

December 5, 2000
hooks, chaps. 6, 9, 11, 12

Announcements:

Shame Hi O-3
Q: What's so feminist about hooks?
If she's concerned w/ the (re)production of gender, is this feminist?

When they finish evaluations, have them write out a reply to this

I. Hooks on power

A. **Q:** Is hooks' notion of power compatible with Foucault's, or is it a "sovereign" model of power that Foucault would critique? [this is a good in-class writing assignment: give them 10 minutes to write out answers, then discuss]

1. It seems repressive, e.g. talk about how everything "serves the ruling class," sexist ideology "brainwashes" men, etc. (See, e.g. 73-75, 121).

2. But she does acknowledge the productive role power can play.

B. **Hooks criticizes the notion that power is only negative.**

C. For her, power can also be "creative and life-affirming," too. (84) Power is not only repressive, it is also about acting "with strength and ability." 88-89

D. **Q:** If women had all the power in the world, would they exercise it differently?

1. **Q:** How does hooks answer this question?

2. Women aren't inherently more "nurturing" or "peaceful" than men. Nor are they taught a different value system, they are merely assigned different roles in the same system. Change the roles and in the absence of a movement to end oppression women would likely use their power just as badly as men have. 85-86

E. The goal of her conception of power is to **encourage us to see women as active political beings**, even when they are subordinate to those with power over them. **Those at the bottom of society are never completely powerless.** 127/128

1. **Seeing women as "nurturing" and therefore "naturally" against war and violence depoliticizes women.** It makes it seem as though their ideas and activities are determined by their biology rather than by their conscious political choices. It reproduces the culture/nature dichotomy all over again, even if this time it exalts women (as the "peacemakers") rather than men (as the "warmakers"). 128-29 / 129

II. Sexual liberation (chapter 11)

A. She is critical of sexual liberation as it is often constructed by feminists because it simply reinforces old sex roles (even if it places women in them) rather than produces "new sexual paradigms" and new sexual roles.

B. Present forms of sexuality are just as limiting for men as they are for women, although they don't oppress women like they do women. 149

C. She opposes compulsory heterosexuality, the dismissal of heterosexual sex choices, compulsory sexuality (i.e. derision of abstinence), and argues for lesbian liberation.

III. Feminism is revolutionary

A. Q: Is hooks a Marxist?

1. How is she similar to Marx? Different?

B. Feminism is not about women gaining equality with men; it's about ending all forms of oppression. But ending oppression in society would radically remake society; it would be revolutionary. Therefore, feminism is not just about achieving various legal reforms, **it is about transforming the lives of men and women for the better. Feminism is revolutionary.** "feminist movement to end sexist oppression can be successful only if we are committed to revolution, to the establishment of a new social order." (159)

1. Q: What does hooks mean by revolution? Is she for the sort of revolution Marx predicted and advocated?

2. No. She says on page 159 that "**new social orders are established gradually.**" The key to social transformation is through a campaign of political education that can build the "mass awareness" needed to build feminist movement.

3. This education must be based upon a "liberatory ideology" that comes not from the center of society, but from the people at the margins. 161

4. Q: Is she right or is she naive? Must revolution be a gradual, progressive affair that emphasizes "cultural transformation" nowadays, given the power and reach of the modern state, or will it likely be a violent and sudden assault on the powers that be, as Marx anticipated? (E.g. 163)

IV. Radical and socialist feminism

[next time, use Echols' *Daring to Be BAD* more carefully and systematically. Too much of this whole lecture is simplistic.]

A. History and activism

1. Another group of feminists were very critical of Friedan and of liberal feminism in general. These women were generally young students who made up the **New Left** in the 1960s. [Explain old and new lefts. SNCC, SDS, CORE, BPP, radical feminist organizations, etc.] These were women who were active in the New Left because they were socialists, radicals, revolutionaries, or grass roots activists, but they were fed up with the sexism of most New Left organizations and men. Here was the New Left, anti-capitalist, the first majority-white mass movement to take white supremacy seriously, very pro-direct democracy, and all the leaders were men while all the women were doing the typing!

2. **Two distinct positions** emerged from the feminism of the New Left that we'll discuss, socialist and radical feminism.

B. Socialist feminism

1. Socialist feminism argues that women's oppressed status is a product of capitalism. It's not that women's oppression hasn't existed before capitalism—it definitely has—but capitalism has intensified women's oppression and created new forms of women's oppression, especially the nuclear family, which is more or less a product of capitalism.

