WOMEN'S STUDIES CELEBRATION
Women's History Month 2005

NOMINATION: Papers and projects done in completion of course work for Spring, Summer and Fall 2004 eligible for nomination. Students do not need to be enrolled Fall 2004 or Spring 2005 to be eligible.
(Students are encouraged to identify works they would like nominated and approach their professor to initiate the process.)

Instructor(s): Janice M. Bogstad and Sheila Smith_____ Dept. (of Class) Women's Studies__
Library Adult Health Nursing

Course Number and Name: __ WMNS 434: History of the Second Wave__ Semester completed Fall, 2004

Title of Nominated Work: ____ Do You Use the 'F' Word?: A Brief Look at the 'Fear of Feminism'_____

CATEGORY:

Sampson:		
Undergraduate Research Paper	XX	**See** ____
Undergraduate Project	___	**Olson** _____
Graduate	___	**Kessler** _____
		Turell _X?_____
		Belter___X?___

STUDENT INFORMATION:

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****WHY DO YOU, THE INSTRUCTOR, RECOMMEND THIS AS AN EXEMPLARY STUDENT PAPER/PROJECT?** (Attach a separate sheet.)

As the nominating instructor, please notify the student and ask them to turn in the paper, or attach to your nomination form.

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Awards are sponsored by the UW-Eau Claire Foundation, Helen X. Sampson Fund, and by private individuals. Research involving human subjects must conform to the guidelines given by the Institutional Research Board. Contact Research Services, 836-3405, with questions.

Submission deadline is February 11, 2005.

Recommendation: Janice M. Bogstad and Sheila Smith

Ms. Roesler's paper is a very sophisticated application of complex theoretical positions to the analysis of a contemporary phenomenon, and as such represents a significant contribution to our understanding of reactionary behaviors that we see around us every day, in our classes, and in social settings, to the use of the terms 'Feminist' or 'Feminism'.

In our classes, Dr. Smith and I encourage students to see theory in relation to their lives, to personalize it as an analytical tool. Ms. Roesler has applied her understanding of contemporary, feminist linguistic theory to a serious contemporary problem, thus demonstrating that she both understands the theoretical positions of de Saussure, Derrida, Moi, Freud (she provides a very useful but simple explanation), Cixous and Foucault.

She also demonstrates her understanding of the historical dimension of feminism in the U.S., which was a main focus of this class, with her discussion of Second and Third Wave feminisms and links this knowledge with her analysis of the 'fear of feminism' reactions around her. Finally, she discusses especially well the individual, personal transition from non-feminist to feminist, with speculations on both its social and its theoretical implications.

Erin Roesler
Jan Bogstad
Shelia Smith
Women's 434
November 23, 2004

Do You Use the 'F' Word?: A Brief Look into the 'Fear of Feminism'

"Currently, feminism seems to be a term without any clear significance. The 'anything goes' approach to the definition of the word has rendered it practically meaningless."
(bell hooks, Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center (1984))

September 2, 2004: You walk into the first session of English 484, Feminist Theory and Criticism. Not really knowing what to expect, you sit down casually and wait for class to begin. Slowly, you scan the faces in the room, five men, the rest women—assumed fellow feminists. Shortly after, the professor arrives. Stacy Thompson—a man. But Stacy is a woman's name, isn't it? Unbeknownst to you and maybe other students too, you've just had your first lesson in feminist theory.

As Toril Moi points out in chapter eight of Sexual/Textual Politics, "Marginality and Subversion", within the rigid and patriarchal structure of language "masculinity and femininity are posited as stable, unchanging essences, as meaningful presences between which the elusive differences is supposed to be located" (153). Primarily based on the work of linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and philosopher Jacques Derrida, it is within this concept of "difference" that meaning is ultimately established and attached to words. As seen throughout the language system, binary oppositions serve both to represent difference and to create a hierarchy within the structural relationships of words. Although many other words appear to gain meaning in relation to, not in opposition to, each other, our language system and specifically the linguistic value of words still rely

heavily on the concept of "patriarchal binary thought". Often attributed to the work of French feminist, Helene Cixous, patriarchal binary thought refers to Cixous's belief that "each [binary] opposition can be analyzed as a hierarchy where the 'feminine' side is always seen as the negative, powerless instance" (Moi 102). It becomes obvious then that the male or masculine part of any opposition is, in turn, the "legitimizing principle" which ultimately situates the meaning and value of all oppositions. But, one might ask, how is it maintained that masculine signifies positive qualities or correlations and feminine, instead, signifies the negative? I bet Sigmund Freud has an answer.

