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Talking about the Revolution? The Place of Marxist Theory in the Core Course Curriculum of US Undergraduate Degree-Granting Women’s Studies Programs

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Talking about the Revolution?
The Place of Marxist Theory in the Core Course Curriculum of US Undergraduate Degree-Granting Women’s Studies Programs

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Abstract

From the key role that socialist feminists (who use some Marxist theoretical concepts) played in organizing many of the first academic women’s studies programs (Kennedy 2008) to the central explorations of questions both with and against Marx in feminist theory, Marxist and Marxist feminist theory historically held a visible and vital place in the field. However since the introduction of post-theories to the humanities and social sciences in the late twentieth century, Marxist feminists charge that women’s studies has abandoned Marx completely (Ebert 1995, Kelly 2002, Cotter 2007, Gimenez 2010) while some socialist feminists charge that Marxist theory is built into contemporary feminist theory in concepts such as “globalization” and “anti-racism” even if we don’t call it “Marxist” (Gardiner 2008). So, who is correct? What is the place of Marxist theory in academic women’s studies today?

Within the social and cultural foundations of education, one way to explore these questions is to analyze which theories and concepts are core to the field’s undergraduate curriculum—to determine what women’s studies is teaching in its core courses. Since introduction to women’s studies and feminist theory comprise the field’s core courses (Salley, Winkler, Celeen, & Meck 2004), a representative sample of current in-use syllabi from these courses was collected from across the US. The most frequently assigned core course authors and titles are established. A descriptive and deductive content analysis is performed as each of the most frequently assigned course readings is run through the Marxist Theory Filter, comprised of the theory’s key components, in order to determine which, if any, of these core course readings are Marxist.

The study supports the assertions of Marxist feminists and finds that Marxist theory is not only marginalized, but is nearly invisible in the core curriculum; and post-theories, particularly
multicultural, global and postcolonial feminist theories that utilize intersectionality theory, clearly dominate. The hegemonic presence of post-theories in the undergraduate core curriculum has significant implications for those who believe that a discipline needs a diverse knowledge base, for those interested in protecting academic freedom and for those who think that one of the only academic fields founded on questions of equality and liberation should continue to concern itself with social change. I propose a re-introduction of Marxist and Marxist feminist theory into the academic women’s studies core curriculum as a means of both ensuring a diverse knowledge base and re-establishing a commitment to social change.
Acknowledgements

Winter, 1992: It was my turn to feed the dogs outside that evening, and I tried every excuse in the book to get out of doing the chore. It was cold outside, a show I liked was on TV, I had homework (my favorite go-to excuse) and I was thirteen. After accepting I had to do the chore, I finally relented and stomped out the door with the heavy container of dog food in hand. My aunt and mother called after me, “Jacque, this will be good practice for all of those books you will need to carry in law school one day.” I ended up earning a PhD and not a JD, but they were right about all the heavy books I would carry during my decade in the university.

Although there was a hint of teasing to it that night, people in my family often made these types of small comments about my academic success and how I was going to accomplish great things one day—things nobody in my family had done yet. It was these small comments that helped me to believe in myself and accept that, despite obstacles, I would achieve whatever I put my mind to.

So I will first thank my whole-life family for their support and unwavering belief in me. Thank you to my mother and father, Cindy and Don Daugherty, for their love, wisdom and determination to put their children’s needs and dreams first. It is from them that I learned to question everything and to make my own way. Thank you to my sisters, Sam and Al Daugherty, for their support and creativity. Thank you to my niece, Tovah Daugherty Lacour, for lightening my spirit with her laugh and for allowing me to be a girl again in her presence—it is the girls who I hope will benefit most from my continued commitment to feminist theory and action.

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Although there are many faculty mentors, students and staff who comprise my academic family, I only have space here to name a few. Thank you to Dr. Vanessa Allen-Brown and Dr. Sandra Browning, for their invaluable contributions to this dissertation and their support over the years I have known and studied with them. Thank you to my Fall 2011 teaching assistants, who helped to research contact names and details for the women’s studies programs contacted for this study: Erika Carter, Chelsea Eldridge, Hannah Herman, Kristy Kennelly, Hap Murphy and Jessica Wolfrum. Thank you to the University of Cincinnati Graduate School (special mention to
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Introduction