2. Women's oppression is directly linked to capitalism and the existence of social classes. Under capitalism, however, women also suffer special forms of oppression that men are not subject to, especially the creation of the nuclear family and women's position in it.

a. The nuclear family oppresses women because monogamous marriage under capitalism is essentially a contract, and an unfair one at that, in which the woman agrees to take care of the home and the children in exchange for economic support. By taking on these activities, this allows the husband to focus his time on accumulating capital. It is sometimes called a **patriarchal family** [explain]. The father is the supreme ruler of the family; his wife and his children are exclusively his own, and therefore he can pass on his wealth to his exclusive heirs.

b. Capitalism also oppresses women because it makes women a cheap labor supply, thus depressing wages all around; increases the demand for consumer goods (kitchen, household, cosmetic, fashion, etc.); and allocates to women those jobs that are socially necessary but that are not profitable (food preparation, child raising, care for the sick and old, domestic maintenance, etc.).

3. Because class oppression and male supremacy are so linked, women's liberation depends on the abolition of private property. Feminism, then, must be part of a broader movement for socialism.

4. Socialist feminism wants to **get rid of the public/private distinctions** altogether. The distinction is a product of alienated society, splitting ourselves and our activities falsely into two categories.

C. Radical feminism

1. Radical feminism also has a critique of capitalism. However, it does not agree that women's subordination is a byproduct of capitalism. Instead, radical feminists argue that **male supremacy** is related to but also autonomous from capitalism. It is another grand structure, like class, that oppresses women.

2. **Women's liberation requires an autonomous women's movement.** You can't just boil sexism down into class oppression, nor can you boil down the struggle for women's liberation to the struggle for socialism. After all, the New Left was a socialist movement and it was very sexist; same with just about every Left movement—they are no less sexist than the rest of the world they're trying to change! Abolishing capitalism does not guarantee that male supremacy will be abolished as well. Furthermore, it also argues that the Left has to broaden its own analysis of society to properly account for women's subordination.

3. Radical feminism argues that women constitute an oppressed class, or a **sex-class**. Women have been oppressed throughout history because of their sex: they are the ones who bear children, so the job of raising them fell to them as well. The role of childbearers and childraisers, being imposed on women, has had severe psychological effects on individuals, defining what is "male" and what is "female." Power relationships in this society are based on female dependence and the psychology of dependence. [correct?] So for radical feminists, "the crucial problem of modern life is **sexuality**." (Firestone in Jaggar 14) Once the sex-class system is abolished, then humans will be free.

4. Eventually, radical feminism evolved into what is now called **cultural feminism**. It went from a critique of male supremacy to a critique of men themselves. Men are "devils," to borrow a term from Malcolm X.

a. Cultural feminism often sees certain essential differences between men and women, only it valorizes women's characteristics and roles over men's. Instead of wanting to make gender an irrelevant factor in social life, as the other feminists do, cultural feminists celebrate femaleness. Men and women are not fundamentally the same, they are fundamentally different, and women should unite around their shared differences with men. (Women are nurturers, more in touch with nature, more emotional, less confrontational, etc.) Women have fundamentally different natures than men.

b. Cultural feminism sees feminism as much as a lifestyle as a political movement. It tends to be countercultural more than activist.

have these topics been covered?:

the social construction of gender (gender as a political category)

sisterhood/unity ("common oppression", solidarity vs. support)

difference

who is "the enemy": capitalism, men, male supremacy, etc.

compulsory heterosexuality

public/private split

patriarchy

women as an oppressed sex class

the personal is political

11. bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*

Nov. 28, 30, Dec. 5, 2000

Announcements:

- Hand out individual point totals
- RP #12 (last one!) due Thursday: What is sisterhood and what are the obstacles to creating it? Can men be feminists?
- Extra credit RP: One full page on one thing you've learned in this class that you want to remember ten years from now. Due Dec. 5
- Q's on essay #3?
- Open discussion session for the paper, 3:00-4:30, FAB N240

chaps. 1-3

I. hooks's critique of the feminist movement

A. Q: How many of you consider yourselves feminists? How many of you believe that men and women are or should be equal? Why the disjuncture here?

B. Q: Notice how this book on feminism begins with a sharp *attack* on feminism. Why does hooks do this?

1. Q: Is feminism a "white thing"?

C. **Contemporary feminism does not address issues of race and class**

1. Contemporary feminism has assumed that all women are oppressed because they are women. Its solution, therefore, is to struggle for equality with men. However, for many women, this form of oppression is not the most significant in their lives. Racial or class oppression is felt much more acutely for many women. **Any feminism that is truly concerned about liberating all women, then, must challenge racial and class oppression as well as sexist oppression.**

2. Unfortunately, the contemporary feminist movement, especially liberal feminism, has not understood this. They have spent all their time fighting for the interests of "women," but their conception of women's interests and experiences has generally been limited to the experiences and interests of middle class white women.

