

Changing Our Power:

An Introduction to Women Studies

S E C O N D E D I T I O N



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CHANGING OUR POWER

An Introduction to Women Studies

Second Edition

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To my co-editors, CJ and Donna, now over the miles that separate us, in our returning to this work, I remember our bond, our love, and the fire burning on in us, through our moves, family deaths, relationship break-ups, to our new paths and lives, that we, like all women, come to our own brilliant joy. In joy, we own the power of living.

Lastly, in humility, to those who have found this book, who have been in this way our students, may this book be a tool for transformation, for understanding and healing, for you . . . for your lives.

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Changing Our Power

*Changing our power
our talk we must learn
to talk again make whole work
we must learn to be responsible
for ourselves make whole work
of ourselves*

Jo Whitehorse Cochran

Preface

I'm thinking about *Changing Our Power*, the poem I wrote, the title and vision for this textbook, and what the relationships are, and what they can mean. In the long of it, changing our power means of course reclaiming our power and power as individuals and as women. Between ourselves as editors we had some doubts because power has so many negative uses in the world and women's community. In a way this is a bold statement for us, like running blind off a cliff. A claim that this book is changing our power. A claim I believe we can make. We have made many mistakes in the making of this book. We have also had many successes and triumphs. From each of these extremes and the everyday work of the textbook we have learned many important and enduring lessons. And over and over we have had to face all of the truths of ourselves and of the women's movement. Each time, over each hurdle we have moved, changed and clarified our vision, our power, and how we use our power in the world. This book is a testimony, a witnessing and telling of and by women about women's lives. Each author shares her own power and voice, together we as readers can glean the communal power of women. There are differences in this book, ideas and words that seem to contradict one another or disagree. This is good. This is the way of living.

Jo Whitehorse Cochran

Introduction to the Second Edition

This essay is a revision of the Introduction to the first edition of *Changing Our Power*. The three of us—Carolyn (cj), Donna, and Jo—originally met when we team-taught the introductory Women Studies course at the University of Washington. For years the teaching staff of that course searched for a textbook adequate to our desire to introduce Women Studies not only as a discipline in which the study of women and gender is central, but also as a theoretical and academic arm of the feminist movement—the movement that struggles to free women from structured and systematic oppression, and that therefore analyzes and resists oppressions of race, class, body type, pattern of loving, and age, as well as those of gender. We did find several textbooks that addressed some of these needs. For instance, *Women: A Feminist Perspective* (ed. Jo Freeman) began a discussion of issues of gender, *All Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies* (ed. Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith) extended the discussion to studies of and by Black women, and *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color* (ed. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa) expanded our awareness of the struggles that women of color face through sexism, racism, classism, and heterosexism. We are trying to incorporate and extend all of these perspectives.

We believe that no woman is free until all women are free, and that women suffer from interlocking systems of oppression. We want to introduce students to the diverse realities of women's lives, to critiques of the dominant culture, and to the present need for the feminist movement to find its unity in meeting-points of difference and community. It was because of these beliefs that women teaching the introductory Women studies course at the University of Washington began putting together a supplemental xerox packet of class readings, which eventually became our main text for the class. It was our (very fat) xerox packet that caught the eye of the Associate Editor for Kendall/Hunt publishers. She approached us in the summer of 1986 and asked us to consider publishing an introductory textbook. Each of us has had experience teaching various courses in Women Studies. Our various editing experiences have included Jo's work editing *Gathering Ground: Writings and Art by Northwest Women of Color* (1984 Seal Press).

One goal for the textbook is that it can be accessible—neither cluttered with academic jargon nor speaking from unacknowledged assumptions of the “generic woman.” One way in which we have tried to meet this goal has been to write, and to ask others to write, short essays that come directly from women's experiences and knowledge. We have asked of ourselves and other writers that specifics of difference and community be articulated. Sometimes this has not been possible. For instance, one of our writers, a schoolteacher, said that she felt she had to remain silent about her lesbianism: “Otherwise I couldn't show this book to anyone I work with.” Another goal that has sometimes been difficult to accomplish has been to name people by their own names, that is, by names they themselves have chosen. For instance, we use the name “Chicanas” out of respect for women such as Laura Esparza and Inés Hernandez. But what name do we use when we want to refer to the larger group of women of which Chicanas

are a part—"Latinas?" "Hispanas?" Should we try to specify various groups, such as Puertoriquaños? Sometimes it is difficult to keep pace with naming. For instance, in this edition you will find Americans of African ancestry referred to sometimes as Blacks and sometimes as African Americans, because choice between names seems to be in a state of flux. The same is true regarding the names "Indian," "Native American," and "Native." You will, then, see individual choices among the authors in this ongoing dialogue about naming ourselves. We name and rename ourselves as we gain more power over our own lives and greater clarity regarding our own identities. For instance, the term "old woman" fairly leaps off the pages of *Look Me in the Eyes: Old Women, Aging, and Ageism* by Barbara Macdonald with Cynthia Rich. The reclamation of "old woman" is similar to the reclamation of "dyke"—that is, a claiming of a name and identity "they taught me to despise" (Michelle Cliff). To us, "old woman" feels powerful, suggesting both loss and the process of learning to live with loss. "Old woman" is an honorable name.