Today, even mainstream US social, cultural and political institutions, such as the Obama White House and TIME Magazine,\(^1\) frequently espouse concerns about the increasing gap between the rich and poor and the loss of social mobility (once thought of as a central justification for our advanced capitalist economy). The recognition that something has gone wrong and that we need to implement any number of measures to get ourselves out of this crisis becomes clearer each day. “Class warfare”, “redistribution of wealth” and “socialism” are becoming common, although oft misused, phrases that the politically conservative hurl to describe any attempt at system reform and that the politically liberal vehemently deny. Everyone from Fox News Vice President and Washington managing editor Bill Sammon to former Republican presidential primary candidate Rick Perry has made repeated allegations of President Obama’s socialism. Sammon’s accusations started during the 2008 presidential campaign when Obama told Republican invention, Joe the Plumber, that he wanted to spread the wealth (Pareene 2011). Evidence later came to light that Sammon sent memos to Fox News programs directing them to play up this image of Obama, and soon this recasting of Obama as something beyond liberal—the dreaded socialist—permeated the network’s coverage of the campaign. This image stuck and has carried through the President’s administration and well beyond republican voters. In one recent New York Times/CBS News poll, over a quarter of independent voters said that the word “socialist”\(^2\) best describes the Obama administration’s policies (Zeleny & Sussman 2012).

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\(^1\) The November 14, 2011 issue of TIME Magazine was titled, “Can You Still Move Up in America?” The featured articles largely came to the conclusion that social mobility is more difficult now than it was in our recent past and, in fact, may not be a permanent feature of American style capitalism.

\(^2\) Other answer options were liberal, moderate, conservative, libertarian, don’t know/non-applicable. Full poll results can be found here: http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/01/19/us/politics/19poll-documents.html?ref=politics. The poll question referenced is question number 85 on page 26.
What is interesting about this whole phenomenon is that the Obama administration, with its bank bailouts and still-privatized healthcare reform, is clearly not socialist, communist or in any way grounded in Marxist theory. This fact has been made clear by the Socialist Party USA, among others, who have pointed out the folly of logic (Delaney 2012). Anyone with even an elementary understanding of Marx, who is perhaps one of Western history’s most well-known philosophers/economists/political organizers, would understand that using public money to bail out private banks is not what Marx had in mind when he outlined what a socialist society would look like. And who might we expect to have at least an elementary understanding of socialism and Marx’s work? Many would answer “college graduates” given Marx’s prominent status as a modern political theorist and philosopher. That New York Times/CBS News poll becomes even more interesting when one considers that independent voters make up 40% of the voting population (2009 PEW Research Center Poll), and 41% of college graduates are independent voters (www.independentvoting.org). This means that at least 41% of college graduates, most of whom fulfilled their social science general education requirement or actually majored in a social science, do not have even a basic understanding of the work of one of social science’s founding fathers. This is even more surprising given that half of the most popular college majors reside in the social sciences (Erwin 2008). Of course, this 41% estimate is only related to independent voter identification, but we have no reason to assume that college graduates who register with a Republican, Democrat or other party affiliation have any more knowledge of Marxist theory or socialism. So a critical question becomes, why do we have such an inaccurate understanding of a theory and political orientation that never fails to inspire fear in most Americans? As a nation, the US has had a long history of socialist/communist political organizing, shares a border with one of the largest social democracies in the world and has justified military intervention on the
basis of a nation’s employ of Marxist theory (e.g., The Bay of Pigs Invasion and the Contra War). Why then, do we have such an erroneous perception of what socialism and communism really are and, therefore, of Marx’s body of work?

The Obama example simply serves as a contemporary illustration of the larger problem, but I started asking these questions while studying social change and the role of revolution in Central America. At that time, I was a first-generation college student with a strong social science background at a small Midwestern liberal arts college. Aside from one college sociology course, my studies in Central America were the first time that I ever explicitly examined Marxist theory. One may think this is especially significant as I am the daughter of a third-generation industrial union family from a lower income working-class context in which common dinner conversation included various concepts expressive of class consciousness such as the problems with NAFTA and the fear tactics used by the company every time the union contract came up for a vote. Despite the central importance of unions in my family and my academic background, I had to travel to a different region of the world to study the work of one of the most famous intellectuals in modern history.

Upon my return from Central America, I made a concerted effort to seek out more information on Marx’s work. Before I found a Marxist scholar with whom to study in a graduate program, I engaged in self-study for nearly a decade. It was during my graduate work in the social and cultural foundations of education and women’s studies that I became more interested in the treatment of Marxist theory in US higher educational institutions and, specifically, in women’s studies programs.