D. **Margin and center**

1. Q: What does hooks mean by the concept "margin"?

2. Read preface. Note the similarities to Du Bois's veil.

3. **Contemporary feminism ignores women in the margins.** Much of feminist theory comes from women who live in the center of society; who, although they are oppressed because they are women, nevertheless still have a privileged position in the world due to their class or race. This kind of feminism rarely includes the knowledge and experiences of women who live on the margins of society: poor women, women of color. Therefore, this kind of feminism is only a partial feminism; it seeks to liberate only a select group of women, despite its rhetoric of universal sisterhood, etc.

a. This critique may remind you of Marx's critique of "universal rights" under capitalism, which claim to be for all but which really serve the bourgeoisie.

E. Therefore, in the name of emancipating women, the feminist movement has reproduced various norms, assumptions, and stereotypes that have excluded non-white and non-mc women, and therefore have perpetuated their oppression. **This kind of feminism has ironically perpetuated the oppression of the majority of women.** Feminism, particularly liberal feminism, has only benefited women in the center while furthering the oppression of women at the margins.

F. Thus feminism, according to hooks, must focus on those women on the margins as well as those in the center. This requires that contemporary feminism be as concerned about issues of race and class as it is about issues of gender. It must include all women (and consequently all men) if it is going to be a feminism worthy of the name.

1. Hooks' critique of modern feminism implies that in many way, race and class are more significant social cleavages than gender. **Read 4** 5 in 2nd ed (?)

2. **Q:** Is this a strange argument for a feminist to make? Is she right?

G. Political unity among women cannot be assumed. When it is, it usually benefits women in the center at the expense of women at the margins. Just because all women in some way or another suffer under sexist oppression, that doesn't mean they will inevitably unite, just as Marx erroneously assumed that the common experience of exploitation would drive the proletariat to unite. Barriers of race and class are often more significant than sexism in the lives of many women, and they affect the construction of unity. **Political unity therefore cannot be assumed, it has to be created.**

H. Hooks argues that Black women have a "special vantage point" from which to analyze this society, since they experience racism, sexism, and often poverty.

1. **Q:** Is hooks making an argument for Black women's "double vision" a la Du Bois? Is she arguing that Black women are the "universal class" a la Marx?

2. **Q:** What problems might such a position create? (Essentialism and anti-democratic tendencies if we must always defer to the "most oppressed.")

II. Liberal feminism

A. Feminism: the second wave

1. The "second wave" of feminism is the period from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s (some would say up to now) when feminist movement experienced enormous growth, both in terms of activism and in terms of feminist writing.

2. The "first wave" of feminism was in the mid-19th century, when women involved in the abolitionist movement got fed up with sexist discrimination within the movement and built a feminist offshoot. The big convention that is usually cited when people refer to the 1st wave is the **Seneca Falls Convention** in Seneca Falls, NY, which happened in 1848. Some of the big names of the first wave are Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony.

3. Very roughly speaking, there were two large forces in the second wave, liberal and the radical feminists (who were themselves divided into socialist and radical feminists). Hooks is most critical of liberal feminism. In particular, she takes aim at Betty Friedan.

B. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963)

(from Zillah Eisenstein, *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism*)

1. For Friedan, the “**feminine mystique**” encourages women to define themselves in terms of being a mother and a wife, not as an independent individual. Women should be like Mary Tyler Moore on the Dick Van Dyke Show, or like June Cleaver. “The problem is always being the children’s mommy, or the minister’s wife and never being myself.”

2. Many women find this lifestyle unsatisfying. Many housewives are intelligent, have college educations, and are bored. They want a more satisfying life, and they don’t want to be bound to the feminist mystique that restricts their independence.

3. The solution to achieving women’s independence, according to Friedan, is for women to enter the workplace, on equal terms with men, and to enter the world of politics. Women are like an interest group; once they organize themselves into an interest group and enter the world of politics, they will achieve full equality with men.

4. Bringing women into the mainstream of political and economic life was Friedan’s goal, and she made it the goal of the **National Organization for Women (NOW)**, which she formed in 1966.

