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THREE WAVES OF UNDERGROUND FEMINISM IN “SOFT” CONSCIOUS-
RAISING NOVELS

by

JEANNINA PEREZ
B.A. University of Central Florida, 2008

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
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Thesis Chair: Anna Maria Jones

ABSTRACT

In the chapters of my thesis, I explore how “soft” consciousness-raising novels of the first, second and third-waves of feminism practice underground feminism by covertly exposing women’s socio-political issues outside of the confines of feminist rhetoric. In moving away from the negative connotations of political language, the authors enable the education of female audiences otherwise out of reach. Working from and extending on various theorists, I construct a theoretical model for what I term underground feminism. Running on the principal of conducting feminist activism without using feminist rhetoric, underground feminism challenges the notion that “subtle” feminism means weak feminism. In illustrating how underground feminism works in novels and in physical activism, I hope to encourage the recognition of the political utility of women’s writings that do not fit the strict archetypes of feminist authorship.

Analyzing the effectiveness of covert feminist conversion narratives, I discuss one soft consciousness-raising novel for each wave. The novels—Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), Dorothy Bryant’s *Ella Price’s Journal* (1972), and Helen Fielding’s *Bridget Jones Diary* (1996)—accused by scholars of employing weak feminist politics, are investigated as feminist literature that disidentifies with the feminist label with the possibility of facilitating a wide spread conversion process in “would be” feminists. After analyzing how the novels place women’s issues at the center of discourse by discussing female education, women’s voice, and narrative control, I consider how the underground feminism implicit in the texts extends to activism outside of literature. I also end by arguing that these novels enable a more intricate conversation about women’s issues in which the voices of both self-identified and non-identified feminists are recognized.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: UNITING THEORY AND ACTION: HOW UNDERGROUND FEMINISM CONNECTS TO CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING.....	1
Theory and Methodology: Figuring Out How to do Underground Feminism.....	8
Why Soft Consciousness-Raising Novels?.....	13
CHAPTER ONE: GIRLS TELLING STORIES: FEMALE EDUCATION AND AUTHORSHIP IN SARAH GRAND’S <i>THE HEAVENLY TWINS</i>	20
Evadne’s Common Place Book: Consciousness Raising in Girlhood Education and Writing.....	28
A Product of Girlhood Education: Angelica Authors an Alternative Narrative	33
Man Takes Over: Male Narrative and the Indictment of Society	40
Creating a Foundation: Taking Steps Towards a Resolved Ending.....	44
CHAPTER TWO: LEARNING TO WRITE: STORYTELLING AND ACTIVISM IN DOROTHY BRYANT’S ELLA PRICE’S JOURNAL	46
Moving Away from Men: Speaking Against the Male-Centered Discourse	52
Awakening through Stories: Narrative Voice and Female Education	59
Ella’s Déjà vu: Unfinished Ending as the Indictment of Society.....	64
CHAPTER THREE: AN UNLIKELY FEMINIST NOVEL: BRIDGET JONES CHALLENGES WONDER WOMAN.....	69
The Grass is Greener on the Other Side: Bridget Challenges Feminism.....	78
<i>Cosmopolitan</i> Power: When a Pop Culture Education Takes Over.....	85
She Don’t Need No Diamond Ring: Moving Away from the Marriage Plot	88
CONCLUSION: UNDERGROUND FEMINSIM IN LITERATURE: SO WHAT NOW?.....	95
LIST OF REFERENCES	111

INTRODUCTION: UNITING THEORY AND ACTION: HOW UNDERGROUND FEMINISM CONNECTS TO CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING

Significantly, the most powerful intervention made by consciousness raising groups was the demand that all females confront their internalized sexism, their allegiance to patriarchal thinking and action, and their commitment to feminist conversion. That intervention is still needed. It remains the necessary step for anyone choosing feminist politics.

bell hooks

At the start of the fall 2009 semester, one of my undergraduate students approached me to discuss her involvement in a mentoring organization I coordinated, the Young Women Leaders Program.¹ She sat down and informed me that she would be dropping YWLP to go work for an alternative, “more political” organization.² Taken aback, I asked the student why she felt this way. She informed me that despite knowing that our curriculum and activism center around feminist ideology, the inability to use feminist language made the activism weak, inconsequential, “non-feminist,” and therefore “non-political.” I reminded the student of all the positive changes she helped make in her Little Sister’s life and how important she was to our community of women. However, the student stated that she did not want to participate in a community of potentially “conservative” women and girls because she felt it “too difficult” and uncomfortable to continue. Angered by the students labeling and pre-judging of other women, I reminded the student that making the conscious decision to work in a more visibly liberal

¹ The Young Women Leaders Program (YWLP) I am referring to is a mentoring program sponsored by the University of Central Florida (UCF) Women’s Studies Program. YWLP promotes middle school girls’ leadership abilities by pairing collegiate women with middle school girls. In mentoring pairs, they focus on learning competence, autonomy, empowerment, positive self-esteem, and on participating in a larger girl community.

² "Student Feminist Conversation." Face to face. Sept. 2009.

organization was “taking the path of least resistance” and choosing to perform activism the “easier” way.³ The student merely replied that YWLP was “just not the best option” for her feminist activism.

This conversation, like others I have had with various feminist YWLP members, led to my asking a series of questions. Why do our women studies students feel that the program’s activism functions outside of feminist methodology? Why is the local women’s rights community undervaluing our work? How are the students in the program constructing feminist activism? How are the students self-identifying with feminism? How and from whom are they learning the theory? After thinking through these questions and the implications of this student’s conflict with YWLP, I reevaluated mainstream theoretical constructions of feminist activist models and rhetoric to get to the root of how and where these students’ understanding took shape. The result of this reevaluation is a call for a restructuring of feminist rhetoric, starting with writing. In this thesis, I analyze “underground” feminism in writing that moves beyond the strict confines of the f-word in order to reach girls and women in spaces and communities otherwise widely inaccessible.⁴ Underground feminism, working on the principal of conducting feminist activism without using feminist rhetoric, challenges the notion that “subtle” feminism means weak feminism. The chapters explore how “soft” consciousness-raising novels practice underground feminism by covertly exposing women’s socio-political issues outside of the boundaries of feminist rhetoric. Representing each wave of the women’s rights movement, Sarah

³ At the time, the student was taking Introduction to Women’s Studies course in which one of the assigned readings is Johnson’s “Patriarchy, The System,” which defines the “path of least resistance” as essentially taking the “easy way” out. For example, just following systems of oppression instead of trying to fight them. In this particular instance, I was arguing that the student wanted to work in an organization where she would feel sure that her opinions would not be challenged.

⁴ The “f-word” refers to the negative connotations attached to the word feminism, suggesting that feminism is often seen as a “bad” word.

Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), Dorothy Bryant's *Ella Price's Journal* (1972), and Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996), follow the structural tenets of soft consciousness-raising novels.⁵ Each novel, accused by feminist scholars of lacking political power, is explored individually in connection to education, alternative narratives, and the value of female voice. These three elements, acting differently in each of the novels, serve to challenge oppressive institutions that silence women.

The discussion of feminist rhetoric and authorship is not a new phenomenon. A quintessential theorist of the French second wave, Hélène Cixous, supports female authorship in her essay "Laugh of Medusa," calling for a revolution in women's writing that crafts an alternative literary style. Cixous grounds the process primarily in female sexuality, claiming that joining the female body to the writing process transforms women into subjects instead of objects. Cixous asks women to move collectively beyond the "old." However, while she sees women's writing as a formidable force, Cixous creates strict boundaries for women writers by creating a universal female author. She demands freedom for "the New Woman from the Old by coming to know her – by loving her for getting beyond the Old without delay, by going out ahead of what the New Woman will be...in order to be more than herself" (1645). Cixous' appeal asks female writers to reject the various historical and personal pasts that undoubtedly inform a diverse present. While Cixous likely does this unintentionally, she nonetheless ignores the labor of women in the past and the women who may lie outside the "universal" norm. Cixous not only assumes that recognition of the female subject occurs only through identifying with a feminist prototype, but pressures women to fit her standard of authorship, resulting in a system based on

⁵ The years I am working with for each wave of feminism are as follows, first wave 1800-1920s, second wave 1950-1980s, and third wave 1990- present.

exclusion instead of inclusion. Despite the problems in Cixous' essay, her appeal for female authorship empowers women by placing the power of recognition in their own hands. Chandra Mohanty and Bidy Martin extend Cixous' appeal, breaking down the essentialist universality by focusing on the value of individual narratives.

As part of this ongoing debate, Martin and Mohanty's collaborative essay "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to do With It?" addresses the need for inclusive rhetoric in the feminist movement. Through analyzing personal narrative rather than fiction, Mohanty and Martin challenge the "terms of totalizing feminist discourse" that support the belief of a universal sisterhood (291). According to the authors, because the varying experiences of women are based on diverse identities constructed through intersectionality, feminism cannot exist as "an all-encompassing home" (294). The authors suggest that collaborative feminism will exist in the "interpretation of personal histories; personal histories that are themselves situated in relation to the development within feminism of particular questions and critiques" (294). The writers are pointing to the importance of personal narrative, suggesting that the various faces of feminism lie in the different personal stories of women, not in universal sisterhood. Individual narratives force the recognition of women as subjects but do so while recognizing the various experiences of women. Making up a collective of women's writing, the narratives are capable of creating local to global change through education and self-realization. The discussion of local to global requires continual recognition due to the continual reproduction of the universal feminist ideal, as seen in the following "how to" texts.

The popular third-wave "how to" feminist texts of this generation, such as Megan Seely's *Fight Like a Girl: How to be a Fearless Feminist*, and Jessica Valenti's *Full Frontal Feminism*:

A Young Women's Guide to Why Feminism Matters reproduce the universal feminist archetype. These “how-to” texts, as others following this model, adhere to rigid genre conventions, offering a strict conversion narrative for the would-be feminist reader.⁶ Each text begins with feminist “myth-busting” where the authors argue that, despite the reader’s possible lack of self-identification with feminism, “You’re a hardcore feminist I swear” (Valenti 5). Once the author has dispelled the myths, each text follows with a discussion of “feminist topics” ranging from popular culture, to abortion, dating, sex, and marriage. The texts close with chapters on activism and a call to arms for readers; essentially moving from the “sin” of not being feminist to “spiritual enlightenment” through activism. These two authors, like other mainstream contemporary feminists, generate a strict feminist archetype that insists on using the term feminism, creating a feminist prototype based on problematic second-wave ideals that exclude younger girls and women who feel uncomfortable with political labels.

Constituting the face of feminism in popular national chain bookstores, the “how-to” feminist texts are the primary books available to average readers. Seely’s guide addresses a current generation of girls who, according to her, “deny” feminism while reaping its “rewards” (4). Seely adopts the universal sisterhood methodology, insisting that women readdress their hypocrisy and perform her brand of feminism. Seely’s first chapter focuses on breaking down the negative myths of feminism, suggesting that feminism is all-encompassing and works for all women. However, as the text progresses, she does not provide an inclusive view of feminism. In

⁶ Other feminist how-to texts that follow similar patterns include *It's A Jungle Out There* by Amanda Marcotte, *Grassroots: A Field Guide for Feminist Activism* by Jennifer Baumgardner, and *Manifesta* by Jennifer Baumgardner.

fact, Seely often excludes the views and labor of marginalized feminists groups.⁷ For example, in her chapter “Knock ‘em Up...Knock ‘em Down,” Seely purports that feminists should stop focusing on abortion and take responsibility for women’s education and creating “women-centered health care” (147). However, immediately after her statement, Seely proceeds to discuss abortion for most of the chapter. Not only does she ignore her own advice by overlooking the need to discuss women’s access to healthcare, but she also constructs feminism as purely pro-choice. While demonizing and stereotyping anti-abortion activism, she never mentions or provides access to the Feminists for Life organization.⁸ As a result, Seely declares a universal feminist view while simultaneously alienating self-proclaimed feminists who do not fit her archetype and perpetuating a system that privileges some women’s efforts over the efforts of other women. In doing so, Seely runs the risk of distancing women from feminist activism and from exposure to feminist ideals.

Jessica Valenti’s *Full Frontal Feminism: A Young Woman’s Guide to Why Feminism Matters* reproduces the same archetype as Seely. Advertised as the cool, “smart-ass,” real life guide to feminism, Valenti’s text prides itself on making young women feel comfortable with feminism, and encourages readers to define their own brand of feminism based on individual identity. However, the text persistently stereotypes and insults women who question the feminist label. Like Seely, Valenti begins her text with a similar process of breaking down the myths of feminism, stating that she “gets so angry at younger women who are nervous about feminism because they’re afraid that boys won’t like them...Part of me wants to say, ‘Yeah, someone’s

⁷ These groups are marginalized within feminism, seen as the “bad” feminists that support conservative rhetoric and values. Seely’s definition of women centered healthcare also primarily supports a white middle class feminist perspective of healthcare, ignoring the concerns of women of color.

⁸ Feminists for life is a “pro-life” feminist organization that supports making changes to education and healthcare so women don’t have to make the choice for abortion. <http://www.feministsforlife.org/>

going to call you a lesbian...Suck it up” (14). Valenti also produces a feminist prototype following this section, arguing that feminists love sex and are “quality women” (15). Statements such as these, which persist throughout the text, privilege feminists as women. For example, what if a woman chooses not to practice intercourse for whatever reason? According to Valenti, “Feminists do [sex] better ‘cause we know how to get past all the bullshit” (19). Not only does this assume that sexual liberation occurs only through feminism, but it pressures women to quickly “get past” negative body image, sexual abuse, childhood abuse, and more in order to be the right kind of feminist.

Thus Valenti and Seely, like so many others, ultimately continue to reproduce the strict and even oppressive definitions of feminism. Women are expected to get on the picket line and wave a one-size-fits-all feminist flag that may not represent them, alienating both themselves and other women. I want to provide a different model of feminist activist authorship that works when feminist rhetoric fails to achieve the desired results. Underground feminism works on the principal of performing feminism without using the term. When the doors slam in our faces for using feminist language, instead of breaking the door down, sneak in through the back door. While it is problematic that there would be repercussions for using political language within some spaces, such as the public school systems, as feminists our focus here should be to reach women and girls in various communities. Using the following theor

oz, I will illustrate how underground feminism allows activists, and specifically authors, to radically practice feminism within spaces otherwise barred to them.

I am calling out to the feminist community and suggesting a paradigm shift in current feminist models of activism. The third-wave “how to” feminist texts taught in Women’s Studies

classrooms are simply not enough, because they polarize and ignore the labor and thoughts of women who question or refuse to self-apply the feminist label. The texts' oversimplification of the women's rights movement hinders complex discourse about feminist theory, resulting in the under-theorizing and simplification of feminism. Students may leave the class believing that although they agree with elements of the feminist movement, they cannot simply "suck it up" and give up their social conditioning to be the ideal feminist. There is also the risk of cultivating a feminist community that is not sensitive to the views of other women and thus perpetuating a cycle of social aggression between groups of women. As an activist community, we have to be willing to get off the picket line and engage with communities and individuals who reject the feminist label in order to facilitate the radical change women seek in the world. Current feminist theories provide an excellent starting point that has proven effective in the past, but the theoretical models are largely limited to a second-wave methodology in a growing third-wave climate. Extending theoretical praxis to include alternative rhetoric and methodology would enable alternative models of feminist writing and activism.

Theory and Methodology: Figuring Out How to do Underground Feminism

To extend underground feminism's theoretical tenets, I begin with Charlotte's Bunch's essay "Beyond Either/Or: Nonaligned Feminism." Bunch argues for "nonaligned feminism," a feminist activism that "requires careful attention and debate" when conducting women and girl centered community service (49). She defines nonaligned feminism as feminist activism and theory without the subset labels, such as Marxism, Psychoanalysis, and liberal. For example, when organizing a project for women's access to healthcare, activists would listen to the views of both pro-life and pro-choice feminists, evaluating the long-term consequences for women at

the micro, meso, and macro levels. The subset labels of pro-choice or pro-life set aside, those involved in the discussion can ideally generate a more complex conversation. Activists and authors would have to consider how this issue interacts with gender, race, class, education, ability, language, and location. Bunch suggests that nonaligned feminism challenges activists because the activism works from a local to global level, examining all the complexity and encouraging a wider understanding of women. Underground feminism operates on similar principles, extending Bunch's nonaligned tactic to the feminist label itself.

Bunch also explores how the various types of feminism (radical, liberal, leftist, and so on) are separatist, preventing advocates from “reshaping the political, cultural, economic, and spiritual structures of our world” (50). While Bunch focuses on particular factions, the feminist label itself is exclusionary in forcing women to fit another social label. As women activists, feminists are constantly trying to get out of the limiting and oppressing categories of slut, virgin, homemaker, and Other. Why should the feminist label be questioned any less? In forcing a stringent definition of feminism, the movement removes the option of choice by pushing women in the campaign into the binary of “feminist” and “not feminist.” While theorists like Jill Rudd and Loreen Olsen argue that the rejection of the f-word is the root cause of disunification in the women's movement, like Bunch I argue that the disunity stems from our inability to dethrone our brand of theory from its sacred place.⁹ In repositioning the f-word in our efforts, we will recognize the labor of women that the how-to books label as feminists, “even if [they] don't know it yet” (Valenti 15). Extending nonaligned feminism, underground feminism “is not a withdrawal from politics,” but a novel understanding of activism that refuses to privilege some

⁹ Olson, Loreen N., Tina A. Coffell, Eileen B. Ray, and Jill Rudd. “I'm all for equal rights, but don't call me a feminist”: Identity Dilemmas in Young Adults' Discursive Representations of Being a Feminist.” *Women's Studies in Communication* 31.1 (2008): 104-33. Print.

over others (50). Underground feminism provides a space beyond the label, bridging the gaps between women rather than accentuating them. Feminist ideology is present, yet women are allowed to make choices beyond being forced to fit a particular brand.

Underground feminism predates the name. As Anna NietoGomez points out in her article “Chicana Feminism,” first-wave women did not invent the women’s rights movement (52). Defending chicana feminism as part of the mainstream movement, Gomez argues that women centered activism predates the creation of the term: “You can find roots of women’s struggle to end oppression of people and of themselves as far back as 200 years before the birth of Christ, in Viet Nam, in China, in Gaul, in Africa, and in the valley of Mexico” (53). Women queens, leaders, soldiers, and scholars worked and wrote for women’s liberation before the feminist stamp of authenticity. In illustrating pre-label feminism, for lack of a better word, NietoGomez points to the life of Sor Juana. A Mexican nun who fought for women’s education and the rights of prostitutes, Sor Juana chose the nunnery as an “opportunity to study” (54). She campaigned for women’s rights, challenging the local bishop through letters to prove that improving women’s education would strengthen women’s love for god. NietoGomez uses the premise of a herstory to question the feminist archetype, suggesting multiple times the impossibility of a strict model.

Since feminist efforts existed before the label, they can exist now without the tag as underground feminism. Often extending from the belief in universal sisterhoods, much of the current feminist rhetoric neglects a history of women’s political activism, including activist writing. In overlooking this history of non-label women’s activism, the feminist movement risks ignoring the views and labor of the very women it seeks to represent. Womanist scholars and

women's rights as human rights organizations often do not associate with feminist rhetoric, yet still work in the interest of women and girls in the process. Underground feminism, an activism-centered model, operates by using feminist methodology and ideology without using polarizing rhetoric. In doing so, this method of activism acknowledges a women's history without posthumously labeling historic female figures as feminists and acknowledges a women-centered history that stands outside the canon. As part of the how-to feminist generation, how do we re-evaluate the methodology and our own constructions of feminism?

Our reevaluation can begin with what Jose Muñoz's classifies as disidentification in his text *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. As a "survival strategy that works within and outside the dominant public sphere simultaneously" (5), disidentification allows for fluently. Muñoz's term reacts to Freud's notion of identification as the collection of another's attributes used to model the self and intersects with Foucault allowing an individual to discover elements about identity and work against the confi

Muñoz offers three models: identification, counter identification, and disidentification. Disidentification, as the third model outside of normative ideas of identification, neither identifies nor completely rejects dominant social ideology but molds and changes central belief systems by acting subversively within macro social structures:

Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this "working on and against" is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural

change while at the same time valuing the importance of local everyday struggles of resistance. (11-12)

Disidentification does not simply follow hegemonic norms (such as heteronormativity and the beauty ideal) or rebel against the entire system, but enacts change within the system. This “survival strategy” promotes a discourse that alters the norms and macro system without espousing emotionally laden, polarizing terms that force either identification or non-identification. Identification represents the myths of the f-word and counter identification represents feminists completely rejecting the mainstream views of feminism. By flying under the radar, one can alter minds and break down norms without showing allegiance. As a result, underground feminism must practice disidentification in order to disrupt norms in meso and macro communities unaccepting of feminist rhetoric.