Through his work on the construction of male and female sexuality, Freud ultimately asserts that "masculinity is equivalent to activity plus 'n' and femininity to passivity plus 'n', where 'n' is established, although its nature unknown, by the Oedipus complex" (Brennan 9). Highly simplified, the Oedipus complex is a theory Freud used to explain the masculine and feminine sexual development of children. As Freud elucidates in his publication, "Femininity", during the nursing stages of infancy both male and female children are completely dependent upon the mother for survival. By breast feeding, the mother provides fulfillment of the child's innate desire for nourishment. Once the mother denies her child further nourishment from her breast, the child realizes itself as a separate entity from the mother and looks for an object to identify with. The male child, realizing he has a penis identifies with the father and out of the "fear of castration", detaches from the mother but takes her as a model of an appropriate love object. The female child, on the other hand, identifies with the mother, but upon the recognition that she is without a penis, becomes overwhelmed with "penis envy" and rejects her mother, viewing both her mother and herself as inferior beings who lack the

dominant phallus. As Freud describes it, "[female children] feel seriously wronged, often declare that they want to 'have something like [a penis] too', and fall victim to 'envy for the penis', which will leave ineradicable traces on their development and the formation of their character" (125). Ultimately, the female child internalizes her subordinate position to the male phallus and expresses her inferiority in a variety of passive and negative behaviors.

Although many psychoanalytic and feminist theorists find Freud's work on masculine and feminine development insufficient, Freud's theories reflect and maintain much of what is still believed about the innate tendencies of men and women. Freud, although often heavily criticized, still stands as an icon of psychological genius. His work on gender development has not only influenced the work of other theorists like Jacques Lacan, but also serves as a representation of society's unconscious (or sometimes conscious) commitment to patriarchal hierarchy.

With this in mind, I would now like to turn to the question I will ultimately address in this paper: Why, in our modern, somewhat liberal American culture is there still a tremendous fear of feminism? Clearly, in the information presented earlier, anything associated with the terms "female", "femininity", or "feminine" has been tainted by the patriarchal structure of the language system and can be perceived as inferior, negative, or problematic. It only follows then, that "feminism", too, carries a variety of negative connotations. Through close analysis of the social identity theory, several studies conducted on feminist identity formation, and the advent of Women's studies courses, I will reveal that although the label "feminist", like much else in our society, has fallen victim to patriarchal control, it can be reinvented and proclaimed by feminists and

anti-feminists alike as a powerful, meaningful way to identify oneself. But first, as Karen Offen points out in "Defining Feminism", current activists need to establish a "broad-based, dynamic working definition [of feminism] in order to confront and combat the present confusion about and fear of feminism in the public mind . . . [by] explaining what feminism is and is not" (122).

The New International Dictionary of the English Language defines feminism as "[t]he doctrine which declares the equality of the sexes and advocates equal social, political, and economic rights for women"[1] (465). This definition, though somewhat accurate and highly academic (and probably written by a man), fails to incorporate integral aspects of what many feminist women might claim a truer definition would entail. For instance, Monique Wittig offers an alternative definition of feminist in her well-known essay "One is Not Born a Woman". Wittig writes,

> "What does 'feminist' mean? Feminist is . . . someone who fights for woman and her defense—for the myth, then, and its reinforcement. We chose to call ourselves 'feminist' . . . not in order to support or reinforce the myth of woman not to identify ourselves with the oppressor's definition of us, but rather to affirm that our movement had a history and to emphasize the political link with the old feminist movement."
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> The Second Wave 268

Clearly, these two definitions of feminist vary greatly in content and depth. Wittig's definition moves far beyond a dictionary definition of a feminist, which unfortunately seems to be, at best, a common understanding of the term.

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[1] Although this dictionary consists of two books, A-PL and PL-Z, it does not contain a specific definition for the term "feminist". Instead, it lists feminist as a noun at the end of the feminism definition.