C. The ideology of liberal feminism

(from Allison Jaggar, “Political Philosophies of Women’s Liberation”)

1. **Main point of liberal feminism:** an individual woman should be able to determine her social role with as much freedom as a man has. The purpose of feminism is to eliminate all legal, social, and moral barriers that prevent women from participating freely and as an equal with other individuals in politics, business and the professions. **Women’s liberation is about achieving equal civil rights.**

2. Thus, **liberal feminism** has been primarily concerned with equality of opportunity in the workplace, getting women in positions of political power, and also involved in issues of women’s reproductive rights and health care.

3. **The role of the state**, for liberal feminists, is not just to protect property; its job is also to ensure that no discriminatory barriers to equal opportunity exist. Not only should the law not discriminate against women, **it should be used to make discrimination illegal:** unequal pay scales, prejudice in admissions to job programs and schools, discriminatory hiring practices, etc. Liberal feminism also generally advocates **affirmative action:** using the law to remedy past and present inequalities that have held women back historically as a group.

D. Hooks's critique of liberal feminism

1. Friedan and liberal feminism erroneously make the plight of white, middle class housewives the plight of all women. Friedan saw the women most oppressed by sexism in this society as white, college-educated mc women who were bored sitting around the house all day, and who wanted careers in business and politics.

2. Hooks says this alienation was definitely a problem, but not for all women. For example, one-third of all women were already in the workplace—most of them doing menial labor—so how could work be fulfilling to them? To them work was drudgery and exploitation and just a way to make a living.

3. Friedan argues that the home is something of a prison for women, confining them and their desires. Hooks points out that this was not the case for poor and working women. For women who were already working, freedom was to be found in the family, and the comfort and support it offered. It was a haven, not a prison.

4. In other words, Friedan's is a feminist theory from the center, fundamentally unconcerned with the lives of those women, specifically poor women and women of color, who live at the margins. This one-dimensional view of women's reality, however, became a marked feature of liberal feminism. It ignored race and class, and therefore ignored the key problems of millions of women. Is it any wonder that feminism turned out to be such a white mc women's movement, she asks?

5. You can't explain the reality of women's lives simply by referring to gender discrimination. Further, you can't make an exclusive focus on gender the foundation on which to construct a feminist theory. If you do, it will exclude too many women. It will only be a feminism for the center, i.e. one that fits perfectly with liberal ideology and all the contradictions that go with it.

III. Defining feminism

A. liberal feminism's definition of feminism: a movement to make women the social equals of men. 17-18 - then go to H.C., p. 3

1. Q: Hooks criticizes this definition. Why?

2. Which men do women want to be equal to, she asks. Men do not share a common social status, as Marx, Du Bois, Malcolm X, and even Nietzsche have shown. Which men should women strive to be equal to?

3. This definition of feminism is inherently limiting. It can easily justify a form of feminism that fights only for the equality of middle class women with middle class men. This is evident in Friedan's book.

4. Thus, liberal feminism and its core tenet of "equality of opportunity" does not eradicate oppression for the majority of women; it only serves the interests of primarily white, upper and middle class women.

B. Thus, hooks defines feminism not as equality with men but as "a movement to end sexist oppression." 25 and 26

1. Q: How is this definition different from the liberal feminist definition?

2. To end sexist oppression, feminism has to address the entirety of women's experiences, and for many women, the most devastating forms of oppression they experience is not necessarily sexism. Therefore, if feminism is really about liberating all women, **feminism has to fight all forms of oppression**. It has to take on not just sexism, but the **race-gender-class triad**.

3. By focusing on ending oppression rather than achieving equality with men, this definition a) concentrates on domination, including but not limited to gender domination and b) avoids a blanket condemnation of all men. It also c) paves the way for a much more radical politics than liberal feminism.

C. There are **three elements** to hooks' definition of feminism:

1. **Oppression or discrimination on the basis of sex exists and that it is wrong**. Women hold an unequal and inferior social status in society for no other reason than that they are women, and that is wrong.

2. **Feminism is a movement**. Women are oppressed or discriminated against and that needs to be changed. It's about struggle, change. We can only understand the development of feminist theory when we place it in an activist context. Feminism is about critiquing this society and changing it, just like Marx's 11th thesis on Feuerbach.

3. **Feminism is transformational**. Currently, society is based on various systems of domination: race, class, and gender in particular. Feminism leads us to examine these systems of domination, how they interconnect, and how they oppress people. Once we understand these systems of domination we can act to abolish them, recreating society in the process. **Feminism therefore promises to transform all of society**: men as well as women, whites as well as people of color. It's not a lifestyle or counterculture, it's about changing society itself.