In order for feminists to work with communities that reject political rhetoric and terminology, women’s rights activists must disidentify with the label. In doing so, feminist activism can “work on and against” systems of oppression by getting an initial foot in the door (11). In using the theoretical tenets, instead of the language of feminism, authors can practice and spread the ideology unnoticed by individuals and communities that would write them off at the first mention of the f-word. Underground feminism, influenced by the theories of Bunch, NietoGomez, and Oz, mirrors the underlying methodology of soft consciousness-raising novels. In the following pages, I outline how by un-aligning with separatist language the three novels, each text accounting for a chapter in my thesis, enable a self-evaluation in female audiences that facilitates larger macro-level change.

Why Soft Consciousness-Raising Novels?

Consciousness raising has been a controversial practice since its inception at the start of the second-wave feminist movement. Anita Shreve discusses the divisive history of the consciousness-raising groups in her text *Women Together, Women Alone*. Shreve describes how views on these groups consistently separated into “two factions,” feminists who defended the practice as effective and those who felt the process was minimally effective if at all:

The first formal introduction of CR into the Women’s Movement appears to have taken place... for the first national women’s liberation conference... At this meeting in Chicago, a paper entitled “A Program for Feminist Consciousness Raising” was presented. Already the New York Radical Women had found themselves the target of ridicule by other female members of the radical left for using CR in their meetings: Their sessions were called “hen parties” and were derided as being “trivial” and “non-political.” (10)

The division occurred not only among individual scholars but also in the organizations themselves. For example, Shreve describes how some members of NOW routinely distributed pamphlets on how to start conscious-raising groups while others argued that resources be allocated to more useful endeavors. These discussion groups confronted continual accusations that they served as politically weak therapy sessions that provided personal release of frustration without a clear end in feminist activism. However, critiques have overlooked how the personal stories facilitate political activism grounded in individual reality. In recognizing their own experience with oppression and “seeing the common threads that united all the women in the room, women would then begin to have some awareness” that often led to communities of

women creating local coalitions meant to enact community- and national-level changes (12). Despite its divisive history, conscious raising filtered into various aspects of feminist activism, including women's writing.

Although we tend to think of these novels as being born from the consciousness-raising groups discussed by Shreve, in fact, we can see consciousness-raising novels that exhibit basic structural elements at least as far back as the New Woman fiction of the eighteen nineties. Lisa Hogeland, in *Feminism and Its Fictions: The Consciousness-Raising Novel and the Women's Liberation Movement*, explains the consciousness-raising novel as a genre capable of reproduction beyond merely one wave of feminism. The plot often progresses based on the protagonist "feeling somehow at odds with others' expectations of her, into confrontations with others and with institutions" (23). According to the Hogeland, the process leads to the protagonist developing a fresh understanding of women's sociopolitical place in society. The protagonist frequently recognizes her own secondary position in society through exposure to the inequities resulting from male privilege. The general basic structure enables the study of early and contemporary literature that follows the same tenets. As a result, while the term came about with the second wave of feminism, the definition itself serves a larger area of study.

Hogeland distinguishes between two types of consciousness-raising novels' soft and hard. According to the author, the "soft" novels focus primarily on personal experiences in relation to marriage or motherhood. The "hard" novels are distinguished by their political rhetoric and direct discussion of the women's liberation movement. The distinction between hard and soft occurs based on political rhetoric, leaving scholars to label novels like Dorothy Bryant's "mild" and limited in their ability to enact political reform. Soft consciousness-raising novels,

fundamentally founded on individually gendered experiences, do not call for radical collective action, one of the main critiques Shreve recounts about the groups. Limiting the use of feminist language, the soft novels rely on rational private change resulting from “when the contradictions in their [women’s] lives become too extreme” (40). In placing central importance on personal change and not social change in the novels, as Hogeland argues, the soft consciousness-raising novels, like the “softer” groups, help recruit feminists through self-evaluation but stop there. However, Hogeland overlooks how the participants of the consciousness-raising groups replicate in readers, thus encouraging a social revolution founded in the conversion process that gets women closer to becoming feminists.

In *Feminism is for Everybody*, bell hooks states “Feminists are made, not born” (7), arguing for consciousness-raising discussion groups as the site of women “converting” to feminism. According to hooks, Women often met privately in the home, rarely divulging even their last names to maintain confidentiality. In keeping the meetings confidential, women felt comfortable sharing their views and experiences without the fear of repercussion. By unleashing their aggression through storytelling, sharing their experiences of sexist oppression, women met their own internalized sexist views nose-to-nose. According to hooks, confronting chauvinism at the micro and meso level changed internalized sexist attitudes enabling a pledge to feminist politics for survival (8). Conscious-raising novels reproduce the private atmosphere of the consciousness-raising groups, while seeping into the public sphere through wider readership.¹⁰ Just as the women in the discussion groups met in private to escape the judgment of family and friends, women readers privately read a novel and think about these larger issues undetected.

¹⁰ Each text I have chosen to discuss in my thesis experienced relatively wide readership upon publication; for example, Fielding’s novel became a bestseller and was translated into multiple languages.

However, the novels are not limited to one home. Various women interact with these stories privately in diverse spaces, possibly gaining interest in social activism when the text asks readers to question patriarchal oppression at its various levels. The consciousness-raising novel becomes the same site of feminist conversion, because the reader experiences the oppression of women in a literary space that substitutes for the physical groups. The female voice in literature replicates the voice of the women in the consciousness-raising groups, exposing the oppression of some women to inspire others to make macro level changes based on micro level stories. In pushing these novels into a secondary status, critics are underestimating the value of systematic changes born from micro-level understanding. Through inclusive personal narratives, the soft consciousness-raising novel facilitates radical change by reaching women who might otherwise not be involved in feminism.

As sites of feminist conversion, the soft consciousness-raising novels do what Seely and Valenti's "how to" texts do not: involve female readers in women centered issues without the "how dare you not be a feminist" guilt implicit in Seely and Valenti's texts. The novels also often reflect the same conflicted thoughts of the unwilling would-be feminist, such as Bridget Jones's clash with the feminist ideal in Fielding's chick lit novel. Feminist organizations and theorists often attribute the inability to reach women outside of the women's rights movement to the negative connotations attached to the feminist label. As a result, in limiting the use of feminist language and echoing the feelings of discomfort, the authors of the soft consciousness-raising novels enable the initial spread of feminist theory to a larger female audience. In restricting the use of feminist political language, soft consciousness-raising novels ask women to confront sexist systems of oppression without driving women away.

In the following three chapters, I will explore how soft consciousness-raising novels from each wave of feminism insist on the recognition of women's experiences. In the first chapter, I will explore Sarah Grand's New Woman novel *The Heavenly Twins* as a representation of the first wave. Each female character faces different struggles within her marriage and social expectations of femininity. Following the standard of the consciousness-raising novel, the text exposes the outcome of a sexist society through the heroines' clashes with popular constructed ideology and social institutions. The chapter will focus on girlhood education as a path to women's liberation and stories as the fruit of female instruction enabling the consciousness-raising process. Through soft consciousness raising via independent education and authorship, Grand's heroines Evadne and Angelica are able to confront and question the secondary status of women. I will explore how the author's use of girlhood education (Evadne's writing and Angelica's progressive stories) enables the consciousness raising of characters. While Grand illustrates that education is not enough in a male dominated society, the novel asks readers to question the inequities within social institutions in order to develop the foundations needed for future generations of girls.

The second-wave consciousness-raising novel I explore in my second chapter is Dorothy Bryant's *Ella Price's Journal*. A fictional narrative written in journal form, the novel details the experience of a middle-aged homemaker who returns to college. Bryant's novel covers a variety of topics including motherhood, marriage, class, abortion, sexuality, dependence, contraception, and education. The journal format allows the reader to follow Ella's consciousness-raising process and education. By experiencing Ella's process first hand through a journal, the reader becomes invested in the process and asks the same questions the protagonist asks. Ella's

transformation through questioning oppressive male voice encourages female readers to develop their own opinions instead of spouting mere recreations of patriarchal thought. I will consider how Bryant employs underground feminism, by showing readers how Ella undergoes the process of acknowledging her own capacity for critical thought, without deterring mainstream readers by using political rhetoric.

The final text I will explore in my third chapter, representing the third-wave of feminism, is Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Considered the text that started the "chick lit" genre, *Bridget Jones's Diary* is consistently underestimated by scholars as weak and anti-feminist. However, Fielding's novel, published on the cusp of the third-wave feminism has more connections to the movement than scholars acknowledge. I will discuss how Fielding develops an interesting heroine who lies outside of the feminist ideal (an ideal born from second wave politics that extended into postfeminism) instead of constructing women as the defenseless victims of pop culture. By disidentifying the heroine from mainstream feminist theory and rhetoric, Fielding reaches the "I am not a feminist, but" generation and enables a complex discussion of women's issues that may otherwise not exist. Through the discussion of pop culture education and conflicting social expectations, I analyze how Fielding presents a realistic heroine who enables readers to self-evaluate the conflict of reaching socially constructing ideals and challenges oppressive patriarchal institutions.

Each of the texts I am studying— Grand's *The Heavenly Twins*, Bryant's *Ella Price's Journal*, and Fielding's *Bridget Jones Diary*—radically challenges expectations of femininity by working undercover. Through the journal writing, letters, and self-education present in the novels, readers follow the consciousness-raising process of each heroine while simultaneously

participating in the same process. All of the women in the novels challenge systems of oppression without getting the “happy endings” Bryant’s heroine craves. In showing how women are consistently struggling for equality, these texts deny the possibility of post feminism and ask for action from their audiences. By exploring a herstory of soft consciousness-raising novels with underground feminism in my thesis, I hope to challenge the academic definitions of feminist writing and authorship encouraging feminist activists to dare and work with audiences unaccepting of our politics. My thesis will conclude with a discussion of how the principles of underground feminism, visible in the three separate novels, are adaptable to activism using journal writing and conscious raising discussion within YWLP as the prime example.

CHAPTER ONE: GIRLS TELLING STORIES: FEMALE EDUCATION AND AUTHORSHIP IN SARAH GRAND'S *THE HEAVENLY TWINS*

You think I should act as women have been always advised to act in such cases, that I should sacrifice myself to save that one man's soul. I take a different view of it. I see that the world is not a bit the better for centuries of self-sacrifice on the woman's part and therefore I think it is time we tried a more effectual plan. And I propose now to sacrifice the man instead of the woman.

Sarah Grand

Women's rights authors of the late nineteenth century, the New Women, were an influential literary force. However, the New Woman often receives little recognition in mainstream feminist discourse. As an instructor of Introduction to Women's Studies, I had to create my own lesson about New Women authors upon realizing that there was no mention of them in either of the course texts. Often focusing primarily on the ratification of the nineteenth amendment, students miss a transatlantic lineage of women activists that stretches beyond the American suffrage movement and Alice Paul. The suffrage movement itself initiated the New Woman's devaluation early on. The division between the two was intentional, as Lisa Tickner points to in her text *The Spectacle of Women*. Suffragists chose to disassociate themselves from the New Woman authors because these women "drew on feminist debates about marriage, divorce, sexuality and bachelor motherhood which suffragists, for strategic reasons, had largely succeeded in pushing to the margins of their campaign" (183). Since divorce and sexuality were taboo subjects confined to the private sphere, the suffragists disassociated themselves from the risky New Woman conversations about sexuality and shifting borders of domesticity, hoping to

avoid the view of the modern woman as licentious, which would have undermined their own groundbreaking work.

Sally Ledger addresses the view of the New Woman as hypersexed in the article “The New Woman and the crisis of Victorianism.” Although the “New Woman as a category was by no means stable” or strictly defined by one standard political view, this did not stop critics from clumping the group together (23). Ledger describes how the New Women were classified as “unsexed,” deeming the women of the movement as masculine and the men as effeminate (26). While the term unsexed suggests the absence of sexuality, because the New Woman was seen to have unfeminine attributes, “many of the fictional writers of the time had no qualms about constructing the New Woman as a voracious sexual subject” (30). In questioning the gendered roles of women and men, the New Woman was a “threat to classic Victorian definitions of femininity” and as result endangered the preservation of “British masculinity” (22). Sarah Grand, the author believed to have coined the term New Woman, was no stranger to the criticism discussed by Ledger. Ouida, an anti-feminist critic of the New Woman, went to great lengths to demonize Grand’s work.

Ouida’s article “The New Woman” published in 1894 with the *North American Review* condemns Grand’s writings and the New Woman in general. The author makes several arguments about Grand’s work, including that her writing style is weak, her arguments lack a clear solution, her focus on equal education is counterproductive, and her New Woman ideas act as catalysts in ending female innocence. Ouida first argues that while Grand often presents the problems in society, she rarely provides a solution in her various writings:

We [the reading public] are further told that “thinking and thinking” in her [Grand] solitary sphinx-like contemplation she solved the problem and prescribed the remedy (the remedy to the problem!); but what this remedy was we are not told, nor did the New Woman apparently disclose it to the rest of womankind, since she still hears them in “sudden and violent upheaval” like “children unable to articulate whimpering for they know not what.” (154)

Ouida’s ill supported anti-feminist arguments illustrate the political climate Grand worked in, showing the lengths critics went to demonize the New Woman. For example, Grand does offer solutions, but they are feminist in nature. One of Grand’s answers to women’s secondary status is education, which she presents in her both articles and novels. In her article “The New Aspect of the Woman Question,” Grand argues that “Man deprived us [women] of all proper education and then jeered us because we had no knowledge” (143). She argues that patriarchal institutions that impose intellectual weakness on women by denying them access to public education have maintained women’s lower position in society. How can men expect intellectual equality if women are denied equal access to instruction? While female education may seem logical to contemporary audiences, especially considering Grand’s arguments, Ouida’s take on women’s education illustrates the progressive nature of Grand’s views. For example, on the topic of education, Ouida suggests that giving women a collegiate education would “only be hardening and deforming” (157). Ouida attempts to place all women in the place of Eve. She argues that the education of women would only lead to a loss of modesty and corruption of society, a view that, as Ledger notes, was pervasive in connection to the New Woman movement. The New Woman’s desire for higher education leads to the supposed corruption of society, just as Eve’s

consumption of the apple from the tree of knowledge led to the demise of man. Ouida also contradicts herself by arguing that women do not need an education, because brilliant women have existed without it. The author demonizes female education by attempting to instill fear in the reader. If women are educated, then they will lose the innocence and goodness that makes women capable of mothering future citizens. The “promiscuous contact and incessant publicity of travel, which may not hurt the man,” does hurt the woman because she is the keeper of the private sphere (159). Men are not “hurt” by higher education because their roles in the public sphere make the knowledge gained appropriate. As a result, Ouida’s arguments against Grand are founded on gendered constructions and produced out of fear in a changing social climate, specifically fear of women’s rising status. It is this fear of change that Grand deals with when constructing her covert narratives, specifically her novel *The Heavenly Twins*.

Grand’s 1893 New Woman novel *The Heavenly Twins* offers a number of the groundbreaking views, including, as Ledger notes, the belief “that men should emulate the moral superiority of women” (32). Radically challenging the inequality women faced in the nineteenth century marriage economy, the novel covers topics such as inequity in marriage, the education of young girls and women, venereal disease, the moral character of men, femininity, and motherhood. While considering these various elements, this chapter will focus on girlhood education as a pathway to liberation and narrative as the product of education that facilitates the consciousness-raising process. Through soft consciousness raising via independent education and authorship, Grand’s heroines Evadne and Angelica function to confront and question the secondary status of women. Despite being an innovative novel for its time, scholars still label the text as weak.

Whereas early critics often disagree with Grand's ideas, they often do so because of her radical beliefs. Modern scholars on the one hand often suggest that Grand's work is not radical enough. Ann-Barbara Graff in her article "Annesley Kenealy and Sarah Grand: Biopower and the Limits of the New Woman" is one of the many current articles that asserts Grand's novel as imperialist and weak in its feminist activism. Graff compares Grand's novel to an "anti" New Woman novel by Annesley Keanealy, arguing that their similarities expose the weaknesses in Grand's novel. Graff suggests that both of the possible feminist heroines, Evadne and Angelica, are too dependent on the male figures in the text. She further argues that this "novel about doing something to redress women's social condition... imagines a number of possibilities but authorizes few" (289). According to Graff, as long as these authors are working within the confines of gendered femininity, feminism is off the table. Yet, what Graff overlooks is that the heroine's dependence on men is part of what Grand challenges in the unresolved endings. The lack of proper completion, or the missing happy endings, functions as an indictment on society and not a perpetuation of those constructs. Grand is not suggesting that dependence on men is the solution, but that this reliance is part of the problem. Dependence enables a system of control in which the economic provider, such as Dr. Galbraith with Evadne, can control the needs and wants of the dependent. When this system of control takes center stage, the equal marriage rights Grand strives for are unattainable. Grand illustrates that female education is not enough to gain equality, but that larger systemic changes within the structure of marriage are necessary as well.

Similar to Graff's argument, Iveta Jusova's posits that Grand's feminism is flimsy in her article "Imperialist Feminism: Colonial Issues in Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* and *The Beth Book*." Jusova suggests that Grand ignores the female other by creating a "feminist

narrative which was centered around the ideal of a white English upper-class woman” in opposition to women of other classes and races (299). While it may be true that Grand is ignoring or overlooking the experiences of lower class women and women of color, this is not uncommon in the history of feminism. Although the denial of the raced and classed female other is highly problematic, it does not make the novel any less political or even feminist. Both the suffrage movement and the second wave of feminism faced criticism for ignoring the concerns of all women, yet the third wave has built and improved on these waves with discussions of intersectionality and multicultural theories. Feminism as a movement requires continued study and improvement, each wave builds off the previous wave by taking the good and making whatever changes necessary. Grand’s text is merely part of this history of feminism. As a result, while problematic in some areas, the novel nonetheless offers the reader groundbreaking discussions about the oppression of women in the Victorian era.

While Jusova argues that the downfall of the text lies in Grand’s ignoring various other groups of women, other scholars have taken it further by arguing that Grand’s novel focuses entirely on individual experience. Ann Heilmann comments on the “failings” of *The Heavenly Twins* in her book *New Woman Strategies*. She asserts that while the novel has powerful moments that challenge gender norms, overall the novel is too soft in its feminism and that its popularity is likely due to “the fact that it reassured female and male, feminist and conventional readers alike, by providing a vehicle for the expression of female discontent, while at the same time limiting the extent to which women could transform patriarchal institutions” (79). Heilmann suggests that while the text calls for “full-scale socio-political transformation underpinned by a sense of women’s collective purpose,” that the power of that call to arms is undercut by male

control of the narrative (46). She asserts that the lack of a feminist resolution in the text results from the heroines' own attempts to change only individually and passively give into "the law of the fathers" (79). However, in privileging Angelica's narrative as the most powerful because of the cross-dressing masquerade, Heilmann underestimates how the failures of all the heroines illustrate how the privileging of male interest is part of the social structure. The heroines have no hope for success as long as their triumph is undercut by patriarchal privilege. Even the male feminist of the text, Diavolo, does not get his happy ending, because the macro level structures are not in place to support feminist success. It is not that a focus on the individual leads to their failures, but that in resisting patriarchal forces they will face trials for the next generation. Angelica's "better" ending is merely just the next step. If she had gotten the perfect ending, it would suggest that activism is no longer necessary. Reaching an egalitarian "utopia" is a slow and painful process that will consistently be met with small successes along the way, but failures as well. Therefore, it is not that Evadne and Angelica just give in, but that they are part of the same slow process for future generations that the reader undergoes as well.

It is in the discussion of this painful reading that Anna Maria Jones both challenges and extends on Heilmann's argument in her article "'A Track of the Water's Edge': Learning to Suffer in Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins*." Jones argues that the weaknesses often claimed by scholars in connection to Grand's novel are necessary in order "to fashion *new* women (and men)" by facilitating "a painful labor of self-fashioning" while reading the novel (217). She suggests that in focusing on the lack of a rewarding ending for the heroines, the critics "elide the politics of reading" (219). The feminist work flourishes subtly in the enactment of the consciousness-raising process through the painful reading, not in each individual narrative.

