. & Lange, L. (eds) (1979) **The Sexism of Social and Political Theory**, University of Toronto Press, Toronto

Daly, M. (1978) **Gyn/ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism**, The Women's Press, London

Ehrlich, Howard J., Ehrlich, Carol, DeLeon, David & Morris, Glenda (1979) **Reinventing Anarchy: What are Anarchists Thinking These Days?** Routledge and Kegan Paul, London

* Eisenstein, Hester (1984) **Contemporary Feminist Thought**, George Allen & Unwin, London

Firestone, Shulamith (1970) **The Dialectic of Sex**, Bantam Books, New York

Frieden, Betty (1963) **The Feminine Mystique**, Penguin Books, Middlesex

Frieden, Betty (1981) **The Second Stage**, Summit Books, New York

Gould, Carol C. & Wartofsky, Marx W. (eds) (1980) **Women and Philosophy: Toward a Theory of Liberation**, Perigee Books, New York

Greer, Germaine (1969) **The Female Eunuch**, Paladin Books, New York

Greer, Germaine (1984) **Sex and Destiny: The Politics of Human Fertility**, Picador Books, London

Hoagland, Sarah Lucia (1988) **Lesbian Ethics: Toward New Value**, Institute of Lesbian Studies, Palo Alto, California

⁴² * indicates that this is a particularly useful general work. This means that it is relatively easy to read, and covers more than one approach to feminist theory.

* Jagger, Alison M & Rothenberg Struhl, Paula (1978) **Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations Between Women and Men**, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York

* McRobbie, Angela & McCabe, Trisha (eds) (1981) **Feminism for Girls: An Adventure Story**, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London

Mead, Margaret (1971) **Male and Female: A Study of the Sexes in a Changing World**, 2nd Edition, Penguin Books, Melbourne

Midgley, Mary & Hughes, Judith (1983) **Women's Choices: Philosophical Problems Facing Feminism**, George Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London

Mies, Maria & Shiva, Vandana (1993) **Ecofeminism**, Spinifex Press, Melbourne

Millett, Kate (1971) **Sexual Politics**, Sphere Books, London

* Mitchell, Juliet & Oakley, Ann (eds) (1986) **What is Feminism?** Basil Blackwell Ltd, Oxford

Moi, Toril (1985) **Sexual Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory**, Methuen, London

Morgan, R. (ed) (1970) **Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement**, Vintage Books, New York

Pateman, Carole & Goss, Elizabeth (eds) (1986) **Feminist Challenges Social and Political Theory**, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney

Rowbotham, Sheila (1974) **Hidden from History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It**, 2nd Edition, Penguin Books, Melbourne

Sayers, Janet (1982) **Biological Politics - Feminist and Anti-Feminist Perspectives**, Tavistock Publications, London

Spender, D. (1982) **Women of Ideas and What Men Have Done to Them**, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London

Spender, D. (1983) **Feminist Theorists: Three Centuries of Women's Intellectual Traditions**, The Women's Press, London

Spender, Dale (1985) **For the Record: The Making and Meaning of Feminist Knowledge**, The Women's Press, London

Watkins, Susan Alice, Rueda, Marisa & Rodriguez, Marta (1992) **Feminism for Beginners**, Icon Books, Cambridge