At worst, however, the feminist label has been so misconstrued that it has become synonymous with "Femi-Nazi", "man-hater", "male-bashing", and "lesbian". Indeed, the author of "Male Bashing or What's in a Name?", Christie Farnham, believes a major problem with the current understanding of feminism is that "there is perceived to be a bright line of beliefs and behaviors which separate feminists from the rest of the world" (7). Rachel Walker, cofounder of the Third Wave, agrees with Farnham, believing that young men and women ultimately reject feminism and its label because they think feminists must all adhere to specific lifestyle choices such as living in poverty, remaining single, censoring pornography, constantly critiquing patriarchy, and worshiping a goddess (Farnham 7). Of course, if an individual does not fall within the specific parameters of this definition, he or she, in turn, must not be feminist. Clearly, both men and women seem to resist the feminist label not only out of fear of the evaluative connotations which it may carry in their own minds, but also, and perhaps more significantly, out of fear of the connotations it may stir in the minds of others (Williams and Wittig 901).

Developed in 1979 by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, social identity theory helps serve as the first step in understanding both men and women's resistance to adopting the feminist label. The theory entails three basic components: categorization, identification, and comparison and predicts that "people are more likely to identify with a group if they hold a positive evaluation of the group and believe that group membership will positively affect their self-concept" (Liss et al. 132). Nancy Downing and Kristin Roush took the social identity theory one step further specifically addressing feminist identity development. In their article, "From Passive Acceptance to Active Commitment",

Downing and Roush conceptualized a developmental process of how women may acquire and maintain a positive feminist identity. Consisting of 5 stages (passive acceptance, revelation, embeddedness-emanation, synthesis, and active commitment), the Downing and Roush model is "based on the premise that women who live in contemporary society must first acknowledge, then struggle with, and repeatedly work through their feelings about the prejudice and discrimination they experience as women in order to achieve authentic and positive feminist identity" (695).

Before I delve into the intricacies of Downing and Roush's model however, it is important to consider *how* women acknowledge, struggle, and work through their feelings of oppression in order to move through the stages of feminist identity development. It would be naïve to think that a woman could simply 'happen upon' a feminist identity without the aid or knowledge of some exogenous force. In fact, most of the research I have read suggests that unless male and female children are exposed to feminism or feminist ideals throughout childhood, they will not realize or acknowledge the depth and constraint of the oppressive patriarchal society in which they live. Patriarchy has become so enmeshed in the daily interactions and socialization of individuals with society that it becomes nearly invisible. Moreover, patriarchal thought is constantly reinforced by the powerful and influential systems situated in society (government, education, and the media to name a few) that individuals often have no 'real' conception of 'Reality'. But, if patriarchal thought has become the basis of reality in our society, how can feminist ideals be incorporated into our socialization so that individuals do not reject and fear it, but instead embrace it as a empowering and positive

philosophy to identify with? One answer, surfacing in the past decade, is the increasing visibility of Women's Studies courses on college campuses.

> Their aim . . . has been to provide students with a nonhierarchal learning environment, to promote student's self-esteem and personal growth, to present previously ignored or re-teach previously misrepresented information concerning women across the disciplines, and to encourage an understanding and practical adoption of a feminist perspective.
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> Bargad and Hyde 182

Although most colleges offer Women's Studies as general education courses or potentially as a minor program, some universities began offering Women's Studies as a graduate program. In fact, the University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire, has a plan in motion to begin offering a master's certificate for Women's Studies in the next few years. As a Women's Studies minor, I am thoroughly excited about this proposal. Clearly, Women's Studies courses are making major headway in the educational system and hopefully one day will be as widespread and normalized as other more common majors like Business, Education, and Art. The reality for now, however, remains that Women's Studies courses, though present on college campuses, are not highly sought after by students unless they fill a general requirement. In the three Women's Studies courses I have taken (WMNS 290, 332, 434), two were cross-listed with literature classes, and although those two classes had a maximum capacity of students enlisted in the course, the majority of student's admitted they were there because the class, considered a blow-off class, met a much needed diversity credit. The only 'authentic' Women's Studies course I have taken (WMNS 434) had six students: five women and one man. This class, titled "Second

Wave Feminism", was led by two female professors and presented more critical theory and historical information than the two other class combined. My point here, however, is not to criticize the Women's Studies program at the University of Eau Claire or any other university; instead, I see the availability of Women's Studies courses as a progressive movement toward a more common understanding of and appreciation for feminism and the Women's Movement, hopefully lending to an increase in feminist identification. Moreover, by turning my attention back to Downing and Roush's stages of feminist identity development and working through the fundamentals of each stage, I will reveal how Women's Studies courses can be used as a critical tool for feminist identification.