According to the author, the pain of reading and ills experienced by the heroines are necessary to illustrate the need for continued work. It is not this generation, but future ones that will benefit from the struggles, thus making the “refusal to offer rewards” to the heroines “its own reward” in the service the girls and women who come after (222). While Heilmann discusses the novel’s dedication to collective action, she falls into the same trap of which she is critical of by focusing on the failure of the individual. It is by focusing on individual feminist reward that she overshadows the political process of reading, because the painful reading is in fact a call for collective action for the benefit of future generations. It is not the lack of resolution that makes the novel weak, but is in fact what makes it powerful.

It is these subtleties in feminist novels that authors often miss, leading often times to the categorizing of the texts as politically weak versus powerful. A. R. Cunningham discusses the apathy towards the early authors who questioned “the traditional concepts of the feminine role” in his article “The ‘New Woman Fiction’ of the 1890’s” (178). He argues that these early authors are often underestimated as apolitical. Questioning the social roles of women, the New Woman novel rarely has the heroine participate in political campaigns. According to Cunningham, New Woman authors argued that women first “had to be liberated from the constricting male ideal of femininity before they could properly exploit political emancipation” (179). However, despite the apparent non-political nature of the New Woman novel, delineations between fundamental and non-radical texts still exist. Cunningham marks out two types of New Woman novels, much as Hogeland notes the different types of consciousness-raising novels. According to Cunningham, Grand’s novel fits the archetype of the “less radical” purity school (179). The primary focus of these novels is the rights of women in marriage. The analysis of marriage often

enacted by the heroine rarely questions heteronormativity or the legal establishment of marriage. Instead of denying the institution of marriage, the novels often call for egalitarian relationships between wives and husbands. Grand's novel provides no exception to Cunningham's "less radical" criteria in the lives and marriages of her three heroines Evadne, Edith, and Angelica. Each female character faces different struggles within their marriage and social expectations of femininity. The text, following the standard of the consciousness-raising novel, exposes the outcome of a sexist society through the heroines' clash with community ideology and social institutions. It is in the exposure of sexist ideology and the subsequent call for collective action that Grand challenges patriarchal institutions, insisting that action must be taken to improve the quality of life for women.

Evadne's Common Place Book: Consciousness Raising in Girlhood Education and Writing

According to Teresa Mangum's *Married, Middlebrow, and Militant: Sarah Grand and the New Woman Novel*, Grand popularized the term New Woman while "advocating rational dress, lobbying for suffrage groups, and lecturing on women's issues" (2). *The Heavenly Twins* was a best seller, reaching a wide readership. Grand fashions a private reading space of the consciousness-raising novel while successfully exposing the oppression of women through wide readership. Not only does the novel itself function to produce a consciousness-raising process in the female reader confronting the chauvinism of Victorian culture, but two of her three heroines, Evadne and Angelica, undergo their own process of awareness through their writing and stories. The heroines alongside the readers question internalized oppressive attitudes, a process of self-evaluation that enables a complex discussion of women's rights.

The reader first meets Evadne as a curious young girl eager to learn and develop her thoughts. Evadne's coming of age centers around her education, especially in the medical sciences, and mathematics. After hearing her father claim that superiority in male intellect relates directly to their mastery of mathematics, Evadne begins to instruct herself in these areas by reading any books available to her. Constantly challenging her father's assumptions on women's "inferior" mental competence, Evadne's education serves to prove women's "exceptional" possibilities (12). To document the progression of her thoughts during her education, Evadne keeps a "Commonplace Book" (13). Not a task of embellished language "to shine in the composition of words," but a means of interacting with various issues, writing enables Evadne's developing of bold views that remain hidden from her family and peers (13). Her self-education and analysis of larger social structures via authorship facilitate a process of consciousness raising. Initially unable to enter circles of intellectual discussion, Evadne depends on her readings, lectures from her father, and observations to inform her examination of the social structures that maintain her and other women's secondary status. Evadne particularly unpacks her mother's relationship with her father, noting in one entry that although her mother often disagrees with her father's views, she nonetheless "always gives in" (15). Grand's narrative suggests that the path to women's liberation must start with girlhood. Without an education that affords her the ability to document and analyze society, Evadne would be unable to undergo a consciousness-raising process. Her girlhood education and writing provide the ability to recognize her father's unfair behavior to her mother. Evadne as a young girl points to the importance of early and continued education, positing that if women in fact have inferior intellects that "weakness" originates from the inaccessibility to "the educational advantages upon

which the men prided themselves” (16). As a result, Grand illustrates how the instruction afforded to the women in their coming of age provides the initial catalyst that shapes their lives. Evadne represents a model of limited girlhood academic instruction, an education that enables her to improve temporarily her own life, unlike Edith.

Edith, a Petrarchan image of innocence, follows dutifully the expectations for her gender. Evadne and Edith’s girlhood education differ greatly, the text pointing to Edith’s lack of worldly education more than once. While Evadne and Edith’s personalities vary significantly, their experiences present alternative mirror images to the same situation. Evadne comments on this “strange coincidence,” suggesting that it resulted from poor “training” and education. Both women find themselves engaged to “rather wild” unscrupulous men (55). Evadne, upon receiving notice of her husband’s indiscretions, demands (unsuccessfully) an immediate end to their marriage in a letter to her parents: “Since I left you I have been fully informed of circumstances in Major Colquhoun’s past career which make it impossible for me to live with him as his wife” (84).

Evadne never wavers in her decision to refrain from sexually consummating the marriage, setting rules for her relationship with Colquhoun. The social institutions that force her to live with Colquhoun may still bind Evadne, but she finds the way to refuse sexual objectification. Edith undergoes the same problem with her husband Sir Mosley Menteith. Evadne warns Edith of his indiscretions, which she has learned about from her own husband, but convinced of their love Edith still marries him. Edith’s naivety prevents her from taking Evadne’s advice and ends in her contraction of syphilis from her new husband, leading to her death and disfigurement. While both women face the same problem, it is Evadne’s self-education

and analysis of larger social structures while writing that changes her circumstance. Edith, having been “robbed of all means of self-defense by the teaching which insisted that her only duty as a wife consisted in silent submission to her husband’s will,” is unable to see her husband’s faults (280). Evadne’s writing, a product of the instruction Edith lacked, becomes her own process of consciousness raising that enables her analysis of society despite the social institutions that would have denied her an education. Only when Evadne slowly gives up her journal does she fail to explore fully the character of those around her, specifically Colquhoun.

Evadne recognizes her writing as the place where her critical thought flourishes, but only after she has stopped writing before her marriage. She abandons the book as her family prepares her for marriage. In trusting her future husband, Evadne no longer needs the commonplace book because her husband will now be the “master” of her thoughts. She picks up writing again immediately once she awakens to Colquhoun’s real character. Informed by another woman the day of her marriage of his unscrupulous past, Evadne is amazed to realize that her judgment has failed. Realizing that she needs to continue to have a discursive space in order to analyze her surroundings, Evadne returns to the commonplace book:

She ended her notes that night with a maxim which probably contained all the wisdom she had been able to extract from her late experiences: -“Just do a thing, and don’t talk about it,” she wrote, expressing herself colloquially. “This is the great secret of success in all enterprises. Talk means discussion, discussion means irritation, irritation means opposition; and opposition means hindrance always, whether you are right or wrong.” (200)

Evadne's statement suggests that discussion leads to debilitating arguments that in the end will do more harm than good. Writing then supplements the discursive space when dialogue is denied or insufficient. When Evadne attempts to annul her marriage after being informed about her husband's past, she believes that her parents will understand why she can no longer stay with the Colquhoun. However, her parents silence her and continually ignore her arguments. Feeling pressured by her mother, Evadne agrees to keep up appearances by living with her husband without consummating the marriage. Denied a discursive space where her views are taken seriously, Evadne makes a deal with her husband and instead returns to writing.

Beyond creating a personal intellectual environment to reflect on her surroundings, writing facilitates Evadne's ability to act directly in the public sphere. She becomes active and vocal about women's rights, presumably on her way to becoming part of the "seventh wave" (98). Evadne's writing in the private sphere becomes the necessary domestic space to extend her action into the public. Control of the domestic sphere makes possible the attainment of power in the public sphere, and mastery of the private writing space results in public action, blurring the lines between the two spaces. Evadne's gradual emergence into the public space is seen in her attempts to help other women and become an active member of the women's rights movement, but unfortunately the reader never sees the completion of this progression. The success of this process is dependent on a balance of both public and private, which does not occur for Evadne. As Beth Sutton-Ramspeck points out in "Making a Home: Literary House Makers," while Grand advocates the need for women to have private spaces, too much privacy can be harmful: "But Grand, who considered celibacy unnatural and unhealthy, shows that Evadne ultimately suffers from her extreme bodily privacy" (111). Forced to give up the ability to "just do" because

of her later promise to Colquhoun not to become involved in politics, Evadne shifts the balance to an excessive amount of private thought. The excessive privacy, as Ramspeck points out, leads to Evadne's illness when her conscious raising is divorced from action. The confines of private thought without action become too much, an excess of thought causing fatigue that eventually can only be cured with flowers and pleasant things to gaze at, as the doctor describes: "We rolled through the wintry landscape rapidly... grazing cattle, nibbling sheep; - but she did not see these things at first, any of them; she was thinking. Then she began to see... [and] well-being generally, took gradual possession of her" (589-590). It is not until the final book that the reader sees the devastating ramifications of Evadne's promise to Colquhoun. Evadne herself ultimately recognizes the ills of reflection without action, stating that "thought naturally resolves itself into action, but...I had made it impossible for myself to do anything" (626). As a result, Grand demonstrates how thought must be followed by praxis, illustrating that the consciousness-raising progression functions as an intended path to activism not merely a means of personal reflection.

A Product of Girlhood Education: Angelica Authors an Alternative Narrative

Just as the reader is cognizant of Evadne's coming of age, so does the reader experience Angelica's development. Because of her brother Diavolo's non-standard education, Angelica essentially receives the education equivalent to her brother's and surrounds herself with men like her tutor and Mr. Kilroy of Ilverthorpe for intellectual discussion. While Evadne's education surpassed Edith's, it is nonetheless limited by her father's belief in the inadequacy of the female mind. Angelica, then, represents the next level of education, a privilege that affords her to take some control over her life in a way that neither Evadne nor Edith can. Not only does Angelica enjoy the benefits of a formal education, but her egalitarian relationship with her brother teaches

her how to create an alternative narrative. Angelica and Diavolo often attempt to change the norms with their self-created scenarios, including childhood battles that would allow Angelica to own the family property otherwise belonging to Diavolo as a male heir. The twins' antics often function as stories that deviate from gendered societal norms. As Heilmann argues in *New Woman Strategies* Grand's manipulation of gender norms presents "gender as an essentially fluid category, a performative act which, with its imaginative interplay of impersonation and identification processes, resembles the work of the actor and writer" (45). One of the most compelling of the twins "performative acts" is the first moment of cross-dressing. During Evadne's wedding, Angelica and her brother trade places. Angelica dresses in boy's clothing with the "pleasure of acting as page to Evadne" while Diavolo dresses like his sister (61). Each sibling takes on the role and mannerisms of the other and use cross-dressing as a method of play to test the boundaries of the traditional gendered narrative.

Angelica's dreams also serve as stories to help her critically consider supposed "unwomanlyness" (296). While staying in Edith's home during her illness, Angelica dreams about her position as a woman in society. The dream addresses various issues including equal pay, for instance when her dream lover accuses her of knowing and wanting too much: "You'll want to get paid next just as well as we are, and that is unwomanly" (294). Angelica's dream presents what may be her possible destructive narrative. Parts of dream suggest that if she does not make changes in her life, Angelica may experience the same fate as Edith and bear the "heavy" burden of the private sphere (295). Like both Edith and Evadne, Angelica's dream shows how she may run the risk of falling in love without critically considering the relationship:

But try as she would she could not attain her object, and finally she became so exhausted by the struggle that she was obliged to desist. The moment she did so, however, the other sphere turned on its own accord, and rolled up to her. “Dear me!” said Angelica. “How easily things are done when the right time comes!” The semblance now took shape, and kissed her. “How nice!” thought Angelica, returning the kiss. “This is love. Love is life. I am his. He is mine. Most of all, he is mine!” (294)

After Angelica falls into the lull of love in her dream, the great romantic men of myth turn on her and accuse her of not being a “true woman” (294). Stories function as a vehicle for self-evaluation, reminding Angelica of how “easy” it would be for her to make the same mistakes and love blindly. Not only does Angelica’s dream expose the inequities women face, but her dream enables a consciousness-raising process. The dream produces a self-awareness in Angelica that acts as the catalyst for her later decisions, such as setting the terms for her marriage. It is her fear of coming to the same fate as Edith that drives Angelica to choose her husband instead of being chosen. In questioning social conditions via dreams, Angelica can improve her position in life even if she must still fit social conventions.

Angelica’s story creating ability developed during girlhood extends into womanhood once married. Forced to marry due to social conventions pushed by her father, she asks Kilroy (a family friend) to marry her and give her the freedom she craves while Diavolo joins the military. Angelica, like Evadne, recognizes her inferior social status due to the privilege of higher education as a young girl. In her confrontation with social institutions alongside her brother, she experiences what W.E.B. Du Bois terms “double consciousness” (567). Du Bois defines double consciousness as the tear between the individually–defined self and the socially–constructed self,

resulting in two separate selves. Du Bois argues that marginalized people forced to see themselves through the eyes of their colonizers create a social double vision that allows “no true self-consciousness” (568). Knowing that she can prove “her abilities are superior” to her brother’s skills, Angelica becomes frustrated at the lack of opportunities for herself and other women (319). The opportunities afforded to her brother force Angelica to recognize her secondary position in society despite being equal in skill to Diavolo: “But everything is easy enough for a man of intellect...It is our powers that are wasted” (319).

Angelica must constantly fight the constructions of femininity that perpetuate her secondary status. However, until her teenage years she fights the expectations attached to femininity with the help of her twin brother Diavolo. Able to gain access to education through an egalitarian relationship with Diavolo, Angelica flourishes surpassing her brother in both skill and intellect. Her early relationship with her brother also affords her the opportunity to triumph over men, Diavolo as the closest representation of the male gender in her life. Angelica succeeds in these early confrontations because of Diavolo’s effeminized weakness that keeps him in the home, affording her the confidence and power gained in “winning” even though he does not fit the “typical” masculine mold. However, as she grows older she must face her own difference, wearing the long dresses that both siblings understand as a marker of distinction between the two when “Angelica, the tom-boy, was to all appearance no more” (274). Despite her ability and intellect, Angelica cannot escape the patriarchal institutions that define her difference. As a result, she attempts to alter the physical markers of her gender as a path to equality. Within her marriage Angelica creates an alternative narrative semi-replicating the wedding gender-bend

with her brother. While not physically writing her narrative the way Evadne does in the commonplace book, she nonetheless attempts to construct an egalitarian account.

In the chapter “The Tenor and the Boy- An Interlude,” the reader is led to believe Diavolo, who is actually Angelica disguised as her brother again, becomes friends with the Tenor, an opera singer recently residing in the area. The reader follows their relationship, being fooled just as the Tenor is being fooled. Angelica (as the Boy) and the tenor meet only at night, in which they eat, talk, and play music. In one outdoor outing, Angelica falls out of a boat into the water. The Tenor saves her and takes her to his home, and while in the light realizes that “the boy” is actually a woman. Once Angelica awakens and tells him how she constructed her deception, the Tenor is devastated that she is married. Distraught over the “inappropriate” relationship they have had for the last couple of weeks, the Tenor takes Angelica home. After Angelica’s masquerade ends in the river, the reader realizes that Angelica has been informing her husband of the relationship the entire time. When Kilroy comes home after Angelica’s unmasking, he asks his wife how her story has been going. The story is in fact an account of her relationship with the Tenor in which she has constructed herself as the main character. Angelica performs as an actress in her own play as she did on Evadne’s wedding day. Angelica creates male clothing and procures a male wig, literally producing a costume for her performance as Diavolo.

Angelica’s costumed production is an attempt to create a narrative that allows her to have an egalitarian non-romantic relationship with a man. Kilroy more than once, believing that Angelica’s narrative is fictional, attempts to convince Angelica to write the story down on paper, but she refuses to write it down with such an “unfinished” ending. As Angelica recounts her last

meeting with the tenor to Kilroy, he encourages her to end what he believes is a fictional bond between her and the tenor in marriage. When helping Angelica create an ending for the “story,” he consistently returns to the marriage plot in each possible ending scenario, insisting that in the “natural course of events” Angelica would have married the Tenor (481). However, Angelica attempts to explain that her marriage has little bearing on the issue because the relationship was never romantic:

“I suppose you mean that you do not want it to be all over between you?”

“*Between the Tenor and the Boy*,” she corrected. “The whole charm of the acquaintance, don’t you see, for me, consisted in that footing— I don’t know how to express it, but perhaps you can grasp what I mean.”

Mr. Kilroy reflected. “I am afraid,” he said at last, “that footing cannot be resumed. The influences of sex, once the difference is recognized, are involuntary.” (480)

What appeals to Angelica about her relationship with the Tenor is not the gendered convention of marriage or the expectation of love, but the ability to have an egalitarian relationship with a man. In refusing a suggestion of romance, Angelica insists that her alternative narrative be a story about the possibility of equality, adamant in her conversation with Kilroy that there must be a way for her to maintain her relationship with the Tenor now that he knows her gender. Angelica’s continual refusal to write her narrative without the proper egalitarian ending shows how the heroine believes that a “happy ending” cannot come without equality. Mangum, in a chapter on the politics of middle-class marriage, argues that the New Woman writer does not

“reject or escape that marriage plot” but instead reinvents the daily conventions of marriage so as to reconstruct the gendered meaning of marriage (16). However, if that is that case, why does Grand’s cross-dressing narrative not end in marriage? If Grand supports the marriage plot as it stands indefinitely, why would she create a platonic heterosexual narrative that, according to her heroine, could never have ended in marriage?

Angelica does not receive the positive ending some scholars have suggested. As pointed out by Jones, while Angelica does take on an active role, her potential as the successful feminist heroine of the novel “is seriously undercut, however, by the closing lines of the section” (230). The ending remarks of this chapter show Angelica telling her husband to take on a more controlling presence in her life: “Don’t let me go again, Daddy, keep me close. I am— I am grateful for the blessing of a good man’s love” (551). Despite the problematic nature of this scene, Angelica’s marriage is still arguably the most functionally egalitarian of the novel’s unions. However, I would also argue that marriage to Kilroy itself prevents a successful conclusion when it was insufficient for her own alternative feminist life narrative. Angelica marries Kilroy not out of choice but because she is choosing the lesser of two evils. Instead of risking marriage with a man who would lead her to Edith’s fate, Angelica attempts to take control by choosing an older man whom she knows well and who will allow her some freedom. However, in the end Angelica is still conforming to a marriage narrative imposed by patriarchal rule. Despite Angelica’s attempts for an equal relationship with a man, the Tenor’s death resulting from Angelica’s unmasking echoes Kilroy’s assertion that the relationship between Angelica and the Tenor could never continue. The inability to end her narrative with an equal relationship between a man and women illustrates an essential point, that while Grand asserts

that education is essential to the well-being of women, equality cannot be had unless the patriarchal system itself changes. The education of women will only do so much as long as gender constructions are upheld and society continues to privilege the views of men over women.

Testing her narrative firsthand by physically living it, Angelica undergoes a consciousness-raising process that illustrates to her the limitations of her gender. Even after her identity has been exposed to the Tenor and she tells the story to Kilroy, it is only upon the Tenor's death that Angelica becomes convinced that she will be unable to have a platonic friendship with men. Angelica continues her education and becomes an activist for women's rights, but knows that immediate equality is currently an impossibility. Having once received a glimpse of equality in hiding her gender, she realizes that as long as the physical markers of gender influence the treatment of women by men there is little hope for complete equality. With the knowledge gained from her consciousness raising, Angelica attempts to be subversive from within the patriarchal system by influencing her husband's politics. She may not get the perfect ending, but her girlhood education alongside her consciousness-raising process enables her taking the necessary political steps for future generations of girls and women.

