Health and Society

A tenure-stream position in the Division of Social Science in the Faculty of Arts at the assistant professor level in the Political Economy of Illness and Health Care. Applicants should have a PhD or equivalent, must have demonstrated research interests in health studies, and be able to teach courses that provide a critical, interdisciplinary perspective on at least one of the following: 1) Social determinants of health and illness; 2) Alternative health care; 3) Restructuring of health systems; 4) The impact of socio-political transformations on health, illness and healing. The Division of Social Science offers general education courses to undergraduate students as well as an Honours BA in Health and Society. In addition to teaching duties, the successful candidate will be expected to participate in the administration of the Health and Society program and to show initiative in the development of health studies at York University.

Applications, with curriculum vitae and names of three referees, should be sent to: John Hutcheson, Chair, Division of Social Science, Faculty of Arts, S757 Ross, York University, North York, Ont. M3J 1P3. Candidates should request their referees to send letters of reference directly to the Chair. Deadline for applications is March 6, 1995.

York University is implementing a policy of employment equity, including affirmative action for women faculty. In accordance with Canadian immigration requirements, this advertisement is directed to Canadian citizens and permanent residents. This position is subject to budgetary approval.

FUNDAMENTAL FEMINISM: CONTESTING THE CORE CONCEPTS OF FEMINIST THEORY


by Kathleen O'Grady

Grant provides an exhaustive examination of the various strands of thought that constitute the contemporary feminist movement; her text contributes a thoughtful critique of feminism that strives to clarify the sometimes tenuous concepts on which feminist theory is based. She demonstrates that, despite the general claim that there is no single feminist theory but a plethora of "feminisms" that function with disparate agendas, there exists an unrecognized, core feminism, a "fundamental feminism," based on defective rudimentary concepts that drive and shape its various forms.

The central aim of the text is to examine the unquestioned and often implicit foundational categories that even opposing strands of feminism employ. Grant lists three pervasive "core concepts" that underlie all feminist theory to varying degrees: "woman"; experience; and personal politics. She claims that the first two categories are the most problematic: the first provides an essentialist view of women and a glorification of the "femininé"; while the second category, evolving out of the first, allows individual experience to become the foundation for all knowledge. In a detailed investigation of liberal, Marxist, standpoint, epistemic and postmodern feminisms, Grant demonstrates the many problems encountered in each due to the unacknowledged concepts on which the theories are based; while these categories were once functional for first wave feminists they must now be abandoned.

The core concepts have remained hidden from the most prominent feminist thinkers, Grant claims, because the history of feminism has been misrepresented. Academics need to reexamine the history of feminism, based on its own writings and activities, not judged as "hyphenations" or "bandaids" to the traditional canon of Western political thought. This hyphenation model of feminism, supported by terms like psychoanalytic-feminism, Marxist-feminism and liberal-feminism, has reinforced the view that feminism is disparate and discordant, allowing theorists to overlook the activism that generated the foundational concepts upon which
all strands of feminist theory currently rest.

Grant performs a particularly astute analysis of Marxist-feminism. She maintains that the use of Marxism has been detrimental to theoretical feminism because of a misreading and analogical misuse of Marxist concepts which go against the very core concepts of feminism. For example, though Marxist-feminists may borrow many of their ideas from traditional Marxist writings, their origins stem from 19th-century feminist activism, not from left-wing political structures which refused to accommodate feminist requirements. With a firm grounding in the history of first wave feminist activism, Grant asks each form of hyphenated feminism, "What is feminist about Marxist-feminism? Why not just Marxism? What is feminist about liberal-feminism? Why not just liberalism?"

In the last section of the book, Grant advocates a more critical, self-reflective feminism that, for its own health and survival, must eradicate dangerous forms of essentialising. In its place, she proposes the possibility for a feminism no longer based on the "core concepts," but structured on the idea that gender is an independent, ideological formation that must be razed.

In an attempt to abandon all forms of feminism based on epistemology—a further perpetuation of the core concepts—Grant posits a "neo-humanist" or "neo-enlightenment" feminism akin to first wave, radical feminism (though she is careful to transform its racist and classist roots). She firmly rejects the core concepts, "woman" and "experience" in her new feminist vision, while maintaining the category of a personal politics. To supplant the two core concepts she calls for the creation of a "feminist lens," highlighting the difference between "women" and "feminist," basing her new theory instead on a subject defined by political feminist practice (both personal and public politics) rather than on a monolithic, transcendental category of "women." She terms her new philosophy, a "feminist-post-enlightenment-humanist vision," calling for the complete abolition of gender structures.

Despite providing the reader with an intricate and complex analysis of the major tenants of feminist thought in the first two sections of the book, Grant neglects to bestow upon her own theory the same care and attention. Her new feminism appears instead as a jumble of poststructural, liberal, Marxist, socialist and humanist thought, generating more puzzling questions than it answers. Based on her own critique, is her "feminist-humanism" not just a new form of the hyphenated feminism that she so thoroughly rejects? Her humanist-feminist theory begs the question, as Grant asked of Marxist and liberal feminists earlier, "What is particularly feminist about humanist-feminism? Why not just humanism?" Perhaps her next book will elaborate the new theory she merely introduces in this text.

While Patricia Foster, the editor of *Minding the Body*, was teaching Women's Literature at a state university, she was astonished at how unhappy the young women were with their bodies. One student confessed, "I'd rather have five pounds off my thighs than an A in this class." She discovered that most of the women would choose physical perfection over mental stimulus, if given the choice. Ms. Foster wondered, "How and why women returned to such a fragile status?" She hoped these young women would eventually realize that "the body is not only a sexual statement, but a social one as well, an ongoing story with multiple plots that women individually and collectively must speak."

With these ideas in mind, Ms. Foster decided to compile an anthology—a collection of women's experiences with their bodies. *Minding the Body* contains a broad spectrum of stories and essays by twenty international women writers. Contributors were asked to "probe what seemed disturbing or exhilarating in their personal lives, what had snagged, invalidated, buoyed, or surprised them about their bodies." In response, the contributors explored topics as diverse as breast implants, infertility, disfiguration, anorexia, dieting and breast cancer to name only a few. Almost every female reader of *Minding the Body* should be able to find at least one essay of particular