In our revisions for this second edition we have retained our original three sections: I. *Our Identities in Difference and Communities*, II. *Claiming Our Identities: Naming the Violence*, and III., *Claiming Our Identities: Creating Against All Odds*. In response to suggestions from instructors and students using the first edition, we have made the following changes. We have omitted a few essays that seemed out-of-date or more specialized than helpful for the introductory course. International feminism and the concerns of American Jewish women are given more space in this edition. Authors new to this edition include Asoka Bandarage, Inés Hernandez, Clare Kinberg, Irena Klepfisz, Barbara Macdonald, and Luci Tapahonso. We have revised some of our essays. We have expanded the index, and have added a possible syllabus, journal/study questions for each section, and an introductory essay for each section. We hope you will find these changes useful, and we welcome your ideas for continued work on this text.

Here is a brief overview of material in *Changing Our Power*:

Part I: Our Identities in Difference and Communities explores experiences and issues affecting women's lives, and challenges the traditional "generic woman" model in order to reexamine our basic concepts and provide a comprehensive feminist perspective. Ideas come out of the context of our daily lives, with particular attention paid to the very real differences of class, race, sexual identity, religion, age, and disability. Tensions between theory and activism, intellect and action, and mental and manual labor are addressed. These ideas and tensions shape the strategies and analysis we develop in this section. Our task as feminists is one of vital, complete, and fundamental change. We are about change, changing our power.

In the last two sections of the book, we explore violence and creativity. We see these two as tied to one another. For often the language of survival in situations of violence against and within women is to be creative. And often to create or begin again from nothing or against all odds.

Part II: Claiming Our Identities: Naming the Violence contains material on sexual harassment, juvenile prostitution, rape, battering, sexual abuse, incest and genocide. These make up a continuum of violences against women. They are part of the whole beast that has made women's lives across the world hard, painful, broken, maddened, angry, silenced, and ended. In this section, we name the beast and change our power by not being silent anymore. This is always the hardest part of the book for us to teach or to read. Because each time we do so, we can almost reach immobility when we grasp the knowledge and emotions that these essays represent millions of women's lives that have been and are being devastated by violent acts. We

move into recognition and owning within ourselves that we too are victims of these violences. However, changing our power concerns naming the violence, truly owning the victim within ourselves, and then giving away that which we own. Giving away our victim as an identity or identification or game that we play to get our way, or to continue to call forth experiences of victimization in our lives. As women this is a vast part of our power and is a responsibility in the world what we have not yet worked on. Because the moment we own our victim in ourselves, and give her away, every day, we have reclaimed a power no violence, no one, can ever take away. We have truly reclaimed ourselves.

Our final section is **Part III: Claiming Our Identities: Creating Against All Odds**. Here we look at this process, this reclamation of power, we see through the dark storms to our larger selves and possibilities, to what we will create. As Olive Schreiner said, “We bear the world and we make it . . . and it is hardly an exaggeration.” It was in this spirit that we chose to close our textbook with a discussion of women and creativity. From our inner spirits, our families, our relationships, our jobs, our countries, our seasons of living, our communities, our races, our economic backgrounds, our sexual preferences, our bodies, and our blood, we create. We create art, children, strength, struggle, and ourselves. Each of us is creating in the world as a woman, and we are creating together as women—friends and lovers—a change, a changing in our power.

Jo Whitehorse Cochran, Donna Langston, and Carolyn Woodward

Suggested Syllabus and Journal Questions

*Note that this is only one possible way to arrange the readings in this book. We mean the book to be adaptable to various ways to introduce Women Studies.

This arrangement is based on a 16 week semester. People using the quarter system might want to combine certain weeks, and/or drop some readings, or make them optional. The readings in the first week of each section seem to us essential material. Other readings might be emphasized or omitted depending on the concerns of specific students or instructors.

I. Our Identities in Difference and Communities

WEEK 1: Introduction to the Course.

Theoretical Bases.

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| Woodward, | "Introduction" |
| Langston, | "Feminist Theories and the Politics of Difference" |
| Woodward, | "Patriarchy and Privilege" |

WEEK 2: Racism and Classism.