After taking several undergraduate and graduate courses in women’s studies as well as having taught courses in it at two different universities, the near-absence of Marx in one of the
only academic fields founded on questions of equality and liberation became glaringly obvious. As I began to research the relationship between Marxist and feminist theory in the twentieth and twenty-first century US academy, a complex history fraught with both alliances and power struggles emerged. I became increasingly interested in those central questions of the social and cultural foundations of education as applied to the context of academic undergraduate women’s studies programs: What do we teach? What do we not teach? Why? What are the implications of the “what’s” and the “why’s?” It is at the heart of these questions that I will investigate the place of Marxist theory in US undergraduate degree-granting women’s studies programs.
Literature Review and Theory

The questions and observations posed in the Introduction chapter are complex and would easily yield enough subject matter for ten dissertations. So, to be clear, this study’s goal is to investigate these questions about what we teach in the university curriculum and what are the implications? It is particularly concerned with the core curricula in women’s studies, an academic discipline that has drawn much from and contributed much to social science theory over the last forty years. Furthermore, women’s studies as an academic discipline carries some debt for its existence to Marxist and socialist feminist theorists and organizers. One would expect at most a prominent place for and at least enough study to support a basic understanding of Marx in such a discipline. This is especially true when one considers that academic women’s studies had a founding dual mission of creating theory and research about women while also contributing to the project of women’s liberation both within and beyond the university. The following will be necessary endeavors of this chapter’s inquiry into the women’s studies undergraduate core curriculum:

I. providing a brief historical sketch of women’s studies as a discipline, including its relationship to socialists/Marx, and the development of its core curriculum;
II. examining women’s studies classic theoretical models;
III. defining classical Marxist theoretical constructs;
IV. comparing and contrast Marxist and socialist feminist theory;
V. exploring current theoretical trends in the US University and their implications for women’s studies;
VI. concluding with a statement of the research problem and hypothesis.
Historical Overview of Women’s Studies and Its Curriculum

The first two women’s studies programs were founded at San Diego State University, in 1970, and SUNY Buffalo, in 1971, by most accounts (Guy-Sheftall 1995). According to Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy (2008) and others, it is here where one can see the tension between different models of feminism become visible from the very inception of academic women’s studies. Kennedy, a socialist feminist, helped found the SUNY Buffalo program. She explains that the liberal feminists, often focused on social reform as key to women’s equality, pushed for integration of women into the existing university curricula and for equal treatment of women students and faculty. Radical, and later cultural feminists, often focused on personal liberation than a liberation that included a structural analysis, argued against any institutionalization of women’s studies since, in their view, the university was inherently patriarchal and education for women’s liberation needed to be done in woman-controlled spaces. Socialist feminists (and others based in women’s liberation) pushed for a separate women’s studies department as they thought it was the best guarantee that feminist theory and practice would have a home in the academy and because this may help to serve their goal of institutional transformation. Their closest allies were their modernist counterparts, the liberal feminists. In her quest to explore what difference socialist feminism made in the history of women’s studies, she finds that, the work of socialist feminists was absolutely key in institutionalizing women’s studies programs.

At the heart of the goals of academic women’s studies was to produce theory to support the project of women’s liberation, to establish that women were worthy subjects of study, to support the work of women faculty and students who were then just entering the academy in large numbers and to transform the traditional disciplines via formalized interdisciplinary work (Gardiner 2008, Brown 1997, Stabile 1997, Stimpson 1986, Edwards 1978). Many founding
feminists (feminists who worked for the creation of academic women’s studies) agree that these programs were built from the bottom up by student agitation and the first women’s studies students were heavily involved in the women’s liberation movement. These early women’s studies students saw academic women’s studies as both the theoretical arm that would inform and be informed by the movement and as a place for women at the university. The student body in many of the universities that first opened women’s studies departments was comprised of working-class, first generation students, many of whom did not come to college directly from high school (Gardiner 2008). This change in student body demographic happened within the context of soaring increases in general university enrollment. Also very common at the time were alliances between women’s studies programs with community groups such as rape crisis centers (many of which were founded by students in these early programs) and labor unions (Gardiner 2008, Ehrenreich as cited in Tuana and Tong 1995). Things changed, however, and a contemporary complaint of some feminists is the current de-prioritization or altogether lack of community activist work in which the discipline is now engaged. Gimenez (2010) writes,

> Once the movements died, academic feminism became the dominant venue for feminist activity, as theorizing and research became functional alternatives to feminist activism, and feminist politics, having lost its radical and socialist concerns, continued in a largely reformist, liberal path, in lobbying groups, in professional caucuses, and in multiple institutional and localized settings (p. 89).

(For a more comprehensive account of the rise of academic women’s studies and its disconnection from political movements, see Messer-Davidow’s *Disciplining Feminism*.)