Man Takes Over: Male Narrative and the Indictment of Society

Dr. Galbraith, the male voice of the last book, narrates the rest of the story and signals the unavoidable overshadowing of female storytelling. As long as the heroines face gendered oppression they cannot continue to have complete control over their narratives. Evadne recognizes her lack of control even in her new "happier" marriage. After the death of the colonel and her remarriage to Dr. Galbraith, Evadne regains her interest in books. However, to prevent

what the doctor diagnoses as her symptoms of hysteria, he denies Evadne her freedom to read, controlling not only the narration of the rest of the story but also Evadne's continued education. Evadne questions him on "why women are kept in the dark" about the world, echoing her earlier feelings on Edith's lack of education (662). His response to her is evasive, treating her like a small child he must temporarily appease: "It is criminal to withhold knowledge from any woman who has the capacity to acquire it. But there is a time for everything, you know, my sweetheart" (662). Almost immediately after this scene, Evadne attempts to kill herself and her unborn "daughter," believing her daughter will experience Edith's same fate: "You would not see it as prophetic, as I do— in case of our death— nothing to save my daughter from Edith's fate — better both die at once" (665). Now censored and in a weakened state of mind, Evadne recognizes her inability to give her new child the girlhood education she would need for even minimal survival. Realizing that even Dr. Galbraith is capable of censoring female education, Evadne takes action to help what she believes is her daughter. With the knowledge produced from her consciousness-raising process, Evadne unsuccessfully attempts to destabilize the male narrative by ending Dr. Galbraith's "romantic" plot line of saving the distressed woman through marriage with a tragic death. She prefers to kill both herself and the fetus rather than allow a continual cycle of oppression. However, Dr. Galbraith takes control of the moment by changing her intended story and stopping Evadne from killing herself, again firmly controlling the narrative. As long as the doctor controls all aspects of the narrative space, Evadne has little chance to break down the idealized marriage plot.

The challenging of traditional marriage narrative present in the earlier sections also comes forth in the doctor's chapter. Just as Evadne's father attempts to force her into a

traditional marriage and Kilroy insists on the fictional marriage between Angelica and the Tenor, so does Dr. Galbraith impose a marriage narrative. After the death of her first husband, Evadne moves in with Lady Adeline and her husband who are willing to help support her. However, Dr. Galbraith insists that no one should support her financially yet, making it clear that he intends to marry her and support her financially. Dr. Galbraith does not allow for any narrative option other than marriage between him and Evadne. Dr. Galbraith also prevents the one possibility of an egalitarian marriage in thwarting Diavolo's intent to marry Evadne. Diavolo is the only male character who fully encourages and acts in favor of the equality between men and women. As Heilmann points out, it is Diavolo "who presents the feminist case" in conversations with other men, such as his grandfather (61).¹¹ Throughout the text, he often comments on the unfairness of his male privilege for his sister Angelica, even promising Angelica that he would always remember the fight for women's rights. Evadne cannot marry Diavolo in this male narrative, because Diavolo is the one who has promised to fight for the rights of women and the doctor as the dominating patriarchal male voice controls the narrative. The doctor informs Diavolo that marriage between him and Evadne was always an impossibility, despite the warm scenes between Daivolo and Evadne presented earlier in the text: "He looked like a young lover lying at the feet of his lady" (607). However, because the doctor's power, Diavolo believes him:

He looked hard at me with pained expression in his eyes. "Ah, I'm a fool," he said; "forgive me! I don't know what I'm saying. I'm mad with disappointment, and grief, and rage. Of course she loves you, I never had a chance. Yet the possibility of giving me one, had you known, occurred to you." (656)

¹¹ Heilmann specifically refers to a scene of the novel, in which Diavolo challenges the story of Adam and Eve with his grandfather. To his grandfather's anger, he ends the discussion by stating that "women come out a long chalk ahead of us [men]" (261).

As long as patriarchal institutions and voices are privileged in society, such as the doctor's voice, a feminist, even a male one like Diavolo's, has no chance of success. Unable to have the ideal relationship with Evadne, Diavolo rekindles his close relationship with his sister, becoming "inseparable" again (669). In losing hope of marrying Evadne, Diavolo returns to the only other egalitarian relationship with a woman available to him. The story, as told by the doctor, is left with an "unfinished" ending, much like Angelica's own narrative because male voice is inadequate. None of the heroines get a resolved and positive ending. Unable to have the lives they would choose for themselves, the feminist women and man continually struggle or make sacrifices in some way. The absent resolution not only constitutes an indictment of society, but also brings about a process of consciousness raising in the readers who have observed the heroines' trials.

Despite the control of the male master voice, Evadne still maintains her authorship by playing with various "story" possibilities. When informing the doctor of her ill thoughts, she explains the scenario of murder for her "own benefit" she had created. Evadne, becoming distraught, attempts to create an internal narrative in which she violently regains her freedom. Evadne also regain her skill of authorship by mimicking narrative structures from other authors to act on. For example, Evadne explains to the doctor that when he saw her roaming the streets that she was attempting to recreate Dickens's behavior: "I had read of Dickens prowling about the streets of London late at night when he was suffering from the effects of overwork, and recovering his tranquility and power in that way, and I thought I'd try the experiment" (633). However, because of the limitations and constraints Evadne experiences, she cannot fully regain her authorial voice but merely a weak imitation. The later attempt of suicide also signals an

imbalance in Evadne's private versus public process. Despite the debilitating effects of excessive privacy, a loss of it becomes equally problematic. In the last chapter narrated by the doctor, the doctor recognizes Evadne's solitude as the key to her murderous thoughts and upon marrying her insists on filling her time. Evadne has not resumed her writing and no longer has time for private thought thanks to Dr. Galbraith's many planned outings and activities. In the complete loss of privacy, Evadne moves to immediate action. Still unable to conduct public activism for her health, Evadne acts against the masculine account without warning to save her daughter. The balance tipped and disrupted yet again, Evadne makes a rash desperate attempt to end the cycle of oppression. However, without authorial control over the master narrative Evadne cannot hope to be successful.

Creating a Foundation: Taking Steps Towards a Resolved Ending

The novel's unfinished note serves to illuminate, as I have discussed before, the need for larger systemic changes. According to Grand, education is the foundation for good government and an improved community. Girlhood education facilitates the first steps towards change, women being sufficiently educated to identify their secondary status. Both Angelica and Evadne experience childhood recognition of their othered existence. Evadne is alienated her father's beliefs in women's social lack while Angelica confronts the social institutions that force her to fight in order to be her brother's equal. Edith nevertheless does not fully understand her secondary position until she is ill and mistreated by her husband. Despite Evadne's warnings, Edith still accepts the proposal. In a fit of madness brought about by her illness, Edith comes to her moment of ultimate realization, acknowledging not only her husband's imperfection but addressing the larger macro system "of society which has made it possible" for her and other

women and children to be “sacrificed in this way” (300). The realizations of each female protagonist serve to educate the reader and disrupt the constant state of ignorance women are encouraged to maintain. Grand’s novel explores how girlhood education, Evadne’s writing and Angelica’s progressive stories, enables the consciousness raising of characters. While her heroines do not get the full package, the failures of the heroines’ stories are necessary to show the reader that continued activism is essential for the daughters of the movement. The text asks readers to question the inequities within the social institutions in order to develop the foundations needed for future generations of girls. The lack of a complete feminist revolution within the text enables a more complex dialogue. While we are disappointed by the heroines’ endings as readers, it is the feeling to disappointment that recruits activists in the acknowledgment that we need to simply do more, such as educating younger women. A complete revolution in the text proves unnecessary, because the consciousness-raising process produced in the indictment of society through the unfinished endings operates a possible path towards “open rebellion” for the reader.

CHAPTER TWO: LEARNING TO WRITE: STORYTELLING AND ACTIVISM IN DOROTHY BRYANT'S ELLA PRICE'S JOURNAL

These men, the authors, didn't really want women to succeed. They liked their heroines, but being men they were prejudiced about what a woman ought to be. Soft and weak and all. So they couldn't make their women strong enough to make a go of the rebellion. They couldn't imagine women like that. They couldn't go on liking them as women, feminine, you know. So they had to destroy them.

Dorothy Bryant

The second-wave feminist movement spanned from the 1960s until the 1980s. Women confronted their secondary status in society and demanded equal access to the opportunities afforded to men. Theorizing from personal and historical experiences, women in the movement asked how society could condemn women to inferiority if they were never given the proper opportunities to prove otherwise. Without the resources and opportunities afforded to men, women could not hope to have the same widespread accomplishments. As the suffragists had once challenged the exclusion of women from the franchise, so did second-wave feminists confront the barring of women from the prospect of education and an equal place in a male-dominated workforce. In order to challenge the systemic privileging of men, women turned in part to writing. The text I will focus on in this chapter of my thesis, Dorothy Bryant's *Ella Price's Journal*, is an example of how second-wave feminists worked to build a literary space for contemporary women's individual narratives. Informed by and working with second-wave theory, Bryant's novel focuses on the personal experiences of women. The theoretical personal narrative of the fictional journal enables a recognition of women's experiences that allows a

space for women's voices in writing.¹² Bryant's novel challenges gendered inequality and connects with female readers by speaking from a woman-centered position.

Carol Gilligan's discussion of women's literary history in her essay "Woman's Place in Man's Life Cycle" shows the importance paid by second-wave theorists to women's writing during the writing and reading of Bryant's novel. Gilligan discusses how women's supposed inferiority has been maintained by psychoanalysis, childhood socialization, and specifically stories. Literature historically has been a male-dominated field in which models of literary study and instruction have been almost entirely male.¹³ Gilligan explicitly notes fairy tales in which "the girl's first bleeding is followed by a period of intense passivity in which nothing seems to be happening" (204). Young women in the stories are frequently passive objects of male pleasure, such as Snow White and Sleeping Beauty waiting nearly dead for a man's kiss. The heroine never triumphs, but instead marries the conqueror. The only moments that female heroine's take on the role of "hero" is when they dress like men, as seen in the Fa Mulan myth.¹⁴ As a result, one of the necessary changes the second wave began working on was the recognition and subsequent continued recognition of women's writing.

Cixous's article "Sorties," like her essay "The Laugh of Medusa," discusses the importance of women's writing and its connection to the physical body. Cixous suggests that "feminine

¹² In the introduction of the book *Women's Life-Writing: Finding Voice/Building Community*, Linda S. Coleman argues that fictional personal narratives allow for the recognition of women's writing while building diverse histories and communities of women with interactions between the author and reader.

¹³ Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's essay "Infection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and Anxiety of Authorship" discusses male centered literary study: "Bloom's model of literary history is intensely (even exclusively) male, and necessarily patriarchal" (22). The authors questions where sexist models leave women in literary history, noting that women are often meant to be merely the muses of the "great" men.

¹⁴ Gilligan's Fa Mulan example relates to the Chinese myth of a girl warrior who dresses like a man to complete acts of heroism.

writing” is the active speaking body manifested in the narrative text (233). If male privilege comes forth in the active male voice of literature in contrast to the passive representation of women Gilligan refers to, then women must transform the meekness by becoming active subjects in literature. Bryant’s novel follows this second-wave tradition by using the journal style in order to encourage the recognition of women’s voices. Cixous posits that “it is in writing, from woman toward woman, and in accepting the challenge of the discourse of the phallus, that woman will affirm woman somewhere other than in silence” (234). Bryant breaks the silence by constructing a “personal” narrative in which the woman’s voice experiences no interruptions, not even by an exterior narrator. In showing a dedication to female authorship, women can ensure the creation of a literary history that enables women to self-reflect and unpack gendered oppression by breaking the boundaries of male-dominated literary study.

The development of this literary history however faces difficulties, as Trinh T. Minh-ha addresses in her text *Woman, Native, Other*.¹⁵ Women’s writing is not merely a passive process, but a difficult task that requires breaking the glass ceiling in a male run field. According to Minh-ha, writing is not simply about the act of writing, but about submitting one’s self to the “laws” of male run publishing companies and accepting their criticism: “Every woman who writes and wishes to become established as a writer has known the taste of rejection” (8). Minh-ha relates these strings of rejection to the belief in “masculine” writing as the highest form of writing. Reminiscent of Cixous’s arguments, she suggests that if “to write is to become,” then women who are “becoming” feel the guilt of using the master’s tools (18). In order to be accepted in the male dominated field, women have become “language-stealers” with “no

¹⁵ Unlike Gilligan and Cixous, Minh-ha would not have influenced Bryant’s writing because *Woman Native Other* was published years later. However, as a theoretical text on the cusp between the second and third wave, Minh-ha informed by second-wave experiences and theory illustrates the difficulties Bryant faced.

pretense of being a stealer” in order to avoid discovery (19). While Minh-ha recognizes that male writers may influence women’s writing, she argues that women as writers need rise above the “borderlines” of the master narrative and write from women centered experiences with the language of the “womb” (28). As if following Minh-ha’s suggestion, Bryant rises above and insists that the literary discipline recognize the voices of women by self-publishing her novel.

Bryant’s first novel reached a relatively wide audience. According to Bryant’s article “My Publisher/Myself,” when published, *Ella Price’s Journal* “received about twenty times the usual reader mail in response to it” for Redbook publishing (36). However, the novel had a difficult publication history. According to Bryant, many of the editors who rejected the manuscript did so because they felt that a text about a common suburban homemaker would not be enough to maintain the interest of readers. Angered at the editors’ responses, Bryant decided to self-publish her text. She believed that if so many authors before her had “published their own books” including famous authors like “Virginia Woolf! Thoreau! D.H. Lawrence! Upton Sinclair!” then she could too (35). Although Bryant was successful in publishing and creating a large reading audience for the novel, she argues that politics with the publishing company in connection to the cover of the book prevented her from reaching an even wider female reading audience because of its resemblance to the covers of harlequin romance novels. Bryant demanded recognition for her first novel, freely giving the self-published copies away when necessary to provoke interest in the book. In fighting so diligently for her novel, Bryant facilitated the creation of a literary space that would value the power of female voice and the “average” woman as the heroine of a novel.

Aside from its unorthodox publishing history, *Ella Price's Journal* is a prime example of second wave consciousness-raising novels. A fictional narrative written in journal form, the novel details the life of a middle-aged suburban homemaker who decides to return to college after feelings of unexplained misery overpower her. Taking into account the various topics in the novel, including motherhood and marriage as I discuss in the introduction, this chapter will focus on female education and storytelling traditions as necessary catalysts for the consciousness-raising process. Through soft consciousness raising via education and self-reflective writing, Bryant's heroine Ella confronts her secondary suburban status and challenges the male master narrative of her time. Just as Bryant demanded recognition of her voice by the readers and publishing companies, so does her heroine Ella challenge male power structures. Critics often neglect or undervalue Bryant's appeal to middle class homemakers, and they consequently overlook the author's insistence on the power of female education and narrative voice and their potential effects on spreading feminist discourse.

Because most literary scholars focus on consciousness-raising novels that identify with the feminist label, critics pay little attention to Bryant's novel. Lisa Maria Hogeland is one of the few researchers who have written on Bryant's novel. Hogeland uses *Ella Price's Journal* as the seminal example of the soft consciousness-raising novel, because the novel fails to encourage collective feminist action. Ella, unlike the heroines of the hard novels, never self identifies as a feminist and as a result does not ask explicitly for feminist activism. Hogeland pushes two major criticisms in arguing Bryant's text as a meek novel. First, she argues that the novel's "critique of psychiatry is far more sweeping than its critique of marriage" (38). According to Hogeland, Ella seems angrier at the control of her psychiatrist than at the larger patriarchal institutions that

perpetuate gendered oppression. Her second major criticism lies in the focus on personal experience, which she argues “shifts the burden of feminist work onto individual women rather than groups of women” (41). However, Hogeland overlooks how both of these elements work to question patriarchal norms. Bryant’s critique of psychiatry is in fact a critique of those larger patriarchal institutions. Dr. Redford’s real job is to ensure that Ella continues to conform to gendered conventions. He acts as the gatekeeper of patriarchal values by encouraging her to cultivate “the feminine side of her nature” (Bryant 182). Not only does the psychiatrist attempt to ensure that Ella continues to conform to gendered norms, but as a male doctor he cannot understand her experiences. The problem is not that he is a psychiatrist, but that, as Ella remarks, “being a psychiatrist doesn’t automatically free him of male prejudice” (190). In being critical of her doctor, Ella challenges the patriarchal institution he participates in and represents. Hogeland also fails to acknowledge the importance of individual understanding to the second wave. By focusing on the personal, Bryant’s text not only reflects the personal theorizing implicit in the second-wave feminist movement, but it provides a space for the reader to confront gendered oppression and learn the journal writing process. Just as Ella is taught how to start keeping a journal, so does she teach the reader by including helpful prompts and topic starters. In keeping to individual thought, Bryant does not merely put the burden on individual women as Hogeland suggests, but encourages female readers to review their own worries without the fear of abnormality when their views do not adhere to social norms. Since Ella has already shared her fears with the reader, the reader then in turn can feel free to consider any doubts without the immediate fear of social sanctions. The novel is speaking out to a larger community of women to let them know they are not the only ones with these concerns. In doing so, the novel continues to

emphasize the importance of individual experience, but does not put the burden on women to experience their insecurities alone.

The novel covertly calls for feminist action in its disidentification with political rhetoric, whether intentional or not. Thus, Ella questions and exposes various oppressive expectations and institutions women face without the blatant use of feminist ideology. In “mildly” challenging social institutions, Bryant’s text can reach a wider reading audience with similar experiences who may fear association with the stereotypes of feminism and provide a method of questioning free from sole ideology and group membership – for this reason it is powerful, because it reflects personal experiences rather than only a “party line.” By providing the first foot in the door, the author enables an initial interest in the feminist movement for a reader by disidentifying with the feminist label. In calling for both self-evaluation and larger systemic changes, Bryant’s novel carves a path towards feminism for its reader.

Moving Away from Men: Speaking Against the Male-Centered Discourse

Ella represents the “average” woman, a character written to mirror the experiences of other suburban homemakers. Ella’s sudden decision to return to school comes as a suggestion from her doctor after she becomes lost: “I was driving down El Alma Boulevard and all of a sudden I was lost...I couldn’t locate myself” (28). The doctor interprets Ella’s disorientation and semi-suicidal attempts to crash into parked cars as her feeling “run down.” The doctor minimizes her experience and stereotypes her as the bored housewife. He suggests that the incident is nothing to worry about, and encourages her to develop some personal interests now that her daughter is growing up and self-sufficient. According to Ella, the doctor has little interest in what she has to say and merely attempts to appease her worries. He does not take her seriously and

treats her concerns as the trivial experiences of a woman. Despite his clear indifference, Ella nonetheless makes a major decision based on his advice. Once she enrolls in the college, her English professor Dr. Dan Harkan asks that each student keep an “honest” personal journal without placing too much concern on “grammar and spelling” (11). Ella resists at first, considering her professor a rude, invasive pothead who is simply too lazy to teach her grammar. However, despite her anger and misgivings Ella continues to keep the journal. Up until Ella begins to write critically in her journal, the men in her life exert a maximum amount of control over her daily activities. Ella enrolls into college because of the suggestion of a male doctor; she centers many of her early entries around her routines with her husband; her male instructor pushes her to begin writing. However, as the text progresses, Ella begins to resist the domineering influence of men in her life.

Price’s novel fails to offer any feminist-friendly heroes, not even the “liberal” professor Dr. Harkan. According to Tatiana Teslenko’s *Feminist Utopian Novels of the 1970s*, one of Bryant’s foci in writing is “questioning the adequacy of patriarchal language to describe reality and especially feminist reality” (85). While Teslenko focuses on another of Bryant’s novels *The Kin of Ata Are Waiting for You*, the same challenging of patriarchal voice happens in Ella’s interactions with her instructor, husband, and psychologist. Ella makes it clear early in her journal that, although she learns a great deal from her English instructor, he is not a feminist. While Dr. Harkan often exposes the institutions that perpetuate various forms of oppression, specifically in connection to race, he cannot recognize his own oppressive actions. He illustrates this problem himself early in the novel during a conversation with Ella. They discuss a student, a war veteran, who often complains about the falling standards of the college. To Ella’s surprise,

he informs her that the student has been attending the college on and off for ten years (65). Ella begins to suggest that the student is a braggart, but the instructor immediately corrects her: “No, he’s quite right. And sincere too. That’s what’s so funny. He’s furious at the quality of this place, but he’s part of it too” (65-66). Just as his student cannot recognize his participation in the system, neither can Dr. Harkan see his own role in perpetuating oppression.