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| Yamato, | "Something about the Subject Makes It Hard to Name" |
| Smith, | "Racism and Women's Studies" |
| Langston, | "Tired of Playing Monopoly?" |

WEEK 3 and 4: History.

Week 3:

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Woodward, | "Reclaiming Our Pasts" |
| Harris, | "Who Will Braid My Hair Today?" |
| Gray and Woodward, | "From Pyre to Hearth" |

Week 4:

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Woodward, | "Real Women and the Cult of True Womanhood" |
| Hale, | "Return to the Bear Paw" |
| Tsutakawa, | "Chest of Kimonos—A Female Family History" |
| Woodward, | "The Growth of the Modern Women's Movement" |

WEEK 5: Work. Poverty.

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| Langston, | "Women and Work: Two Jobs for Less Than the Price of One" |
| Langston | "My, My, My, What We Got Today in the Food Bank Line" |

WEEK 6 and 7: Race, Ethnicity, and Lesbianism

Week 6:

- Smith, "Some Home Truths on the Contemporary Black Feminist Movement"
Lai, "Asian American Women: Not for Sale"
Cochran, "Steadily, One by One, Pulling Ourselves Out"
Hernandez, "Open Letter to Chicanas—The Power and Politics of Origin"

Week 7:

- Warn, "Esther's Story," "Lost," "Sounding the Good Name"
Yamato, "Mixed Bloods, Half Breeds, Mongrels, Hybrids . . ."
Kinberg, "American Jewish Hopes and Fears"
Klepfisz, "Anti-Semitism in the Lesbian/Feminist Movement"
Cochran, "I am a Woman Who Chooses My Words Carefully"
Cochran, "The Trouble with Normal Is It Always Gets Worse"
Tapahonso, "Note to a Younger Brother"

WEEK 8: International Women.

- Karl, "Integrating Women into Multinational Development?"
Juana, "Juana's Testimony"
Goodwin, "Afrikaners, Liberals, and Going to Jail"
Bandarage, "Toward International Feminism"

WEEK 9: Sexism, Disability, and Aging.

- Connors, "Disability, Sexism and the Social Order"
Rich, "The Women in the Tower"
Macdonald, "Outside the Sisterhood: Ageism in Women's Studies"
Tapahonso, "Yes, It Was My Grandmother"

II. Claiming Our Identities: Naming the Violence

WEEK 10: Violence.

Theoretical Bases.

- Langston, "Introduction"
Cochran and Woodward, "Dialogue on Introduction"
Herman, "The Rape Culture"
Taylor, "For Battered Women"
Sears, "Sexual Abuse: Smashing the Silence"

WEEK 11: Experiences of Violence.

- Walker, "Coming Apart"
Cochran, "Stealing the Planet"
Yarbro-Bejarano, "In Order to Survive"
James, "Smiles"
Cochran, "I Am Laughing"
Hernandez, "With Due Respects to la Llorona"

WEEK 12: Sexual Harassment. Prostitution.

Price-Spratlen, "Sexual Harassment: Definition, Issues, and Challenges"
Cochran, "Using and Losing Our Kids"

III. Claiming Our Identities: Creating Against all Odds

WEEK 13: Creation.

Theoretical bases.

Cochran, "Introduction."
Lorde, "Poetry Is Not A Luxury"
Anzaldúa, "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to 3rd World Women Writers"
Reagon, "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century"
Cochran, "Namasté"
Bandarage, "Women of Color: Towards a Celebration of Power"

WEEK 14: Community Action.

Seattle Reproductive Rights Association, "Reproductive Rights"
Seattle Feminist Karate Union, "Punch, Kick and Shout"
Cochran, "A Lesbian Theme"
Yamato, "Where Are All the Colored Folks?"
Langston, "Feminism as Survival . . . And More"
Clark, "Speaking My Own Tongue"

WEEK 15: Celebration, Critique and Challenge

Livingston, "Female Sexuality"
Sears, "Pubescence at 39"
Tapahonso, "Raisin Eyes"
Esparza, "Feminist Theater: Saluting Those Who Create Change"
James, "European and American Women in the Visual Arts"
Woodward, "Dare to Write: Virginia Woolf, Tillie Olsen, and Gloria Anzaldúa"

WEEK 16: Review.

Journal Questions for Section One, "Our Identities in Difference and Communities"

1. Write a brief analysis of the development of a "politics of difference." What are the theoretical premises of such a politics? Bring in specific examples from Langston, "Feminist Theories and the Politics of Difference" and Woodward, "The Growth of the Modern Women's Movement."
2. Define the revisionist history that Woodward presents in "Reclaiming Our Pasts." How are "Return to the Bear Paw" (Hale) and "Chest of Kimonos" (Tsutakawa) examples of revisionist history?