Nov. 30, 2000
hooks, chaps 4 & 5

Announcements:

- Q's on essay #3?
- Re-announce 446 and 470
- Do evaluations at end of class. Ask them to evaluate:
 - the value of the web site
 - the value of TDs and RPs
 - more or less in-class discussion?
 - Fave/least fave texts?
 - Too much reading? If so, which books to can?
 - Anything missing? Which need more/less time?

I. Sisterhood

A. **Q:** What is sisterhood for hooks?

1. For hooks, sisterhood is fundamentally a form of **political solidarity**.

B. Hooks criticizes the argument that sisterhood is a "**natural bond**" that unites all women, whether by some mystical aspect of nature or by a common experience of sexist oppression, and that this bond is stronger than any divisions that may come between them.

1. **Race and class creates differences among women** in terms of social status and lifestyle that often take precedence over the common experience women share. A notion of "sisterhood" that assumes that all women are natural allies doesn't transcend these differences. If anything, it tends to aggravate them, since it assumes white mc women as the norm.

2. Yet at the same time that sisterhood is not a natural alliance, sisterhood or solidarity is necessary for feminist struggle.

C. **The basis for sisterhood, hooks argues, is politics.** It's not being a woman or being oppressed as a woman that creates solidarity among women, but a **political commitment to ending sexist oppression.**

1. **Read 47/47.**

2. A political commitment to end sexist oppression does not require that women forget the other fragments that make up her identity and her life experiences (class status, race, ethnicity, religion, etc.) for that of "woman." Instead, sisterhood can fully acknowledge and appreciate diversity and difference if there is a political commitment to end sexist oppression.

3. **Sisterhood is political solidarity among women.**

4. Hooks argues that her conception of sisterhood avoids the women = good / men = bad dichotomy.

D. **Race and class are the two key barriers to creating sisterhood.**

1. Unless white women recognize white supremacy and the role they play in it, and act to end it, there's no way white women and women of color can unite in sisterhood. Therefore, **by fighting racism, white women create the necessary conditions for sisterhood.** "When white women attack white

→ NEX TIME: Add discussion on
solidarity vs support (ch. 4,
esp. 62-65) what's the 2A? etc.

supremacy they are simultaneously participating in the struggle to end sexist oppression." (52)

2. Same goes with class. As with white supremacy, women need to struggle against not only class prejudice, but the system of class exploitation (i.e. capitalism). **Feminism involves engaging in class struggle on behalf of poor and working women.**

3. Sexism, racism, and class exploitation divide women from one another. Sisterhood depends on a political commitment to abolishing these divisions. Therefore, **sisterhood requires the abolition of all oppression, and feminism becomes a radical critique of all forms of domination.**

4. Read 52/53

5. **Q:** Do you agree with hooks that "white supremacy has always been as great if not a greater priority than maintaining strict sex role divisions" in the United States? If so, and if fighting racism is the primary task, what is so "feminist" about hooks? Is she a feminist or a feminine Malcolm X?

E. Politics is central for hooks. We need to see women as political beings. They are not different from men by nature, nor are they united with other women by nature.

II. The role of men

A. **Q:** What's the role of men in feminist movement? Can men be feminists? [Or should it be, Can men *advocate* feminism?]

B. **Feminism is not just a movement for women**, she argues. By defining feminism as women gaining equality with men and by claiming that "all men are the enemy" **feminism has hurt itself by excluding** those who have nothing to gain from feminist movement.

1. Men are not the enemy, she argues. **Men are not the enemy, but their humanity is twisted and distorted by sexism** because it makes them conform to participate in a system where they themselves are oppressed, many of them, by capitalism. Men benefit from sexism and participate in it, but not all men benefit equally.

2. Men need to take responsibility themselves. **Men and women** folks have to take responsibility for ending racism.

C. **Separatism is a white, male reaction.**

1. **Q:** Are women's-only spaces inherently sexist?

2. **Q:** What's the difference between such spaces and Black self-determination? Separatism and Black self-determination are different.

D. **Why Black women often ally with Black men**

Black women: they often have more in common with Black men than they do with white women, in terms of a common experience of suffering and a common culture, than they do with white women. In fact, Black women and white women in the U.S. have historically had very little to do with each other. 69

E. **Q:** If feminism is a movement to end sexist oppression, and men have a responsibility to end sexist oppression, and sisterhood is a political commitment to ending sexism, than should men be a part of "sisterhood"? Why not?

- student work - #92210

- Q's on paper

- lead in ~~to~~ the credit RP

- 3rd Paper: 11:35 Dec 11

- can men be sisters?

- hooks vs. F on power

- how is she similar/diff to Marx?

on revolution?

- is label correct?

start here -