In several entries, Ella points to what she feels are Dr. Harkan’s unjust characterizations of women. He often comments on superficial female beauty, blaming women for their obsessions with “domestic frills” and beauty products (23). He characterizes men as the victims of women’s superficiality, claiming that men “work themselves to death” to provide for their “Barbie dolls” (23). Ella challenges the instructor’s generalizations in a journal entry immediately after class, arguing that the burden of social pressures cannot simply lie with women. Ella argues that women’s attempts to look perfect are a direct result of systemic social pressures Dr. Harkan often attempts to unpack, illustrating how even the “liberal” professor insists on categorizing women as merely decorative instead of looking to macro issues. He never discusses the oppression of women or even the triumphs of women, but perpetuates an archetype of women as the frivolous gender. Ella persistently challenges the instructor’s sexist views, arguing in a later entry that as long as women are seen as objects of male pleasure women will consistently give into the pressures of the beauty ideal because “if you’re not attractive to men nobody cares what else you are; you’re a failure” (37). However, the expression of her opinions occurs primarily in her journal because of her professor’s master control over dialogue. As Ella describes in her entries, the professor provides little opportunity for dissent in class, his voice often overpowering the voices of his students. By exposing the inadequacy of his views and voice in her class journal,

Ella ensures that Dr. Harkan will have to consider her thoughts while he is grading. Ella's resistance in the journal also illustrates how her actions may be read as political dissidence. Not only is she forcing her instructor to take notice of her views, but she is doing so under the risk of failing the course project. While he has control of voice in the classroom, she fights by maintaining control over the written space even as he annotates her journal. Ella's challenging of the hierarchal male voice, a process that presents real life consequences, encourages readers of the novel to take risks in order to question oppressive institutions.

Ella's fight to maintain control becomes complicated when she becomes romantically involved with Dr. Harkan. Ella continues to challenge her professor even after she becomes romantically involved with him. While she constantly struggles with whether or not to test him, in the end Ella continues to question his sexist thoughts. She becomes infatuated with Dan (as she refers to him in this section) midway in the novel. Despite encouraging her to question social norms in the classroom, once they are involved Dan reinforces gendered stereotypes and norms. When she tells him about a recent birthing dream, he attempts to convince her that the dream is a reflection of her love for him:

He smiled and said, "That's a female expression of love. When a woman is in love she wants a child by the man she loves."

I smiled too but shook my head. "The last thing I want is a baby, by anyone."

"Well, of course, you don't consciously want one. But your deeper instincts, the real woman in you, comes out this way – in dreams."

There was no way to argue with that, of course. I can't prove or disprove what I'm not even conscious of. (163)

Ella is cognizant of Dan's manipulation of knowledge and language to silence her. He uses Freudian arguments, accusing her of being unable to recognize her unconscious thoughts, thus making it difficult for her to prove that she in fact understands her own thoughts. Luce Irigaray demonstrates how "female sexuality has always been theorized within masculine parameters" when discussing Freud in her essay "This Sex Which is Not One" (323). Dan's belief that Ella's desire to have babies relates to her love for him illustrates what, according to Irigaray, Freud believed was a woman's "attempt to possess at long last the equivalent of the male sex organ" (323). Defined by the lack of the phallus; on Freudian terms, women seek to fill this "void" with the children produced in part by the male organ. Only in being a mother is fulfillment possible, because "maternity supplants the deficiencies of repressed female sexuality" (325). As a result, Dan's adherence to what Irigaray points to as sexist Freudian ideology represents his participation in an oppressive patriarchal dialogue that deems women sexually deficient. As the dominant educated male voice, Dan can apparently identify the origins of her dreams better than she can. However, in questioning his assertion and insisting she does not want more children, Ella challenges the imposing male voice that seeks to define her in terms of fulfillment for male desire. She does not give into Dan's Freudian narrative and insists that children are a real responsibility that entails lifelong consequences for mothers. Dan's suggestion that childbirth is the "natural" role of women in order for them to be complete, as posited by Freud, undervalues and idealizes the difficulties of childcare.

Ella also attempts to challenge her husband Joe on numerous separate occasions, in the end realizing that he prefers her to be weak and unhealthy so that he can feel needed. Ella strives to bring her husband into her academic interests, but he often shrinks away, uncomfortable with

her new knowledge and confidence. In one conversation, Ella tries to tell her husband about Malcolm X's life, but he shows no interest. Ella becomes annoyed and suggests that Joe chooses to be ignorant out of fear. He fervently denies her accusation then tells her he is simply not intelligent enough to have these conversations with her, making Ella feel guilty about their dispute. Ella consistently makes an effort to push her husband, but he continually manipulates the conversation so that she feels sorry for him. Ella's reflections on the conversations with her husband enable a process of consciousness raising, because she realizes that her husband is choosing to passively accept his male privilege. The process of writing out the conversations in her journal after they have occurred forces Ella to analyze her conversations with her husband deeply, which did not occur pre-journal. It is the detailed transcribing of the arguments and self-reflection it entails that facilitate Ella's realization of her husband's manipulation. What she had once mistaken as humility and low self-esteem is in fact a method of maintaining Ella's self-loathing and feelings of inadequacy. Later in the novel when Ella insists on getting an abortion, she refuses to give into her husband's tactics and their family's pressures.

Joe's attempt to exert his powerful male voice comes forth more subtly than Dan's sexist comments through his continually feigning ignorance. Ella begins to recognize slowly Joe's power over her, having often mistaken his manipulations as unintentional actions. For example, she notes in one journal entry that Joe guilted her into having sex. He insinuates that ever since Ella started going to college they have less intercourse, and, feeling inadequate, she agrees to sleep with him. However, once he goes to bed, she realizes that he lied, because they are in fact still having the same amount of sex. Ella begins to wonder how Joe convinced her so easily: "I felt so guilty when he said that, I didn't think about whether or not it was really true" (81). Ella

consistently gives into Joe's desires and modes of control, until one of the last entries of her journal. She asks for a divorce, Joe begins to insult himself, and Ella replies, "You're not stupid. When you say things like that, you're very, very clever. Because they shake me" (223). She knows that Joe intends to make her feel sorry for him with his self-denigration so she will stay. At the last moment she almost gives in again but gets up, hurriedly packs, and runs out the door. She refuses to let him speak or to listen to his pleas because she was wary of the power of his master voice: she is "afraid that words, explanations, arguments, would slow me down, make me unsure again" (225). In leaving and preventing Joe from speaking, Ella denies the power of patriarchal voice to take over her life. Through the consciousness-raising process nascent from the analysis produced in journal writing, Ella makes changes in her life and shapes an alternative path.

Neither of the two men in her life with whom she is romantically involved affords her the option of an egalitarian relationship. Accustomed to defining herself by the men in her life, Ella attempts to manage her new knowledge with her extramarital affair. When Dan disappoints Ella, using her for a sexual relationship that she does not enjoy, he becomes the first key to understanding that she must create her own life. A new man will not fix her feelings of dissatisfaction, a point addressed by Irigaray. In the same article, she argues that if women "resort to pleasure alone as the solution" they will face the "risk of missing the reconsideration of a social practice upon which her pleasure depends" (328). In one of her last entries, Ella realizes that while the journal enabled her understanding of the oppression of women and the need to change her own life, she had assumed that the change in her life could come with changing partners. However, in existing for her men instead of with them, Ella loses freedom. For

example, the moment Dan begins to exert control over their relationship, Ella recognizes the limitations of heterosexual relationships. She had believed that in her new romance she “would have all the things we had before, but that sexual love would be added” (163). However, as long as heterosexual relationships are defined by gender inequity and mens’ voices are privileged above hers, Ella cannot hope to have a fulfilling relationship with any man.

Awakening through Stories: Narrative Voice and Female Education

According to Leah E. White in her article “Silenced Stories: May Sarton’s Journals as a Form of Discursive Resistance,” journals can function as a place of resistance by offering “a safe place in which a woman is able to express her feelings and emotions” (81). In organizing their thoughts, women can begin to compartmentalize various facets of their lives for the sake of analysis and action. Early in the journal, Ella’s timid writing often merely relates the mundane details of her day while occasionally regurgitating the views of her husband, family, and local community. However, through her own anger and continued study, Ella’s entries gain depth, often unpacking her own views by questioning herself in the journal. Ella’s growth comes not from adapting the views of a male professor instead of a husband, but comes from her own self-evaluation and independent education beyond classroom instruction: “I’d hidden a lot of things that didn’t seem to fit into my life, a closet stuffed so full that once I’d opened the door just a crack, I couldn’t pushed it closed again, and things started tumbling out” (77). Ella’s change does not come from a “brainwashing” male college professor as her brother-in-law suggests during Thanksgiving dinner, but as an outcome of her own private experiences interacting with various public forces. Ella’s change is facilitated through the interaction of public versus private, encouraging female readers to move fluidly between the two spheres and develop their own

opinions instead of spouting mere recreations of their husbands', fathers', or brothers' opinions. Ella brings her publicly learned education into the private sphere through discussions with her husband and family, making her family very uncomfortable, and takes her private thoughts from the journal into the public arena of the classroom. Instead of deterring mainstream readers by arguing that women need to break away from patriarchal rule, Bryant breaks away from feminist rhetoric in showing readers how Ella undergoes the process of acknowledging her own capacity for critical thought. The journal provides the safe space to cultivate the consciousness-raising process, affording Ella the confidence to move beyond the journal by using it to challenge the existence of separate domestic and public spheres.

Among the various topics discussed during Ella's metamorphosis, the expectations of women within the private sphere are at the forefront of the text. At the start of the journal, Ella understands her identity as mother to her daughter Lulu and wife to Joe. As she continues to write in her journal, she slowly acknowledges her dissatisfaction with both roles, admitting she was "angry" when she got pregnant and only "pretended to be happy" to adhere to social expectations. However, unlike Hogeland's assertions that the soft consciousness-raising novel does not ask for collective action, Ella calls for a systemic educational change in the discussion of pregnancy and motherhood. In the same journal entry, Ella is critical of the curriculum in her psychology course that focuses on the "trauma of being born" with no mention of the shock of giving birth (70). When Ella addresses this concern with her professor, he gives her strange look and provides a brief inaudible reply. Annoyed at the lack of interest in women in the medical field, Ella discusses her own experience with childbearing and the representation of motherhood in *Madame Bovary*. Ella believes that women lack an unidealized early education on motherhood

that would better prepare prospective mothers. While Bryant may not call for a specific collective feminist action in this entry, she does call for widespread change in education. The author encourages readers to demand an academic curriculum that recognizes women. The appeal for a woman-centered curriculum seems both logical and natural in this entry because of Ella's confusion: "I wonder why no one has ever discussed the trauma of birth for the mother" (70). By relating it to a mainstream concern for women, Bryant depoliticizes the feminist appeal for women's studies through logical deduction. Why wouldn't we learn about the experiences of women in higher education? By making it common sense, Bryant employs underground feminism, encouraging readers to explore feminist concerns without forcing women to accept the feminist label. Bryant's appeal to education also removes her journal from the purely personal label Hogeland places on it, because Bryant attempts to take the private birthing concerns of mothers and push them into the public sphere by insisting on macro level changes. In insisting on educational reform, the novel illustrates how individual experience is political, because larger government institutions directly affect the real material conditions of women. The personal also in turn affects those same larger institutions by serving as a catalyst for change. For example, if feminist activists fail to first take notice of the deficiency in women's education by studying the individual experiences Ella describes, how will they know what to change? As a result, the novel illustrates how individual self-reflection and experience intrinsically connect to macro political systems.

Just as reading *Madame Bovary* helps Ella sort through her ideas on motherhood, so do other texts influence her writing. Throughout the novel, Ella reads a variety of books suggested by her professor. At the start of the journal Ella complains about the reading load and has

difficulty understanding the books she reads in class (16). However, as she grows academically she begins to better understand the texts and occasionally compares her own life to those of female heroines, frequently feeling “awfully bitter about being a woman” after reading *Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenina* (75). Ella’s consciousness raising occurs in part by relating to the heroines of these novels. Not only does Ella relate to the heroines, but she insists on identifying them as real people. When discussing *Anna Karenina* with her professor, she questions why the heroines of these novels are “always destroyed” (77). Dr. Harkan accuses Ella of excessive sentimentality telling her that the “Destruction of the protagonist implies indictment of the society” (77). However, Ella refuses to give in to Harkan’s interpretation. She suggests that while the books may be an indictment of society, they merely show an image of “despair” for women by always killing the one who rebels. If a woman becoming the subject leads to eventual destruction, what kind of hope does that give its female readers? Ella also insists that men take some of the responsibility that Dr. Harkan has been ignoring. He tells Ella that “society destroyed” the heroines of these novels. Ella recounts that she “started to nod, almost obediently” and then began to shake her head insisting that it is not merely an abstract notion of a system. The “system” is a male-dominated society that privileges the interests of men before women, thus forcing these women to take drastic action in order to escape their secondary status. In referring to “society” as the culprit, Dan and other men/women can give up responsibility for participating in the system. In arguing that an abstract notion of society led to the heroine’s demise, Dan himself can minimize his own participation in the oppression of peoples by blaming it on a faceless villain. In doing so, he also undervalues Ella’s attempt to stop participating in the cycle of oppression by making changes in her life and challenging the sexist views of people

around her. Understanding individual participation in systems of oppression is a necessary step towards national and global feminist political change because if we cannot recognize how we feed into the system how can we expect to change it? The heroines of these novels, as Ella points out, are also bound by the wishes of the male author. They die not only because of a patriarchal society, but because the male author refuses to create a narrative in which the rebel women could have hope.

Not only does Ella question the classic endings written by men, but she also attempts to create alternative narratives for her own life. In an entry describing her “favorite fantasy,” Ella tells the reader that she often used the want ads to imagine a new life (41). Echoing Woolf’s insistence female autonomy, Ella believes that each address in the classifieds offers another possibility of a room for herself with “lots of books in it” (42).¹⁶ These fantasies always occur on Sunday mornings when Ella spends the most time with her family, reflecting her desire to refashion her life. She also has fantasies of an event that would free her of the social expectations of motherhood and marital obligations:

Then suddenly this thing would come: Joe and Lulu were home asleep, but I was out somewhere. I came home to find the house in flames. I tried to run in, but people held me back. Everyone and everything perished in the fire. My husband, my daughter, and every single thing that was part of my life with them. I used to end up crying when I thought about that – but then I’d feel relieved. I’ve always

¹⁶ Ella’s desire to have her own space is likely influenced by Virginia Woolf’s assertions about female agency in her text *A Room of One’s Own*. Woolf argues that women deserve to have the means to write freely without societal boundaries so that they may express their genius. She suggests that women can only have this freedom if they can reach economic independence and stability, specifically a room or space of their own.

wanted to ask other women, and men too, if they had fantasies like that, but I was too ashamed to admit that I did. (43)

Throughout the entire novel, Ella wishes she could leave her family. As a result, in her early entries Ella imagines possibilities that would give her the freedom she craves without violating her social obligations. Ella also shares rape fantasies she had before her marriage to Joe. Wanting to maintain her “nice-girl self-image” but just as sexually “frustrated as any boy,” she would wish that someone would take the responsibility out of her hands (83). She talks about just wanting sex without love while knowing that “nice” girls should want love. Ella’s problematic rape fantasy illustrates her recognition that she does not have responsibility or freedom over her sexuality. She does not fantasize about ways she could please herself, but imagines a violent scenario in which she still gives up responsibility, and as a result continues to lack agency. Ella never gains control over her own sexuality in the novel, revealing how she continues to grapple with gendered expectations. She wants sexual release yet wants to avoid the social consequences of acting against normative gender expectations. None of Ella’s fantasies provide viable options, because patriarchal institutions inform them all. Even when Ella acts on one of her fantasies by leaving her family, she still does not get her happy ending.

Ella’s Déjà vu: Unfinished Ending as the Indictment of Society

Bryant’s novel ends mid-sentence while Ella is presumably being prepped for her abortion. Hogeland suggests that the novel ends on a hopeful note of new beginnings; however, I question how happy Ella’s ending actually turns out. While Ella suggests that separation from her husband will afford her some freedom, she confides in her friend Laura that she wishes her daughter Lulu could understand and that her husband would change. It is not the mere existence

of her daughter and husband that make Ella feel trapped, but the gendered institutions that force her into the limited roles of wife and homemaker. However, Ella recognizes that there is no hope of her husband changing as long as he participates in the system:

“On the other hand, maybe you’ll go back to your husband. This separation may change him.”

I thought about that. “I doubt it. I don’t think they’ll let it change him.”

“They?”

“People. He’ll be surrounded by pity – his wife left him on Christmas Eve, yet!”

That made us both laugh. “Everyone will tell him what a poor abused fellow he is, such a nice guy to be treated this way. They’ll invite him to dinner, introduce him to eligible women...” (226)

As long as Joe refuses to question the larger system that affords him privilege, despite Ella’s attempts to encourage him to do so, he will never be able to change and become the partner Ella deserves. Neither Ella nor Laura has the opportunity for egalitarian relationships, because as long as the men they meet perpetuate sexism there can be no possibility for an equal marriage. This problem, illustrated in the final moments of the text, mirrors a much earlier entry about *The Golden Notebook* (87). In this entry, Ella argues that freedom is not a sure path to security and happiness. As slaves met loss of food and shelter with the success of the abolitionist movement, so will women face the loss of security in their struggle for freedom. Ella makes clear that the fight for autonomy is necessary, but like Sarah Grand, she questions where this fight would leave the early women of the movement. Ella and Laura have undergone a metamorphosis into the free “new women” of their generation “but where are the new men” for them? (88) As a result, while

Ella's choice is essential to her attempt to gain autonomy, Bryant does not romanticize this decision. The idealization of Ella's resolution would undervalue the difficulty of those choices and give readers false expectations. Ella may find herself with no job and no home of her own, but the hardships are a necessary step towards equality for women. Both Grand and Bryant recognize the dangers of challenging patriarchal institutions, but both authors suggest that these are necessary risks so that each generation can get closer to achieving an egalitarian ideal. Each generation of women acting for change will face their risks, but as changes continue to take place, future generations have the opportunity to take less threatening risks.

The novel also leaves little hope for Ella's daughter Lulu. Annoyed that her mother is acting outside of the norm, Lulu often sides with her father. In one instance, Lulu attempts to convince her mother to change her mind about the abortion to appease her father who gives her money for shopping whenever she asks. However, Ella implies that her daughter would not even care if it were not for her father's pressure. Lulu is a voiceless character, much as her mother was at the start of the text. The little the reader knows about her is superficial. Ella describes her as beautiful and popular in school, all the things her father was in school and that her mother had wished for at her age. Ella never describes her daughter in terms of intellect or personality, but just as a wandering body in her home. The last moment the reader sees Lulu she ignores her mother on her way out the door for another shopping trip (221). The reader never knows if Lulu decides to stay with her mother or father, leaving her life in limbo. Even Ella feels no hope for her daughter while talking to Laura at the end of the novel. She begins to suggest that maybe Lulu will change or come around somehow, but before she can even finish the sentence, she "started to turn cold all over" and insisted she could not talk about Lulu (225). While Ella shows

no sense of hope for Lulu, she never tries to force her daughter to accept her views. While not explicitly stated in the text, there is the hope that Lulu may one day undergo a consciousness-raising process like her own mother. However, as long as the daughters of the feminist movement are born into a patriarchal system that rewards women for fitting gendered norms and undervalues those who do not, there will always be the risk of girls participating in the system. Because Lulu persistently gains rewards for fitting normative gender roles and social constructions of beauty, without encouragement she may never question the social inequity women face because she benefits from this system. Just as Ella needed Dr. Harkan's journal project to act as the catalyst for her analysis and self-reflection, so may Lulu need a similar experience. The inconclusive ending illustrates the need to continue challenging institutions of oppression. One person undergoing a consciousness-raising process is simply not enough. By spreading Bryant's methodology to a wide variety of readers, the novel may function as the catalyst for other people's consciousness raising. Non-aggressive forms of reaching women via non-political discourse, as suggested in the tenets of underground feminism, may also work to slowly introduce people to feminist politics. However, the novel also suggests that personal reflection is not enough. The consciousness-raising process must be followed by feminist activism for any hope of long-term change, such as Ella's decision to change her own life, challenge her family and larger community, and later work with Laura on her activist projects.