Given the historical context of women’s studies as a newer field of academic inquiry (when compared to philosophy, for example), an examination of the trajectory of its curriculum’s
content and pedagogy is useful in understanding the development of today’s core curriculum. Some of the earliest work on US women’s studies curriculum development was a number of published course outlines and sample reading lists, such as Female Studies No. 1: A Collection of College Syllabi and Reading Lists which consisted of ten volumes (Stimpson 1986). These early reading lists provided interested faculty with a build-your-own approach to creating women’s studies courses and programs at their home institutions. A more comprehensive approach was the Women’s Studies Curriculum Development Project, organized by the University of Michigan women’s studies program in 1976, and funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. The project was in response to the many challenges that women’s studies faced as a discipline in its early years (Edwards 1978). These challenges included the narrow perspectives of faculty trained in traditional disciplines and unaccustomed to doing interdisciplinary work and the resulting scarcity of interdisciplinary readings and other curriculum resources, the need for colleges and universities to distinguish between the “practice” of women’s studies (i.e., workshops that taught women assertive communication skills) and an interest in maintaining the women’s studies tradition of a “collective-minded” approach to teaching (Edwards 1978). The project had three phases:

- to convene a seminar of women’s studies scholars to examine new scholarship on women, determine how to best integrate this scholarship into women’s studies courses and discuss pedagogical issues women’s studies teachers face;
- to develop new curricular materials, eventually resulting in four interdisciplinary courses, that would incorporate and evaluate the well-known scholarship on women as well as make available current research (these courses were derived from subject areas where the research was rich and where there was interest and need);
to teach and evaluate these new courses at all participating institutions (most of which were located in southern Michigan) (Edwards 1978).

Each of the four interdisciplinary courses were published as its own course curriculum, complete with required and recommended readings, course discussion topics and assignment options. Although it is hard to gauge the use made of this curriculum by women’s studies faculty at the time, the Women’s Studies Curriculum Development Project is important early documentation of the challenges faced by those trying to define a discipline. The Project also establishes the primacy of the syllabus and course readings to the discipline from the start. Course readings still serve as the central component of the today’s curriculum.

As women’s studies grew as an academic discipline, leaders in the field continued to document historical development and current challenges. A series of reports to the Ford Foundation over the last forty years of women’s studies gives a broad overview of the state of women’s studies as a discipline, including its curriculum challenges and trends. The Ford Foundation has supported the development of women’s studies as a discipline from its founding. Although its support of research on women hails back to 1959, between 1964 and 1979 the Ford Foundation granted a total of $30 million to research, advocacy and women’s studies curriculum development projects (Stimpson 1986, p. 23). The first such Ford Foundation report was written in 1986 by Catherine Stimpson, then Rutgers professor and founding editor of *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society*, and provides a glimpse at both the disciplines successes and challenges. It was the proliferation of courses, built by interested faculty and requested by interested students, that grew the field from one program in 1970 to approximately 300 programs ten years later (Stimpson 1986). Since academic programs “conferred greater respectability on women’s studies as a field than [as] isolated courses,” Stimpson writes that the story of academic
women’s studies is a story of legitimation as it struggled with questions then that in some ways continue to be central such as “Should women’s studies be its own degree-granting academic program or more broadly a field of inquiry within established disciplines?” and “Should women’s studies continue forth with the political aim of women’s liberation at its center or will that political goal be co-opted by the often politically conservative institutional setting of the university?” (1986, p. 21). Stimpson’s report reveals the growth and development of the seeds planted by women’s studies founders and gives glimpses into the future as it examines the current and future goals of institutional women’s studies and the aims of its curriculum.

The second Ford Foundation report, entitled Women’s Studies: A Retrospective, was written in 1995 by Beverly Guy-Sheftall, then professor of English and women’s studies at Spelman College with many prominent works on African American women and Black feminism and later president of the National Women’s Studies Association. Guy-Sheftall picks up where Stimpson leaves off and focuses on the impact of women’s studies on transforming the university curriculum beyond women’s studies programs and into traditional disciplines--often referred to as a two-part process of curriculum integration projects often between women’s studies and ethnic studies programs and a “mainstreaming” of women’s studies into more traditional disciplines (for more information, see Johnella Butler, particularly Butler and Walter’s 1991 work on the subject, Transforming the Curriculum). The rest of Guy-Sheftall’s report chronicles the move from margin to center of women of color feminism (for examples, see Gloria Anzalduá, Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Vivian Ng and Audre Lorde) as well as global perspectives outside of the US. According to Guy-Sheftall this move to difference feminism, a discourse that focuses centrally on the differences in experiences between women based on race, gender, sexual orientation and other identities than potential shared common ground, is both a
necessary development in creating a more rigorous and well-rounded curriculum but also a way for women’s studies to

… broaden its base by listening to potential allies who were ignored in the early years or distanced themselves because of its primary focus on gender” which will help it to survive the prominent right-wing attacks both inside and outside the academy at that time (p. 28).