The first stage of the model, passive acceptance, describes women who do not recognize or openly reject the discriminatory practices of patriarchal society. Typically, these women accept sex role stereotypes, believing they are actually advantageous for women. In addition, these women maintain the hierarchal belief that men are superior to women. Adena Bargad and Janet Shibley Hyde shed light on this stage of the model by printing actual responses from 88 female participants involved in a study conducted at the University of Wisconsin Madison in 1991. In their article "Women's Studies—A Study of Feminist Identity Development in Women", Bargad and Hyde present several student responses which clearly support the first stage: passive acceptance. For instance, one student wrote, "I don't think there is any need for an Equal Rights Amendment, women are doing well" (200). Regardless of the fact that this woman does not consider race or sexual orientation as viable aspects of the ERA, she naively believes that women's unequal position in society is acceptable and justifiable. Because women are "doing well" or better than before, there is no need to continue fighting for women's rights.

Another student openly admits her ignorance surrounding gender inequalities: "I've never really worried or thought about what it means to be a woman in this society" (200). The refusal or failure to recognize the patriarchal hierarchy in place in today's society only perpetuates oppression by promoting and embedding, consciously or unconsciously, the acceptance of discriminatory acts and institutions in the minds of individuals from both privileged and oppressed groups. Clearly, it is mindsets like these which support and maintain patriarchal dominance.

Women Studies courses, however, work to combat this problem by first presenting students with historical background that most likely was ignored or completely omitted from early, middle, and secondary education. Once students begin to understand the root of the women's movement and the initial framework of both first and second wave feminism, they become relatively receptive to change. A student's degree of readiness and receptivity to change is a crucial transitory step into the next stage of feminist identity development: revelation. As Downing and Roush proclaim, when men and women become receptive "[d]enial and selective perception diminish and [they] become increasingly open to alternative conceptualizations of [themselves] and the world" (698).

The shift from passive acceptance to revelation is not easy for most women. Despite their readiness and openness for change, women usually need to experience several crises which blatantly reveal their subordinate and oppressive position in society before entering the second stage of feminist identity development. Again, it appears that Women's Studies courses can be used as a tool to bring about revelation. By receiving professors' personal and historic accounts of the prejudices and discriminations women

experience daily, students, often initially blind to the oppressive patriarchal hierarchy in which they live, begin questioning their experiences and perceptions of themselves within the framework of patriarchy. By comparing their own experiences to those of their professors and classmates, students primarily recognize both blatant and subtle discrimination experienced in their own lives, but also form a framework of the historical cycle of oppression women continue to endure as members of a subordinate subgroup. But, because "traditional female socialization includes a distrust of one's perceptions, a mechanism that helps perpetuate the woman's subordinate status", upon revelation, they often describe feelings of anger and guilt (Downing and Roush 699-700). "I am angry that I've let men take advantage of me", claimed one student from Bargad and Hyde's study (200). This type of response is typical of women in the revelation stage, for they often begin to develop a negative perception of men, holding them primarily responsible for the discrimination women experience daily. It is important to note, however, that although women are beginning to redevelop their personal identities at this stage, they often develop out of negativity toward their oppression rather than on "an affirmation of the strengths of being female" (Downing and Roush 700).

Indeed, working though women's negative self-image is one of the focuses of Women's Studies courses. By presenting critical information about dominant figures of the first and second wave (like Woolf, Mead, Sanger, Friedan, de Beauvoir, hooks, and Lorde), students realize the enormity of the struggle women have faced and still face today. But perhaps more importantly, women recognize the power and advantages of identifying with a group who shares similar feminist ideals.