Ella's inability to have a fulfilling ending extends beyond her daughter and husband, but also relates to her sexuality and abortion. As I addressed earlier, Ella never gains complete sexual agency. After her moments of unsatisfying intercourse with both Dan and her husband, there is little indication that Ella has found an alternative to heterosexual intercourse. By the end

of the novel, Ella continues to define her sexuality in relation to men, a product of heteronormative values that leave her unfulfilled when she leaves her husband. Her body never ceases to function as an object, as seen when nurses prepare her for an abortion on the hospital room table. In the last passage of the novel, Ella experiences the medicalization of her body. She refers to the hospital doctors and employees as “they,” the “anonymous” people who are merely acting on her body without any care for her feelings. They bathe her, shave her, and instruct her without any indication of her being anything other than just another patient.¹⁷ Her last comments in this passage are “I feel like a plucked chicken about to be gutted. I feel” (227). Despite her newfound independence, Ella still has to deal with the institutions that objectify her and do not even allow her to finish her last thought. The novel calls for a change that exists beyond the novel itself. Now that Ella has the education that enables her to conduct feminist activism, she now must take that knowledge and act on it. While Ella escapes as she has been hoping to do for the entire novel, her decision to leave shows the difficulty of a complete revolutionary change. While the process of consciousness raising has awoken that “something” in her to enable her to understand the oppression of women, she still lives in a patriarchal society that values the rights of men over women.

¹⁷ While it is strange to think that Ella is in fact writing in her journal as she awaits the procedure, Hogeland suggests that this is merely one of the limitations of the journal-writing format. While it is implausible that someone would be writing at this time, the author must abandon this logic temporarily in order to provide necessary information to the reader.

CHAPTER THREE: AN UNLIKELY FEMINIST NOVEL: BRIDGET JONES CHALLENGES WONDER WOMAN

Wise people will say Daniel should like me just as I am, but I am a child of *Cosmopolitan* culture, have been traumatized by supermodels and too many quizzes and know that neither my personality nor my body is up to it if left to its own devices. I can't take the pressure. I am going to cancel and spend the evening eating doughnuts in a cardigan with egg on it.

Helen Fielding

Extending upon and challenging the politics of the second wave, the current third-wave women's rights movement focuses on the multiplicity of identity politics and on balancing the contradictions women face in our current political climate. While the third-wave movement remains active, some critics have argued that we are currently living in a "postfeminist" world. With both groups merging during the early nineteen nineties, third-wave feminism and postfeminism occur simultaneously and require independent definitions. In the introduction of *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism*, editors Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake point to the distinction between the two groups. The authors define postfeminism as a movement "of young, conservative feminists who explicitly define themselves against and criticize feminists of the second wave" and who believe that feminist scholarship and activism are no longer necessary because feminism already exists in the societal infrastructure (1). Third-wave feminism on the one hand recognizes the triumphs of the preceding generation of feminists and uses "second wave critique as a central definitional thread," without labeling the second wave as "bad" feminism despite questioning many of its problematic assertions (7). According to the authors, the third-wave recognition and use of second-wave politics complicates the theoretical tenets of the current movement because of the various intersecting identity markers

that inform the analysis of oppression. The multiplicity of the movement shapes third-wave politics around “messy” contradictions, such as “identities formed within a relentlessly consumer-oriented culture but informed by a politics that has problems with consumption” (8). Considering the difficulties in accommodating various social pressures, third-wave feminism embraces the “messiness” for the sake of promoting continuous change. Those same contradictions inform Helen Fielding’s novel *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, illustrating the novel’s dedication to third-wave politics. However, the complicated nuances of the third wave present in Fielding’s novel are what some feminist and scholars identify as a definitive mark of weakness.

In “Postfeminism and Popular Culture: Bridget Jones and the New Gender Regime,” Angela McRobbie argues that feminism faced a major turning point after the second wave, representing “the moment of definitive self-critique in feminist theory” (29). McRobbie argues that the modern challenging of the second-wavers illustrates the average woman’s aversion to feminist discussions of oppression, providing the “cultural space of postfeminism” (31). The author conflates a third-wave transformation with a complete cultural repugnance to feminist scholarship, an aversion based not on a dislike of egalitarian politics but on the belief that feminism is passé. Like any theoretically based movement, feminism is continually evolving for each generation as participants of the movement question the prejudices and inconsistencies of the generations that preceded them. Feminism must be self-reflective, otherwise it would cease to evolve and fit the needs of each successive generation of women. As a result, McRobbie mistakes the evolution of feminist ideas with a complete disappearance of the movement, which she suggests comes in the normalization of “postfeminist gender anxieties so as to regulate young women by the means of the language of personal choice” (38). This is not to say that

postfeminism is somehow inherently against the women's movement. On the contrary, as McRobbie suggests, postfeminists are feminists who believe the ideals of the women's movement are already firmly in place: "postfeminism positively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings, which emphasize that it is no longer needed, that it is a spent force" (28). Postfeminism posits then that because feminism is already in place, discussions of oppression are no longer needed. It is this point that the third wave disagrees with and identifies as a weakness in Fielding's novel, the belief that discussions and activism in connection to women's rights are useless.

Although many third-wave feminists demonize postfeminism as "anti-feminist," many women's movement scholars discuss the problems within the group while still acknowledging that it is feminist. Deborah L. Siegel discusses the limitations of postfeminist views on the mainstream women's rights movement in the essay "Reading Between the Waves: Feminist Historiography in a 'Postfeminist' Moment."¹⁸ Siegel's article focuses on three major postfeminist authors: Katie Roiphe, Rene Denfield, and Naomi Wolf. Siegel argues that these three authors perpetuate a false binary of "good feminism" versus "bad feminism" (59). Bad feminism is characterized by a focus on perpetuating the victim status of women by discussing forms of oppression. The belief is that a discussion of systemic oppression is debilitating because women are choosing a victim status instead of acting on the opportunities afforded by a "feminist infrastructure" already "firmly in place" (75). However, as Siegel briefly notes, all of these authors speak from a position of privilege. Roiphe bases many of her discussions on her

¹⁸ When I use the term "mainstream" in relation to feminism, I refer to the third-wave of feminism popularly discussed in academia as following the second-wave. This is not to be mistaken with the popular view on feminism in the media.

experience in the Ivy League university system, and Wolf primarily addresses the opportunities available only to white middle class women (75). In labeling the concern for larger systemic forms of oppression as a support of victim status, these three postfeminist authors oversimplify how the various intersecting elements of race, class, language, nationality, ability, education, and gender inform the experiences of women in society. What these three authors ignore is that in recognizing systemic issues, feminists can fight those institutions to resist victimization. To add to Siegel's argument, the oversimplification of the women's movement also suggests that one can simply be unaffected by societal pressures. Siegel cites various moments in which these authors have suggested that women can attain equality if they simply stop giving into "bad" victim feminism and embrace "good" power feminism. In ignoring the complexity of intersectionality and the difficulty of dealing with contradictory social expectations, the authors perpetuate the belief that women can reach a "good" feminist ideal of perfection if they simply have sufficient drive. For example, if a woman does not receive a university education, it is simply because she has allowed herself to be weakened by the feminist "victim" status. This belief gives no consideration to the outside factors of class, ability, or cultural family obligations that may have kept that woman from immediately seeking an education. As a result, these authors privilege the experiences of white, middle class, able-bodied, American, and educated women by suggesting that all women are equipped with the same tools, and if women cannot succeed they are weak in comparison to other women.

In supporting a binary of good feminism versus bad feminism that demonizes the experiences of the Other as the bad, postfeminism perpetuates the victimization it tells women to overlook in order to achieve empowerment. In the article "A Tale of Two Feminisms: Power and

Victimization in Contemporary Feminist Debate,” Carolyn Sorisio addresses how postfeminism ignores the “ugly facts” by perpetuating “victim feminism” as a archetype representative of all feminist models (147). While Sorisio contends that some feminist theorists and groups use debilitating ideas of “shared victimization” in order to avoid the responsibility of participation, she argues that this is hardly a representation of all feminism (143). Not only are the major postfeminist authors ignoring the experiences “of women from other classes and nations,” but they are ignoring the work and experiences of feminist theorists and organizations that do not fit their “bad” model (140). For example, the author cites how Wolf claims that feminism limits sexuality by imposing fear of sexual assault on its followers, using herself as an example. However, Sorisio challenges Wolf’s claim by arguing that “Wolf is never clear as to how her socially sanctioned heterosexuality has been silenced” (139). As in the other examples, Wolf is privileging one form of sexuality over the other. Wolf suggests that feminism over-exaggerates the severity of rape and sexual assault, thus minimalizing the experience of women who have experienced sexual violence. Sorisio argues that postfeminism as it currently stands discounts the real issues women face. She tells the postfeminist community that “just because we [third-wave feminists] recognize the means by which women have been exploited does not mean we have to cling to the status of victim” (147). In trivializing the experiences of women, postfeminism does not pay sufficient attention to the multifaceted individual experiences of women.

Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary* addresses the intricacies of personal experiences in conjunction with social expectations, regardless of the book’s fluff status in academia. It should be surprising then that both postfeminist and third-wave feminists herald the novel as a representation of postfeminist ideology. While the novel does focus on the experiences of white

middle class women, the text explores the complexities of the competing demands women deal with and challenges systems of oppression. McRobbie asserts that chick lit, pointing to Fielding's novel as her main example, proves the existence of postfeminism by displaying an extreme aversion to mainstream scholarly feminism. Third-wave feminist Jennifer L. Pozner also agrees that *Bridget Jones's Diary* has a postfeminist stand in her article "The 'Big Lie': False Feminist Death Syndrome, Profit, and the Media." Pozner argues that postfeminism's popularity in the media has brought about the belief that feminist activism is dead. She cites Fielding's novel as an example of "self-indulgent drive!" that has "replaced intellectually challenging works such as Kate Millet's transformative *Sexual Politics*" (33). Pozner demonizes postfeminism and accuses the novel of not being a feminist text and characterizes it as "the literary equivalent of cotton candy" (33). While *Bridget Jones's Dairy* may not constitute the *Feminine Mystique* of our generation, the novel is not as frivolous and politically weak as scholars suggest. *Bridget Jones's Diary*, as the typical example of chick lit informed by the rising ideas of postfeminism and by recent generations of mainstream feminists, represents the voice of the third-wave attempting to negotiate all of the choices and possibilities afforded to women through the successes of the women's rights movement.¹⁹

One of the goals of the third wave that informs Fielding's novel is the push to move beyond the purely academic writing prevalent in feminist theory in order to reach a wider audience of women. Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake discuss the mainstreaming of feminism

¹⁹ While I am arguing that the power of Fielding's novel lies in its third-wave stance, this does not mean that a postfeminist stance would inherently be weak. While some scholars have argued that the novel's ills lies in its postfeminism, they have done so by arguing that the novel does not call for collective action and makes superficial connections to women's issues. I am arguing then that the novel does in fact call for action and addresses third-wave concerns, making it powerful not because it is not postfeminist, but because it calls for a complex dialogue about women's rights and oppression that are not characteristic of the postfeminist movement.

in their article “We Learn America like a Script: Activism in the Third Wave; or, Enough Phantoms of Nothing.” Like the writers of the other articles, the authors argue that postfeminist scholars participate in and perpetuate gendered myths about women, such as the “femme fatale” (50). The authors argue that postfeminism’s popularity over the third wave relates to the third wave keeping itself hidden in academia and intellectual contexts. They argue that participation in popular media outlets is necessary if third-wave feminists hope to enact change:

Besides, we’re pop-culture babies; we want some pleasure with our critical analysis. So we inhabit that contradictory space between critiquing what various movies, videos, songs, ads, and fashions say and do to uphold structures of domination, even as we’re into these same hip cultural productions, *knowingly* (yet as if we did *not* know) spending money on them, consuming them, and making them...we [feminists] take popular culture as just one pedagogical site that materializes our struggles with some of the ways power works. (51-52)

To critique, analyze, and participate in popular culture is essential in understanding the contradicting pressures women often experience and changing the popular view that feminism is dead. To move outside of the academic realm is to reach a “larger public,” evident in the success of Fielding’s novel (53). Popular culture is an unavoidable facet of American society, and while we consume it regularly, we can also critique it and even produce new media of our own.

Chick Lit is part of the current production of media that addresses women’s issues. According to Cris Mazza’s article “Who’s Laughing Now? A Short History of Chick Lit and the Perversion of a Genre,” the novels frequently deal with “a woman in her 20s or 30s, going through everyday problems and challenges with her boyfriend, job, living situation, marriage,

dating life” (24). Widely seen as the frivolous sister novels to harlequin romances, Chick Lit regularly receives negative criticism from feminist scholars for the persistent telling of heteronormative Cinderella stories. Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, often read as an “antifeminist” text, can be read as a representation of third wavers’ questions and insecurities. Considered the text that started the genre, *Bridget Jones’s Diary* has sold over five million copies and has been translated into thirty languages, adapted into the 2001 popular film, and has been the subject of online fan fiction (Gill 487). While scholars openly admit the genre has its rough spots, such as the occasional reinforcing racial stereotypes, chick lit delves into the modern pressures women face daily and makes possible a complex conversation about women’s issues. Despite not discussing race, the novel still facilitates a discussion of intersectionality by showing how Bridget and her peers must negotiate the various pressures and levels of privilege that affect their daily lives. For instance, while Bridget’s story may be a heterosexual love story, it is not necessarily heteronormative. On the contrary, she often critiques the heteronormative privileges afforded in the institution of marriage. Bridget’s friendships also allow the reader to see the experiences of the Other when her friends discuss the prejudice they experience because of sexual orientation, class, and political affiliation.

Chick lit often also faces accusations of supporting “postfeminist” views in providing superficial depictions of women’s lives. Women buy their individuality with expensive Coach bags and gain sexual freedom with their “fuckwit” bosses (Fielding 66). However, Fielding’s novel, published on the cusp of these scholars’ arguments, has more connections to women’s literary history than some scholars will acknowledge. Chick lit comes from a recognizable lineage of women authors, as Juliette Wells points out in her article “Mothers of Chick Lit?”

Women Writers, Readers, and Literary History.” Wells argues that the lack of recognition for the genre, its authors and fans facing accusations of chick lit’s inferiority in the literary discipline, correlates with the “long tradition of discounting women writers and their readers” (47). To ignore chick lit as an area of study is to overlook the widespread popularity of these texts, the reading audience primarily consisting of women. If that were not reason enough to study this genre, Wells argues that many of the genre’s authors are rewriting the marriage narratives of authors like Austen, Brontë, and Wharton. The contemporary novels sustain core themes from their earlier mentors, such as a preoccupation with physical appearance, dating, self-growth, and the importance of community (49). The main difference between the contemporary texts and the originals is the present-day denial of the marriage plot and discussions of sexual agency. In rewriting the story of the “mothers of chick lit,” authors like Fielding are encouraging a tradition of writing founded on the feminine authorial voice while addressing the issues women face in contemporary society. In doing so, the chick lit genre is encouraging a herstory that recognizes female authorial voice in what has historically been deemed a “masculine” discipline.

While most scholars are critical of Fielding’s novel, some agree Bridget is not all bad. Kelly Marsh’s article “Contextualizing Bridget Jones” unpacks the view that Bridget’s occasional loss of control equals weakness. Marsh points to the “control myth,” a belief “that the self can be remade in such a way that one is in control, and that control is ultimately achievable by anyone” (53). Marsh connects this notion of the control myth to Bridget’s constant attempt to reach a state of perfection, in which Bridget always wants to be the flawless version of herself. While Marsh covers the same issues that interest me, I would like to push her idea further. Although the author acknowledges that Bridget is on a constant quest for perfection, I intend to

argue that Bridget is attempting to become a feminist ideal and that her failures represent the impossibility of the flawless feminist. Extending on Marsh's argument, we can see that reaching the ideal is impossible because Bridget will continue to experience dependence as long as women must negotiate with male-dominated power structures. In the following sections, I will discuss how Bridget's struggle for perfection breaks down the possibility of a model "good" feminist as postfeminists have argued, how her pop culture education constructs her attempts to achieve perfection, and how Bridget attempts to take control by disrupting the normative narrative but ultimately fails.

The Grass is Greener on the Other Side: Bridget Challenges Feminism

Ironically, despite the postfeminist aversion to second-wave politics, the roots of the postfeminist views on good feminism can be seen in the second wave. Wonder Woman, the Amazonian icon of the second wave movement, broke the glass ceiling of a male dominated superhero world and managed to "look good" doing it. Molded by the beautiful Greek female deities of Mount Olympus as the ultimate woman, superior to all men, she is a tough act to follow. Feminists informed the daughters of the movement that they could manage it all. Women could get careers, save the world, have children, go to school, get married and bake a cake all in the same day. As an icon of the second-wave feminist movement, Wonder Woman serves as an unattainable ideal that pressures women into the binary of good woman versus bad woman in much of the same way the Virgen de Guadalupe does for some Latina women.²⁰ Growing up with the belief we could all be feminist super heroes, we want to do it all despite the impossibility of success without becoming ill. While postfeminism perpetuates the second-wave

²⁰ In her article "Guadalupe the Sex Goddess" Sandra Cisneros describes the Virgen de Guadalupe as an unrealistic role model. An unattainable ideal that stifles female sexuality and maintains the virgin/whore dichotomy.

tradition of a feminist ideal, third-wavers often question the super hero feminine ideals developed within the movement. Bridget represents the conflicts present in aspiring to be a super woman by showing the ramifications of the unrealistic pressures women face during the process. This is the same pressure pushed with postfeminist ideas of good feminists being able to simply get over they're supposed "weakness" to succeed. In positing a good versus bad feminism ideal, postfeminism ultimately employs the same tactics from the second wave it seeks to criticize. This conflict presents itself at the start of the novel with Bridget's "I will not" and "I will" lists for the upcoming New Year. The two long lists include better career, lose weight, stop smoking, read more books, become involved in humanitarian efforts, stop gossiping, stop sulking about not having a boyfriend, stop "sluttish" behavior, stop becoming interested in "misogynists," stop having "crushes on men, but instead form relationships based on mature assessment of character," and "develop inner poise and authority and sense of self as woman of substance" (2). Bridget's list creates a prototype of what she imagines is a powerful woman, a list that is informed by feminist and non-feminist ideals. As addressed by the scholars Siegel, Heywood, and Drake, third-wave feminism explores the contradictions women face in society. Bridget's list is indicative of these social contradictions, in which she tries to negotiate the social expectations of female perfection and her understanding of feminist goals. Bridget shows an interest in being an activist and having an egalitarian partnership, but also describes goals that relate to the pressure of beauty ideals and being in a relationship. As Bridget's entries progress, she constantly meets and does not meet the goals established at the start of the year. Always trying to meet the goals, Bridget seems unable to have a life in which she does not strive for flawlessness yet never reaches perfection. Her inability to attain fulfillment by checking off goals on her list

represents the inability to fashion ourselves as women to a strict ideal of femininity, whether that model of womanhood be feminist or not. In representing the impossibility of merely succeeding to reach an ideal of womanhood, the novel challenges the postfeminist belief that such a “good” feminist ideal is even attainable.

Some scholars insist that Bridget’s voice is weak and ineffective despite the influence of third-wave politics, and as a result is in no way feminist. Alison Case addresses the authenticity of Bridget’s narrative voice in her article “Authenticity, Convention, and *Bridget Jones’s Diary*.” The popularity of Fielding’s novel is often attributed to Bridget’s authenticity, or in other words, the ability for female readers of the novel to relate to the heroine’s trials and insecurities. While the quotes on the back and inside cover from *Glamour*, *Elle*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *The New York Times*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, and *The Washington Post* seem to agree that Bridget’s voice reaches out to female readers—Case believes the relate-ability factor is falsely constructed. Case argues that Bridget’s narrative voice perpetuates the “lack of narrative and material agency we have come to expect from fictional women” (181). Case suggests that in using the journal convention, similar to the tradition of letter writing, the narrative becomes purely informational and does not allow for the self-reflection necessary for character development. The author also argues that the journal format generally denies “the narrator of the interpretive advantage of hindsight with which to shape the narrative” (177). Case’s argument also suggests that if self-reflection and narrative control are not possible, then neither is the consciousness-raising process. How can Bridget enter into the process of consciousness raising if she lacks control over her life story and cannot see the inequities she faces as a woman every day? However, what Case

misses is that Bridget is in fact constantly self-aware, and attempts to change her life narrative on more than one occasion.