3. Using “Real Women and the Cult of True Womanhood” (Woodward) as your source, do you think it is possible to define the American woman? If your answer is yes, write out a definition. If your answer is no, explain why you feel a definition is not possible.
4. Define “racism” and “classism.” How are these two “isms” similar? How is racism different from classism? How does classism affect racism? Bring in specific examples from Yamato, “Something About the Subject Makes It Hard to Name”; Smith, “Racism and Women’s Studies”; and Langston, “Tired of Playing Monopoly?”
5. According to Bandarage, “Toward International Feminism” and Langston, “Women and Work,” what are some crucial economic issues for women?
6. Why are the specificities of identity important to any articulation of feminism? Bring in examples from your own experience, and from three of the following:
 Smith, “Some Home Truths. . . .”
 Lai, “Asian American Women. . . .”
 Cochran, “Steadily, One by One. . . .”
 Warn, “Esther’s Story”
 Hernandez, “Open Letter to Chicanas. . . .”
 Cochran, “The Trouble with Normal. . . .”
7. According to Bandarage, “Toward International Feminism”; Karl, “Integrating Women into Multinational Development?” and Kinberg, “American Jewish Hopes and Fears,” what are some key issues for international feminism?
8. Gloria Yamato writes that the isms—racism, classism, ageism, and so forth—are systematic, that is, dependent on one another for foundation. What are some ways that sexism, ageism, and ableism are systematic? How are they part of interlocking systems of oppression? Bring in specific examples from Connors, “Disability, Sexism, and the Social Order”; Rich, “The Women in the Tower”; and Macdonald, “Outside the Sisterhood: Ageism in Women’s Studies.”
9. Why is homophobia an issue of concern to feminists? Illustrate your ideas with specifics from Cochran, “The Trouble With Normal Is It Always Gets Worse”; Langston, “Feminist Theories and the Politics of Difference”; Woodward, “The Growth of the Modern Women’s Movement”; and Klepfisz, “Anti-Semitism in the Lesbian/Feminist Movement.”

Journal Questions for Section Two, “Claiming Our Identities: Naming the Violence”

1. Write two or three paragraphs in which you try to understand and articulate the roots of violence in our society. Bring in specific examples from Herman, “The Rape Culture,” and Cochran, “Stealing the Planet.”
2. Many feminists believe that the threat of violence works to keep women oppressed. In what ways are women today breaking silence and taking action to free ourselves from cycles of violence and oppression? Illustrate your ideas with examples from three of the following.

Price-Spratlen, "Sexual Harassment. . ."
Cochran, "Using and Losing Our Kids"
Walker, "Coming Apart"
Taylor, "For Battered Women"
Sears, "Sexual Abuse. . ."

3. Read aloud the poetry in this section. What do you hear in the voices of these feminist poets? In what specific ways do they raise a cry against violence and/or sing about healing? Illustrate your ideas with examples from three of the following:
Yarbro-Bejarano, "In Order to Survive"
James, "Smiles"
Cochran, "I Am Laughing"
Tapahonso, "Note to a Younger Brother"
Hernandez, "With Due Respects to La Llorona"

Journal Questions, Section Three: "Claiming Our Identities: Creating Against All Odds"

1. Come up with a feminist theory of creativity. Illustrate your ideas with specifics from three of the following:
Lorde, "Poetry Is Not a Luxury"
Anzaldúa, "Speaking in Tongues. . ."
Reagon, "Coalition Politics. . ."
Cochran, "Namaste"
Bandarage, "Women of Color: A Celebration of Power"
2. How are feminists transforming society through creative community work? Bring in examples from Yamato, "Where Are All the Colored Folk?" and Langston, "Feminism as Survival . . . and More."
3. What are some crucial questions regarding reproductive rights and/or female sexuality? Try to answer the questions you have posed, using examples from Livingston, "Female Sexuality," and Seattle Reproductive Rights Alliance, "Reproductive Rights."
4. What difference does writing make? Can the arts transform society? With these questions in the back of your mind, discuss three of the following:
Woodward, "Dare to Write"
Esparza, "Feminist Theater"
James, "European and American Women in the Visual Arts"
Clark, "Speaking in My Own Tongue."
5. Read aloud the poetry in this section. What do you hear in the voices of these feminist poets? In what specific ways do they sing in celebration of creativity and power? Illustrate your ideas with examples from:
Sears, "Pubescence at 39"
Tapahonso, "Raisin Eyes"
Cochran, "A Lesbian Theme"
Tapahonso, "Yes, It Was My Grandmother."

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