Once this recognition takes place, students are now well equipped to enter the third stage of the Downing and Roush model known as the embeddedness-emanation stage. Here, women begin to affirm a new sense of self and feminist identity. Perhaps Wittig's reflection in "One is Not Born a Woman" best explains a woman's identity transformation during stage three. She writes "once one has acknowledged oppression, one needs to know and experience the fact that one can constitute oneself as a subject (as opposed to an object of oppression), that one can become someone in spite of oppression, that one has one's own identity" (Nicholson 269). Once a woman has done this she is ready to fully enter the embeddedness stage.

Ideally in this stage, women form strong, meaningful attachments with other women, finding comfort and support in a female-oriented subgroup. For example, a student involved in the Bargad and Hyde study expressed that upon entering stage three she realized that "other women around [her] give [her] strength" (200). Clearly, women are encouraged by the visibility of other women who share their feminist viewpoints. This proved true for my experience in "Second Wave Feminism". When discussing the Downing and Roush model in class, a few students admitted that this course single-handedly encouraged them to complete a close, self-evaluation in which they ultimately discovered the value of relating to other women and aligning with a feminist identity. Clearly, Women's Studies courses serve to help students recognize the power and capacity of personal investment within the movement and see feminism and identifying as a feminist in a more positive light. Thus, Women's Studies courses provide students with the necessary tools and space to situate themselves within the goals of the women's movement.

With their newly formed confidence within the movement, women are now ready to enter stage four of the Downing and Roush identity model: synthesis. As a result of their experiences in the first three stages, women begin to value the positive aspects of being female and thus form a positive and realistic self-concept. Women in this stage readily establish a personal value system, productively and appropriately respond to instances of oppression and discrimination, and realistically appraise men individually instead of as an entire group of oppressors (Downing and Roush 702). Although collective action is significantly correlated with feminist identification, at this stage women still seem to combat oppression on an individual basis. "Many young women perceive themselves as effectively working to achieve equal status with men on their own" (Williams and Wittig 891). Women's Studies course help these women to see that although individualistic action and values are important to maintaining the goals of the movement, collectivism is equally as important in establishing legislation and making progress for women as a group. Often Women's Studies professors provide listings of services, organizations, and charities that students can work for to contribute to the advancement and equality of women and oppressed people around the world. Indeed, once students become associated so closely with a group or organization, it only follows that they will continue to strengthen and maintain a feminist identity.

The belief in collective action directly relates to the final stage of Downing and Roush model: active commitment. Once women have formed a positive feminist identity, they enter the fifth stage where they make "a deep and pervasive commitment to social change" (Downing and Roush 701). Although few women reach this stage, the ones that do see themselves as actively transforming the patriarchal dominance and sex-

role traditions of society into more egolitarian ideals. One student from Bargad and Hyde's study, who clearly became engaged in active commitment, professed "I am willing to make certain sacrifices to effect change in this society, in order to create a nonsexist, peaceful place where all people have equal opportunities" (201). By continued encouragement and the availability of resources presented by Women's Studies courses, students realize the number of opportunities accessible to them to make a difference in their own life as well as the lives of other women. It is important to remember, however, that by aligning with a strong feminist identity, feminists are not expected to live a rigid, systematic life. As women approach or, arguably, find themselves in the midst of the third wave, all rules are thrown out. Women learn to see shades of grey, embracing difference and contradiction by identifying themselves (hopefully) as self-proclaimed feminists.

Although the term is still highly controversial, "feminist" serves to describe men or women dedicated to a group fighting for recognition and equality. Whether one accepts the term or not may seem insignificant for many people, but in my opinion, accepting and promoting feminism is crucial to the survival of the movement. Suggestions have been made by feminists and anti-feminists alike to find an all-encompassing term which still embraces the goals of the movement. Personally, I will argue that changing the term promotes regression of the movement by stripping the credibility, contributions, and personal accomplishments from our feminist foremothers. Indeed, we live in an entire different time where consumerism, materialism, and individualism overshadow the politically motivated, die-hard, activism of the second wave. Society's dedication to capitalism directly robs the motivation and value of

collectivism from younger generations, leaving them completely individualized, without a sense of community, belonging, and purpose. Truly, future generations hold the key to the survival of the movement. But without knowledge or a term to identify with, the movement will die, ultimately maintaining and strengthening the patriarchal power structure by sadly eradicating the voice of the oppressed mass. So please, use the 'F' word and fight for women's rights.

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