Bridget unpacks her neuroses, obsession with physical appearance, and her attempts at crash diets. As evident in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, she recognizes how her insecurities are socially constructed even if she continues to buy into them. In some instances, Bridget attempts to evaluate her life and make changes, successfully taking control of her own narrative. Before Bridget becomes interested in Mark Darcy, she has a love affair with her “fuckwittage” boss (66). First, she idealizes Daniel as a successful, attractive, and intelligent man – ignoring his sexist comments as flirtation. However, during their relationship he continually undervalues her and sexually objectifies her. Bridget becomes fed up with him after he cheats on her and decides she will no longer see him. After her reflection on the destructive nature of this relationship, Bridget decides to go back and edit her new year’s resolution list, adding that she “will not sleep with, or take any notice of, Daniel Cleaver anymore” (74). Not only is Bridget evaluating her own life, but she also changes the life narrative and in doing so modifies the narrative of the novel. Multiple changes in her life follow this entry, including but not limited to her finding a new job. Bridget both engages in narrative control and shows a process of consciousness raising. Bridget even recognizes (thanks to her friend Sharon) that her initial attraction to Daniel, in which she ignores his negative comments and behavior, is informed by the oppressive heteronormative pressure women face to marry: “we are a pioneer generation daring to refuse to compromise in love and relying on our own economic power. In twenty years’ time men won’t even dare start with fuckwittage because we will just laugh in their faces” (18).

Thanks to her community and education, she can recognize Daniel's destructive nature and begin to make changes in her life as Ella does in Bryant's text.

Fielding, through a journal format, also enables the reader to experience that process of consciousness raising as it happens so that the reader can also recognize that Daniel, and men like him, are no good. Bridget successfully breaks the unhealthy relationship with Daniel and occasionally challenges his objectification of her. On their first sexual encounter, Daniel informs Bridget that he only wants to have fun. Not interested in a solely sexual encounter that does not value her as a person, Bridget informs Daniel that he is "cowardly and dysfunctional" and that she is "not interested in emotional fuckwittage" (29). Although I agree with Case that Fielding is using a conventional style of feminine narration, I disagree that Bridget becomes a weak powerless figure as a result. Bridget's journal writing is an attempt to document and explore her quest for perfection. The journal is Bridget's attempt to "take control of her life" through self-reflection and "plotting" a new and more perfect life for herself (178). She argues that Bridget's consistent failure to accomplish her desired goals constructs her as the "lovable" heroine whose failures in a male dominated world make her the stereotypically "feminine" (181). Case suggest that Fielding is perpetuating a view of women as helpless in rewarding Bridget for her failures instead of successes. On the other hand, Bridget is bound to fail not because she is a woman, but because she is attempting to reach an unattainable feminist ideal. It is in her imperfections—the making of an "average" heroine—that Bridget gets some of her goals accomplished. Women like Bridget that think "as a feminist" are not allowed to make the mistakes, because as feminists women should know better than to give into the beauty ideal or the insecurities of heterosexual relationships (47). For example, later in the novel when Bridget believes Mark Darcy has

discarded her now that her mother is a criminal, she triumphantly chants that the “only thing a woman needs in this day and age is herself” (250). However, only a few hours later Bridget stresses over why Darcy has not called her yet. As the feminist reader, we want Bridget to stick to her guns and believe confidently that she can be fulfilled without a man, but are feminists free of insecurities?

Feminists, like all women who participate in a system that has historically undervalued their experiences, face daily pressures at varying degrees. However, akin to Cisneros’s guilt for not being the “virgin,” feminists feel the guilt of not being the superhero woman. Like many women of her generation, Bridget still feels the social pressures of being thin, feminine, and married despite understanding that it is “wrong” to acknowledge these pressures in a feminist informed world. But, in writing about her persistent struggle between feminist-informed ideals and gendered societal pressures without the guilt of “giving in,” Bridget makes it more acceptable not to be the “perfect” feminist. Bridget divulges in her journal the feelings that “should” remain hidden, that it is difficult and extremely stressful to work towards a super woman ideal. In exploring these experiences, she normalizes the struggle of negotiating the conflicting roles of weak woman and super woman perpetuated by the feminist ideal. It may be difficult to imagine Bridget as the woman reaching for a feminist identity, but, while Bridget never self identifies as a feminist, the politics are clearly part of her life. Sharon, one of her best friends, is a self-identified feminist who we are led to believe constantly discusses feminist politics and literature with Bridget. However, she also has other friends who give her advice, including married women who fit the stereotypical archetype of the suburban housewife. The posh married women are all “ex-career-girl mothers” who compete with each other using their

children by comparing IQ scores, “Baby Gap G-strings” and cooking skills (61). These women all give Bridget conflicting advice, and these contradictions define Bridget’s life, because she never knows which advice or plan of action is the best. All of these varying views cause Bridget to face a considerable amount of frustration. For example, despite wanting to be a “woman of substance” who does not care about what men think, she still becomes “exhausted by an entire day of date preparation”:

The whole performance is so highly tuned you only need to neglect it for a few days for the whole thing to go to seed. Sometimes I wonder what I would be like if left to revert to nature—with a full beard and handlebar moustache on each shin, Dennis Healy eyebrows, face a graveyard of dead skin cells, spots erupting, long curly fingernails like Struwwelpeter, blind as a bat and stupid runt of species as no contact lenses, flabby body flobbering around. Ugh, ugh. Is it any wonder girls have no confidence? (27)

While preparing for her date by treating her body like a “farm,” Bridget acknowledges that despite understanding the basic idea that her looks should not matter, her self-confidence still depends on fitting the beauty ideal. As a result, while Bridget is working towards a feminist informed notion of “perfect” womanhood, she also faces the confusion of other models of womanhood, none of which seems to be sufficient due to their strict boundaries.

Bridget can learn about feminism all day, but as long she feels constant gendered social pressure from her family, community, and media outlets, she will continue to face insecurities and exhibit contradictory behavior. The reader also sees this with Sharon, the only self-identified feminist in the text. In one journal entry, Bridget shares that Sharon became annoyed with her because Bridget called when she was about “to call 1471 to see if this guy she has been seeing

had rung while she was out and now my number will be stored instead” (111). Even Sharon experiences lack of confidence when it comes to her relationships with men, even if she would never fully admit it the way Bridget does. Sharon’s moments of uncertainty do not make her any less feminist, but merely show that she is equally affected by social pressures. As long as the women continue to work towards equality, they will continue to navigate these various pressures. By creating a female heroine who constantly grapples with feminism but does not self identify as feminist, Fielding has the reader investigate feminist issues without making them uncomfortable with feminist label at the outset. The conflicting trials that Bridget faces in her constant fight for perfection also enable a consciousness-raising process for the reader. While Bridget will likely always work towards perfection, the reader can recognize the conflict of so many social expectations. Fielding removes women from the binary of good feminist and bad feminist by suggesting that women will face a continual struggle to figure out their lives even with the variety of choices resulting from feminism. Seeing and relating to this effort encourages a consciousness-raising process in the female reader, showing that perfection is not a path to fulfillment or “good” feminism, but a pathway towards continued abuse through the physical and mental exploitation of over commitment.

Cosmopolitan Power: When a Pop Culture Education Takes Over

Bridget’s voracious appetite for consumer goods is part of dealing with her new economic independence and her nineties pop culture education. Daughters of the feminist movement are told that financial independence from men is essential in the fight for equality, but how does this relate to the shopaholic? In the article “Betty Friedan’s Granddaughters: *Cosmo*, Ginger Spice & Inheritance of Whiteness,” Jennifer Harris addresses how *Cosmo* participates in

the commercial marketing of women's independence. She argues that popular magazines like *Cosmopolitan* capitalize on women's rising financial independence by advertising material goods as a way to "articulate their individualism" (198). Harris suggests that women's current buying power is merely an extension of what Betty Friedan addressed as women's early role of purchasing new things for the home, but now attached the responsibility of consumerism to the role of career woman instead of housewife. It is this same commercialization of women's independence and perpetuation of archaic gender roles in a "half feminist" message that fuels complaints about Fielding's novel (200). While the "shopaholic" syndrome of the chick lit heroines seem to conflate buying power with female autonomy, it also exposes the pervasiveness of this belief in our society. As Harris notes, with "2.5 million subscribers" and *Cosmo's* "\$156 million in advertising revenue per year," how could Fielding merely ignore the influence of popular culture outlets like popular magazines (198-99). As a result, in recognizing women's participation and consumption of the media Fielding acknowledges the role of popular culture in the contradictory experience of the third waver instead of merely suggesting that a "powerful" woman could simply avoid mainstream films, books, magazines, music, and advertising.

Fielding's novel addresses the influence of the media by illustrating its prevalence in society through Bridget's pop culture education. Despite working for a publishing company and being well read, Bridget shapes her life from what she has learned through popular films, TV shows, and magazines. As a result, her own consciousness-raising narrative is constructed by her acceptance and resistance to the popular pressures exposed through the media. Paying homage to another Austen redo, Bridget relays her lesson on "boy time" as seen in "the film *Clueless*" (60). When waiting for Daniel to call after their last date, Bridget's friend suggests that she excuse his

behavior using the concept of boy time, arguing that seven days is a “normal cooling-down period in which to gather emotions, before proceeding” (60). While Bridget engages in media education, she does not passively follow mainstream pop culture, but constantly questions the pressures placed on women and men to follow the latest fashions and socially-constructed notions of beauty.

The beauty ideal is one of the issues Bridget grapples with the most in connection to popular media, and in doing so shows the novel’s challenging of postfeminist ideas. As Alison Umminger points out in her essay “Supersizing Bridget Jones: What’s Really Eating the Women in Chick Lit,” Fielding’s novel reacts to Naomi Wolf’s popular text *The Beauty Ideal* written only a few years earlier. Wolf’s theoretical text examines beauty ideals as a systemic form of patriarchal pressure on women. Wolf argues that women in Western culture are experiencing negative self-image because they are giving into the pressure to conform to a socially idealized perception of thin, white, and blonde as beautiful. A political tool, the continued support and adaptation of these ideals perpetuate the objectification of women’s bodies and encourage women to take up less space.²¹ Wolf argues that if women allow themselves to become victim to the beauty ideal they will experience a loss of autonomy as women face the constant looming fear of old age. In response to Wolf’s claims, Umminger suggest that Fielding’s novel reacts to Wolf’s seminal text, playing with “Wolf’s laundry list of obsessions as they lurked in the dark corners of the single, working woman’s mind” (239). Instead of constructing “bad” feminists as the defenseless victims of the beauty ideal and “good” feminists as the ones who completely resist, Fielding develops an interesting heroine who deals with negative self-image every day:

²¹ By the phrase “taking up less space,” I am referring to feminist discussions of women being encouraged to be silent and to take up less physical room in comparison to men by literally shrinking in size.

I guzzled [chocolates] by the light of the Christmas tree, together with a couple of mince pies, the last of the Christmas cake and some Stilton...Now, though, I feel ashamed and repulsive. I can actually feel the fat splurging out from my body. Never mind. Sometimes you have to sink to a nadir of toxic fat envelopment in order to emerge, phoenix-like, from the chemical wasteland as a purged and beautiful Michelle Pfeiffer figure.

Tomorrow new Spartan health and beauty regime will begin. (16)

While Bridget talks about her weight and admits her insecurities, she never stops having feelings of insecurity. In fact, she often uses other media references to justify her actions. For example, in the quote above Bridget suggests that her weight gain is not a big deal. There will always be another diet Bridget can start each day that fits what she wants to eat. As a result, while the media outlets that perpetuate flawed beauty ideals influence Bridget, she attempts to play with these media outlets. In showing the hypocrisy of all these conflicting messages while simultaneously participating in the beauty rituals, Bridget enters into a third-waver discussion about the media. Although women may not be able to entirely escape popular culture, third wave activists can recognize the conflicting messages as a first step to constructing new media and developing a more critical eye.

She Don't Need No Diamond Ring: Moving Away from the Marriage Plot

Bridget persistently preps for marriage, struggling with the expectations of marriage throughout the text. From the beginning of the novel, Bridget becomes angered at her family's and friend's expectations of marriage. In fact, Bridget only becomes interested in Mark Darcy when she begins to get to know him away from the family pressure. Bridget first meets Mark when her mother is playing match-maker at a New Year's party where Bridget becomes annoyed

and wonders why her mother “didn’t just come out with it and say, ‘Darling, do shag Mark Darcy over the turkey curry, won’t you? He’s *very* rich’” (11). Bridget refuses to give in to her mother’s attempt to control her life, insisting on writing her own narrative. While we know as readers that as part of a modern rewrite of Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* Bridget will have a romantic attachment to Darcy, she nonetheless controls the terms on which their romance will happen. She decides when to give her number to Darcy and intentionally refuses to tell her mother. Even as Bridget takes control of her romantic life, she still worries that this relationship will bring continued pressure from her family, wondering if they will force Darcy and her “to do tricks for the assembled company, like rubbing noses or having sex in front of them, like a pair of performing seals” (207). Despite making the decision to date Darcy, she refuses to be manipulated by those uncomfortable with her unmarried and childless status. While Bridget consistently fights the expectations of marriage, Fielding shows that the social pressure of marriage also affects Bridget:

On top of everything, only two weeks to go until birthday, when will have to face up to the fact that another entire year has gone by, during which everyone else except me has mutated into Smug Married, having children plop, plop, plop, left right center and making hundreds of thousands of pounds and inroads into very hub of establishment, while I career rudderless and boyfriendless through dysfunctional relationships and professional stagnation. (68)

Bridget experiences the pressure of being the ideal woman, wondering if maybe she should be married and “successful” as she approaches her birthday. In the same way that Sharon can have “unfeminist” insecurities, Bridget occasionally mentally gives in to the social pressure of

heterosexual marriage by fantasizing if she would have a better life as a married woman. Not only does this continue to break down the idea of being the good feminist, because we cannot entirely be immune to social pressures, but Bridget's occasional thoughts of marriage make Fielding's rewrite of the Austen marriage even more powerful.

Despite thinking of marriage, Bridget consistently denies and questions the institution of marriage. Not only does Bridget refuse to consider dating Mark until she stops feeling pressured, but she continues to question heteronormative pressures by pointing to the attitudes of the "smug marrieds" (35). She becomes annoyed with her married friends who seem to invite her over to dinner only to trick her into blind dates. Bridget recognizes that her "singleton" status makes her married friends who have adhered to normative social convention by choosing to marry, uncomfortable. She unpacks their insecurities, wondering if they are so immersed in their relationships that they have forgotten how to exist as individuals. The "marrieds" also put on airs of superiority, which Bridget suggests indicates "they really do want to patronize us and make us feel like failed human beings. Or maybe they are in such a sexual rut" (35). In assuming that her happiness lies in the diamond ring, her immediate community undervalues her as an individual woman. In choosing when she will be with Mark Darcy and if she will get married, Bridget insists on recognition beyond the "quality" man she can find.

Bridget understands that she makes both her family and married friends uncomfortable with her choice to remain single. However, Bridget continues to be part of a smaller community of social outcasts or others. Despite the influence of the media and the social pressures that feed her insecurities, Bridget often embraces her othered status and stands up for herself. Early in the novel, Bridget shares a theory that Tom, her gay male friend, has about their friendship. He

insists that single women in their thirties, like Bridget, can relate to homosexual men because both are “accustomed to disappointing their parents and being treated as freaks by society” (24). Tom, Bridget, and Sharon all share a bond due to their othered status: Tom as a homosexual male, Bridget as an unmarried woman, and Sharon as a self-identified feminist. In embracing her othered status, despite the pressures she admits feeling throughout the text; Bridget shows how she is being subversive from within the master social narrative.

The heroine disrupts the social narrative in illustrating the dissatisfaction and apprehensions of the married couples in her community. Fielding’s unsettling of the account enables a consciousness raising in which both Bridget and the reader realize that infidelity, boredom, and divorce can follow the storybook romances. The recognition of the unhappiness and falsehoods in both her parents and friends “fantasy” marriages, Bridget slowly begins to work her way towards making changes in her life unrelated to romance such as finding a new job. The consciousness-raising process is possible though because Fielding is rewriting the ending of Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, and in doing so is leaving Bridget’s life open to other possibilities. Fielding maintains most of Austen’s story line in her retelling, including Darcy saving the family name at the last moment, but chooses to discard the marriage ending. In having Bridget control her own romantic narrative and challenging the passive damsel in distress storybook role, Fielding encourages a consciousness raising in which the reader will question the institution of marriage.

Like Grand’s novel *The Heavenly Twins* and Bryant’s *Ella Price’s Journal*, the novel’s ending questions the patriarchal institutions and gendered social expectations. Similarly, Fielding’s heroine does not get the happy ending she imagined for herself. Despite avoiding

marriage, Bridget still becomes dependent on and indebted to Darcy. Throughout the novel, Bridget consistently expresses a desire for “poised” autonomy. She wants to feel powerful and self sufficient, but in the end it is Darcy who brings her mother back to be reunited with her father. The novel also ends not with Bridget’s new relationship with Darcy, but with a list showing her “years progress” (271). While she is excited about her relationship with Darcy, Bridget acknowledges that her year was marked with many failures on her long list of goals. Bridget’s inability to fulfill any of her goals beyond having the “nice boyfriend” illustrates the continued secondary status of women in society (271). Darcy has a successful career, embodies the attributes of the “model” citizen, and successfully gains the interest of the novel’s heroine. Bridget on the other hand only gains a relationship that encourages dependence and carries the weight of the marriage pressures she dislikes. Bridget may not get everything she dreams of, but the novel’s questioning of ideal womanhood, media influence, and marriage challenge the inequities and oppressive institutions that still exist. In doing so, Fielding’s novel challenges the postfeminist belief that feminists should stop focusing their analysis on oppression. Bridget’s lack of happy ending makes clear that there is no clear feminist infrastructure in place and that feminists must continue working.

While Fielding’s novel may not be an overtly feminist manifesto, the novel fits the model of the soft consciousness-raising novel. Fielding challenges the larger institutions that perpetuate women’s secondary status in society while avoiding the excessive postfeminist representations of good feminist versus victim feminist. In working from an informed feminist position instead of overtly speaking about feminism, Fielding reaches the “I am not a feminist, but...” generation while simultaneously challenging second-wave feminist views with third-wave arguments.

Through Bridget's soft consciousness-raising progression documented in her journal, Fielding presents a realistic heroine who breaks ideals of perfect womanhood and engages readers with third-wave issues.

CONCLUSION: UNDERGROUND FEMINISM IN LITERATURE: SO WHAT NOW?

To be truly visionary we have to root our imagination in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality. A primary strength of contemporary feminism has been the way it has changed shape and direction. Movements for social justice that hold on to outmoded ways of thinking and acting tend to fail.

bell hooks

Unlike the “how to” feminist texts by Seely and Valenti discussed in the introduction, the soft consciousness-raising novels by Grand, Bryant, and Fielding provide the initial path to feminism without placing strict demands on the female reader to fit a limited archetype of the perfect women’s rights activist. While these novels do not necessarily unpack the negative myths of feminism, the authors create “flawed” heroines who address women’s issues and engage in a textual discussion that facilitates the recruitment of women to the movement. Evadne, Angelica, Ella, and Bridget’s personal narratives make women’s experiences the center of the text, and in doing so, encourage the reader to value women’s experiences and voices. By un-aligning with the feminist label, the three novels encourage a process of consciousness-raising in female audiences that can translate into further feminist study and activism born from a basic understanding of feminism. However, if these authors are disidentifying with the feminist label, how do we know the texts are feminist?

Risk is involved in classifying non-identified feminist texts as such. As I note in the introduction, feminists become so through experience and study. Being a woman does not grant the automatic privilege of being a feminist, because just as men can be feminists so can women

be sexist. The nature of feminist authorship is briefly addressed by Toril Moi in the article “Feminist, Female, Feminine.” Moi argues that feminism primarily aims to represent women, but that “being *female* does not necessarily guarantee a feminist approach” and that not all “women writers exemplify anti-patriarchal commitment” (246). As a result, it is essential to note that the novels discussed in this thesis do not qualify for underground feminism simply for not using the word feminist in relation to the heroines, but because these texts present themes and enter into a political discourse that directly connects to the feminist conversations of their decades. While each novel refrains from using political rhetoric in connection to the heroines, each book exhibits an understanding of or dedication to feminist politics. For example, in Sarah Grand’s novel *The Heavenly Twins*, Grand makes an appeal for early girlhood education. Grand offers three different heroines with varied levels of education. Edith, the heroine with the least amount of education, contracts syphilis from her husband and dies, whereas Angelica, with the highest level of education, leads a more comfortable life in which she becomes active in the women’s movement. While none of the heroines gains the “ideal” life, as I discussed in my first chapter, the reader is presented with a better lifestyle for women in connection to advanced education. In connecting girlhood instruction to a higher standard of living later in life for women, Grand shows a dedication to the women’s rights movement by arguing for macro level systemic reforms that would offer women more equal opportunities in education.

Bryant’s novel *Ella Price’s Journal* presents the same no-label feminism. While Bryant never makes use of the word feminism, the novel shows a dedication to feminist politics and theory. Bryant’s resistance to Freudian ideas is one example of the text’s feminist undertones. In my second chapter, I cite how Dan attempts to use Freudian arguments to rationalize a birthing

dream Ella recounts, but she discounts Dan's explanation by insisting that children are a real responsibility instead of an expression of love for men. Reminiscent of arguments by Cixous and Irigaray, Bryant challenges sexist Freudian views that claim it is natural for women to have children in order to fill the void of the phallus. Bryant also alludes to Virginia Woolf's arguments on the need for women's independence. Ella fantasizes for a personal space where she can escape the constraints of marriage and motherhood in order to act on her personal ambitions freely. Although the novel makes no use of feminist rhetoric, it does explicitly use feminist ideology and theory.

However, I would also like to note that being critical of feminism does not necessarily mean that one is inherently anti-feminist either. As Nancy Miller notes in "Feminist Confessions: The Last Degrees are the Hardest," feminism must continue to change in order to represent each era of feminism. As a movement, feminism must "be self-critical in order to evolve" with the intent of "offer[ing] an occasion to reexamine the assumptions of its operations" (102). To be critical of feminist theory from within (working as a catalyst to inform the larger movement) can represent a dedication to continuing the fight against oppression, not necessarily an attempt to abandon feminism altogether. As I illustrate with my analysis of Fielding's novel *Bridget Jones's Diary*, questioning the movement does not represent a rejection of feminist ideas but an attempt to strengthen the core ideas. For example, in questioning the possibility of a feminist ideal, Fielding's novel illustrates the conflict of attempting to reach a state of perfection. Because Bridget attempts to complete all her goals without error, she rarely gets close to accomplishing any of the tasks. Bridget often overextends herself, demonstrating the oppression that an ideal of womanhood can produce. In questioning this quest for perfection, the novel initiates a discussion

on whether more choices should directly correlate with more responsibilities. While the second wave fought for more choices, it does not follow that subsequent generations must be responsible for taking on all of the possibilities. Rather, Fielding's novel is critical of the feminist ideal in order to show how it can perpetuate the oppression women face at having to fit multiple social roles.

While the texts I discuss are representative of specific feminist political periods, the discussion of underground feminism in consciousness-raising novels extends to other novels like *The Color Purple* and *The Secret Lives of Bees*. Many authors have understood the importance of recognizing the complexities of women's experiences. However, beyond placing the stories of women at the center of literary discourse, these texts and others like them are building feminist friendly media that are accessible to a wide audience. I am not only referring to the disidentification with the feminist label, but to the lack of academic language in the novels. In *Feminism is for Everyone*, bell hooks argues in favor of spreading feminist theory beyond academia by tapping into popular outlets like novels, television, and radio that can reach wider audiences:

Today in academic circles much of the most celebrated feminist theory is written in a sophisticated jargon that only the well-educated can read. Most people in our society do not have a basic understanding of feminism; they cannot acquire that understanding from a wealth of diverse material... We must create it if we are to rebuild [a] feminist movement that is truly for everyone. (112)

While hooks is describing a third wave need, the use of mainstream media extends to each wave of feminism. Bryant's novel illustrates this in the use of colloquial language and in referring to

various novels and pop-culture images such as Barbie and Doris Day. These images are not simply passing occurrences, but used as a narrative catalyst for clarity and to make connections with the reader. For example, the mention of Doris Day works to show how Ella's interests are changing as she undergoes the consciousness-raising process:

We went to a movie tonight, another Doris Day thing. She's Joe's favorite. After it was over, I said, "God, I thought it would never end."

Joe looked at me as if I'd slapped him. "I always thought you liked Doris Day."

"So did I. But I don't"

He was quiet for a while and then said, "You don't like a lot of things anymore." I started to tell him about the film series at the college, but when I mentioned a couple of movies he said, "I don't understand French." (80)

Popular culture is employed intentionally to include the reader by correlating a well-known actress with the evolution of the heroine. Readers of the period are likely aware of the actress and her films, and as a result can relate to how Ella's interests adjust. Representations of the media are also very prevalent in Fielding's novel. However, unlike the other two novels, Bridget makes major decisions in her life based on popular magazines and films. Her eating habits are shaped by popular diets; she takes dating advice from films like *Clueless*, uses self-help books to improve her attitude, and attempts to mold her own physical appearance to fit with advertisements. In these instances, the media is used not only to illustrate the contradictions in Bridget's life as I discuss in my chapter, but also to open a feminist dialogue in conjunction with the media. The novel popularizes feminist ideas by using timely examples the reader can relate

to, thus removing it from the purely academic realm. If feminism continues to be explored solely in scholarly terms, we have no hope to gain power as a movement. Privileging academia results in the exclusion of women who may not have access to a college education. Using popular culture provides an opportunity to reach the readers who may not know of Irigaray or hooks and still elicit a feminist dialogue without the requirement of a college degree.

The use of relatable language and images in the novels not only enable further connections with readers, but illustrates how to take abstract feminist concepts and simplify them for audiences unfamiliar with feminist theory. In reading the novels, activists can acquire the tools to have more subtle conversations about how feminism relates to everyday life. In entering into a textual dialogue that disidentifies with the feminist label, feminist activists can better identify with underground feminism and replicate these same tools when working with other women, especially very young women.

Although feminist theory is accessible to older women in the movement, it is unlikely to find a middle school girl reading Chandra Mohanty or Judith Butler. While there are children's authors who show a dedication to teaching feminism via literature, such as Tamora Pierce, these are unfortunately few in numbers and often not as popular as the *Twilight* or *Harry Potter* books.²² As a result, in reading consciousness-raising novels that employ underground feminist tactics, mothers, sisters, aunts, and mentors can learn the tools necessary to teach even the youngest of generations about feminism. An example of this process can be seen in the Young Women's Leaders Program, a girls mentoring program adapted by the UCF Women's Studies

²² With the onslaught of adolescent fiction (books such as *Gossip Girls* encouraging heteronormativity and "princess" superficiality) Peirce provides an entire series of novels that empower girls and put feminist issues at the center of discourse. Pierce's texts are girl-centered fantasy novels in which female heroines overcome great adversity.

Program from the program at the University of Virginia (Tweed). The Little Sisters of YWLP are seventh-grade girls in the middle who receive little individual attention. The middle school girls are often average students, managing to “get by,” but who are not fulfilling their potential academically, socially, or behaviorally. Designed to help girls negotiate tough choices and to encourage them to think for themselves, YWLP provides resources and critical thinking tools for the Little Sisters to excel. By promoting a non-socially aggressive environment and by providing positive role models, YWLP supplies additional encouragement and resources that Little Sisters need to become women leaders who give back to their local communities. As I discussed in the introduction, it was my involvement with this program that I first considered the benefits of covert feminist activism. Analyzing YWLP with my discussion of the novels in mind, I will consider the same questions I posed with the soft consciousness-raising novels.

Just as the novels reach readers who would otherwise be inaccessible with the use of political rhetoric, so does YWLP reach a larger community of women and girls by disidentifying with the feminist label. Working within the public school system and maintaining relationships with these schools is possible thanks to our non-political affiliation, specifically by disidentifying with the feminist label. As these schools are in a highly politically conservative area, any mention of progressive politics could end our program indefinitely. As a result, the facilitators and working program coordinator extensively prep Big Sisters and meet every week to decide how to address sensitive topics with Little and Big sisters. The facilitators (prior Big Sisters that are promoted in the program) are two group leaders per school that are responsible for the lessons. Unlike the Big Sisters, group facilitators do not mentor a particular Little sister, but make themselves available to all Little and Big sisters. The facilitators, most of whom are self-

proclaimed feminists or Women Studies minors, are the students primarily responsible for discussing feminist topics.

The ability for the facilitators to discuss feminism with the group occurs under the major goal of the program, girls' leadership. The main YWLP objective is to find each of the girl's leadership strengths and help give them tools to maintain and develop those skills. During the semester, YWLP facilitators explore what women and girls do as leaders, considering what helps and holds girls back from using their own voices. The sessions meet for one hour and a half after school every other Wednesday. Each meeting includes various elements, as discussed in the frequently asked questions section of the website: "1) an introduction to the day's special topic by the group facilitator; 2) time for each Big/Little Sister pair to discuss the topic one-on-one; and 3) group time to talk about and participate in creative interactive activities" (Tweed). This structure enables the mentors to talk with "Little Sisters" about important issues, such as the nature of leadership, friendship, self-sufficiency, body awareness, managing pressure, making connections, and looking ahead. The variations between group and pair work accounts for various learning styles, helping the girls understand that each person has different leadership styles and ways of learning. The development of girls' leadership through confidence raising and critical thinking exercises allows YWLP members to discuss feminist ideology, relating it constantly to leadership. The discussion of leadership in YWLP is similar to the dialogue of feminism in the novels. YWLP facilitators take the abstract notion of girl's leadership (which facilitators define around feminist theory) and bring it down to simpler terms that the middle school girls can understand. An example of this can be seen in Bryant's discussion of representations of women's issues in education. Ella explains the need to recognize women in

scholarship step-by-step, making the inclusion of women seem logical. Instead of discussing this under a theoretical term such as herstory, Bryant takes the time to explain to the reader on non-abstract terms. This is exactly the same tactic employed in the program. By moving the conversation to focus on leadership and not the term feminism, YWLP has been able to teach girls feminist principles without compromising the programs relationship with the middle schools. The step-by-step explanation, conducted with fun exercises and challenging group discussion, initiates a deeper level of processing for both mentors and the middle school girls. Not only do facilitators need to have a strong grasp of feminism for the figurative breakdown, but little sisters interact critically with feminist ideas that may make them more open to feminist theory in the future. In discussing women's issues and using the lessons learned from those conversations daily, the girls will be more likely to interact with feminist organizations and do feminism in the future.

The lessons also incorporate feminist pedagogical methods, including tools from Sherry Linkon's essay "From Experience to Analysis: Using Student Discomfort in the Feminist Classroom." In the essay, Linkon discusses the need to vary the setup of the classroom to break common teacher-student hierarchies. According to Linkon, general classroom structures "recreate and reinforce long-standing cultural assumptions about the nature of knowledge, persistently sending the message that teachers 'own' knowledge and students 'receive' it" (2). Linkon encourages questions and answer sessions, roundtable student discussion, and varying the seating arrangement in the classroom. Often facing resistance from students, Linkon exposes the difficulties of both teaching feminist material and using related pedagogical methodology. Students often fear and dislike the changes because they deviate from the typical student/teacher

hierarchy, disrupting a student's sense of comfort in the classroom. Student resistance, according to Linkon, exists beyond students discomfort with feminist ideology, but stems from students ability to claim "power *in traditional classrooms*" (57). Once the students have learned the rules of educational hierarchy, "they resist *feminist pedagogical techniques in part* because such practices remove those small liberties" (57). Feminists are the students in the YWLP classroom who are uncomfortable with the lack of feminist rhetoric. Having grown accustomed to a new educational hierarchy in which feminist rhetoric is acceptable, the students become nervous now that the rules changed again. Linkon insists that discomfort enables students to think outside of the box, changes that can exist in this case by removing the f-word from discussion.

An example of feminist activism without labels, Linkon's techniques have been permanently included into Facilitator training and YWLP lessons. When the term feminism is absent, a feminist pedagogical methodology can reproduce the benefits of activism on the behalf of women and girls. For example, during the first week of meetings, we have the YWLP group, made up of both Little and Big Sisters, generate ten ground rules for the group. Facilitators ask the Big and Little sisters what rules they want included on the list. The activity often produces resistance and occasionally hostility from the Little Sisters. The girls often provide ideas instead of rules, hoping that a Facilitator or Big Sister will make it into a rule thus preserving the classroom hierarchy. While facilitators help Little Sisters develop their ideas, the girls soon become frustrated upon realizing that the rules require their full commitment and involvement. While the girls often face anxiety conducting this first activity, by encouraging the girls to create their own rules, YWLP breaks the hierarchy of the teacher (facilitator).

The activity also encourages independent thinking that, as Linkon suggests, initially invites resistance. As the semester progresses, the Little Sisters often inform us that teachers rarely ask for student opinions. On the contrary, Little Sisters often feel their ideas have no value in the classroom. For example, one Little Sister informed us that her science teacher rarely called on girl students, because according to him girls cannot do science. Decades later, our girl's complaints are reminiscent of Evadne's father's assertions on women's intellectual weakness in Grand's novel (16). The resistance, often shown in social aggression like gossiping, then stems primarily from student's lack of confidence. Just as Evadne creates her own small forms of resistance, such as learning science and math because her father said women could not do so efficiently, so do our middle school girls need outlets of resistance beyond social aggression. In encouraging the girls to generate their own rules and discussion topics, YWLP provides a girl centered space, filling the gaps created from gendered discrimination. By using feminist pedagogy, YWLP can disrupt the oppressive hierarchies and gendered oppression while still working within the limitations of the middle school system.

In enacting underground feminism, YWLP also avoids the separatism incumbent in strict definitions of feminism. As a result, YWLP attracts a wide variety of female college students from many different fields. Few of our Big Sister's are familiar with feminism and are introduced to feminism for the first time in YWLP. While the program does not publicize itself as feminist, like with the consciousness-raising novels, the college members often ask about feminism once in the program. For example, although political language cannot be used with the Little Sisters, a minimal amount of political conversation can occur in the Big Sister meetings. At the beginning of the semester, YWLP conducts a training session that includes activities on

cultural sensitivity, such as the stereotypes activity. Each Big Sister receives a stereotype card on their back, only able to see the stereotypes on other students' cards and not their own.

Participants are asked to interact with each other by reacting to the card with what they believe are the stereotypes of that archetype. There are 30 stereotypes, including pregnant girl, lesbian, band geek, Muslim girl, well-developed girl, feminist, white trash, reservation Indian, and ghetto girl. The stereotype activity enables a discussion about various stereotypes that forces participants to acknowledge their own cultural biases. The feminist stereotype, discussed in depth every semester, facilitates a discussion about feminism. The trainees rarely acknowledge that the myths of feminism are actually stereotypes, wanting to prove that these stereotypes have real foundations. As a result, each training day includes time for breaking down the myths of feminism. In doing so, YWLP conducts the same myth-breaking procedures as the how-to feminist text without pressuring YWLP members to become feminists by labeling the program. Although limited in its use of feminist rhetoric like Fielding's novel, YWLP uses underground feminism to introduce the theory as an option to larger communities of women. If YWLP advertises itself as a feminist organization, the students who firmly believed in the stereotypes of feminism would have been unlikely to participate in the program and therefore would have never broken down the f-word. Thus, feminist ideals, which are arguably more important for the movement than the label alone, would fail to proliferate.

While YWLP participates in the myth breaking of the f-word in the college setting, feminist rhetoric is never present again. In the weekly lessons, activities about women's leadership place women's issues at the center of discourse. For example, with both the Big and Little sisters, YWLP conducts an activity titled "The Ten Ways Women Lead." The activity

encourages women and girls to think about how they, their community, and women globally lead at the micro, meso, and macro levels. First, girls are asked to think of leadership at a micro level, enabling them to understand themselves as leaders. When our Little Sisters first talk about leadership, they project a political understanding of leadership, firmly believing that leaders are only people in government. YWLP facilitators strive to show Little Sisters that there are various ways to lead, such as completing homework, working in a student organization, helping take care of siblings, and even helping parents around the house. Like the heroines of all three novels, while they are not at the political forefront, their stories and modes of resistance enable local activism that can result in global change. In constructing leadership as the “little” everyday acts, leadership becomes less abstract and more accessible.

Within the activity on women’s leadership, facilitators also often have to break down stereotypes about women’s leadership. For example, a Little sister, when asked about how she felt women led, replied that women lead by being “lady-like.” Upon hearing this, part of the lesson time was spent deconstructing the gendered notion of the lady. Little sisters were asked critical thinking questions about what they believed lady-like meant. The facilitator, through a series of questions, connected the notion of lady-like to systems of privilege between boys and girls, facilitating recognition of how these gendered norms construct gender and pressure women and girls. Little Sisters often, through these discussions, are able to recognize the inequities of gendered oppression, telling their Big sisters that they are tired of the expectations of being girly and want to dress comfortably. By breaking down gendered stereotypes without the use of feminist rhetoric, YWLP’s use of underground feminism facilitates a larger understanding of gendered oppression within the girl community. Again, by framing these activities around a

feminist informed discussion of girls' leadership, YWLP can practice underground feminism simply through empowering younger women by pledging a responsibility to feminist activism and not feminist semantics.

Not only does YWLP teach college women and middle school girls feminist ideology, but it teaches self-proclaimed feminists to conduct activism in a non-feminist friendly environment. Despite YWLP's history of self-proclaimed feminists leaving the program due to the lack of feminist rhetoric, YWLP has also been successful in teaching activists how to work in non-political communities. YWLP facilitators attempt to teach women how feminist activism will require them to work in communities where feminism is taboo. Oftentimes, our self-proclaimed feminist Big Sisters experience difficulty adjusting to an environment where they practice feminism without rhetoric. For example, one of our most currently successful Big Sisters, when initially beginning the program, was angered at the inability to talk about sex education or feminism.²³ Through various responsibilities in the program, such as practicing parent sensitivity, the Big Sister was able to disidentify with the term feminism while consistently practicing feminist ideology and methodology with her Little Sister. By the end of the semester, this Big Sister, never using feminist rhetoric, developed a relationship with her Little Sister, provided wider opportunities for her, successfully helped her Little Sister return to her normal grade level, and helped her understand feminist theoretical concepts.²⁴

This Big Sister, despite almost leaving the program due to the constraints on language, continues to be active with the program. Feminist Big Sisters have later confessed how using

²³ Orange County is an abstinence only school district in Orlando.

²⁴ This particular Little Sister, because of grades and age, was significantly held back in school. Lacking confidence and embarrassed by her academic level, the Big Sister worked on helping her confidence level and tutoring her on the weekends. By the end of the school year, the Big Sister helped her little sister improve her grades radically allowing her to move back up a grade.

theory in YWLP helped them take feminism to other non-political communities when they were otherwise unable to do so. By framing their discussions around womens' leadership with family, friends, colleagues, neighbors, and other organizations, they have been able to initiate conversations about feminism without the negative confrontation often produced by use of the rhetoric. By using underground feminism as in the novels discussed in the thesis, YWLP members have been able to discuss feminism in various communities, inciting radical change outside of typical feminist methodology. In disidentifying with the feminist label as underground feminists, Big Sisters became more open-minded with non-feminist Big Sisters, often entering into political discussions without either party losing their temper, creating an inclusive community of women that values the opinions and efforts of all its members.

YWLP, like the soft consciousness-raising novel, facilitates an introduction to feminist politics. The subtle activism of soft consciousness-raising novels and YWLP are capable of replication as the initial "in" to feminism. Even hooks admits that her "conversion to feminist politics had occurred long before" she entered feminist classrooms (21). In being open to feminist ideas already, she was more likely later to accept feminist theory in the classroom. In order to get to a point where women activists no longer need to disidentify with the feminist label, we first need to create and nurture spaces in which women have already comfortably interacted with feminism. YWLP creates a space where girls can discuss feminism so that one day when they become exposed to feminism they will already understand the theory and likely agree with the core politics. Similarly, with the soft consciousness-raising novel, readers once familiar with feminist ideas will likely be more open to discussing feminist ideas at the academic or activist level. More importantly, however, the reading of these novels can help both self-

identified and non-identified feminists participate in more complex discussions of feminism. Having been exposed to feminist ideas in novels and music myself before I learned about feminism in college, I was much more understanding and open to listening to the views of women who felt anxious about the feminist label. It was in being exposed to feminist ideology before I was introduced to the rhetoric that made me much more accepting of the ideas. Furthermore, it helped me later in YWLP when I was confronted with an environment in which I could no longer use the rhetoric. As a feminist activist, I have often worked with other feminist activists who become socially aggressive with women who are afraid to identify as a feminist. This is simply not enough. How can we expect women to join the movement if we are unaccepting of their feelings and provide a limited model of feminist activism? If, as a movement, we are willing to occasionally let go of the label and develop a more empathetic understanding of the “I am not a feminist, but...” generation, feminist activists can enable a radical conversion in the unwilling would be women’s rights activist and in doing so enter into a much more intricate dialogue as self-identified feminists.

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