The report ends by asserting that women’s studies has an important role to play in “One of the most urgent challenges for the American Academy in the 1990’s [which] is to respond to issues of diversity by making the old and new scholarship on people of color and women central, not peripheral, to the curriculum” (p. 28). Difference feminism is still a central focus in the field today as demonstrated recently by two of the most highly attended National Women’s Studies Association conferences with their focus on promoting “Difficult Dialogues” between women and men with different identities—the conferences were titled the same.

Rounding out our brief historical sketch of women’s studies curriculum development is a 2004 study (Salley, Winkler, Ceelen, & Meck) on women’s studies in the western United States, which defines the core curriculum in women’s studies undergraduate programs. It is a follow-up to the initial 1988 study (Salley and Henderson as cited in Salley, Winkler, Ceelen, & Meck 2004). The studies surveyed women’s studies programs in the western United States about various facets of their organization and structure from faculty hiring to budget to curricular offerings, which is of most interest here. The 1988 study found that women’s studies programs were challenged with adisciplinarity or lack of core curriculum which was still largely being developed—a finding supported a few years later by Fellman and Winstead (1992) who wrote, “While faculty involved with women’s studies argue against a ‘canon,’ they continue to
recognize a ‘knowledge base’” (as cited in Salley, Winkler, Ceelen, & Meck 2004, p. 184).

Perhaps the most important finding in the 2004 study is the development of a core curriculum and the subsequent establishment of program coherence and a unifying paradigm. Ninety-seven percent of the women’s studies programs surveyed in the study indicated that their curriculum is comprised of a combination of course hours offered by the women’s studies department/program and those offered by other departments (cross-listed with women’s studies). As a result of this dependence on other departments and what some may call their women’s studies “affiliate” faculty, there is great diversity in the type and number of courses offered to fulfill undergraduate women’s studies degree requirements (Salley, Winkler, Ceelen, & Meck 2004, p. 183). The majority of schools’ surveyed women’s studies departments offered the following courses as part of their core curriculum: Introduction to Women’s Studies; Feminist Theory; Psychology of Women; History of Women; Women in Literature; and Gender, Race, and Class. Also consistent with Guy-Sheftall’s observations on the future of women’s studies, Salley, Winkler, Ceelen, & Meck (2004) found that the programs in their study subscribed to a growing trend in multicultural, multiracial and global perspectives in both their core and elective offerings.

These curricular studies demonstrate two important facts about women’s studies curriculum. First, the studies establish the central role of the syllabus and course readings in comprising women’s studies curriculum. Second, the studies establish that U.S. undergraduate women’s studies curriculum in degree-granting programs is currently comprised of core required classes, often offered by the department, as well as elective courses, often offered both inside and

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3 There are different names for what I refer to here as “affiliate faculty,” but their place in women’s studies programs is well-documented. An affiliate faculty member is usually a faculty member from another department (e.g., psychology, English, education, etc.,) who teaches one or more courses that are cross-listed with women’s studies. These courses often serve to fulfill elective requirements for women’s studies courses.

4 Courses may be titled differently from school to school, but they are typically some incarnation of these core offerings.
outside of the department. My concern in this study is with the two most commonly offered core courses: introduction to women’s studies and feminist theory. It is within these courses that students gain an overview of the discipline and its theoretical underpinnings. As a result, it is also within these courses that students explore the discipline’s key concepts such as what feminist theory is and the relationship between theory and practice. Introduction to women’s studies and feminist theory courses serve as the cornerstones upon which an undergraduate women’s studies degree is built, and they will therefore serve as this paper’s subject of study.

**Classical Theoretical Models in Women’s Studies**

In order to understand the importance of core courses and their readings in constructing the field of women’s studies, it is important to understand the development of the feminist theoretical perspectives studied in women’s studies.

Marilyn Jacoby Boxer (1998) is considered a founder of academic women’s studies and gives a chronology on the “Quest for Theory” in the field (a chapter in her cited book shares this name). She and others have recognized three classic theoretical models, foundational in early women’s studies teaching and research. These models still serve as the foundation for most textbooks on feminist theory today: liberal, radical and socialist (Tong 2005, Brocke-Utne 1998). Boxer writes, “These three models, ‘the big three,’ quickly came to dominate feminist thinking, creating an early but persistent scheme for conceptualizing different ways of interpreting women’s condition” (1998, p. 129). A brief, and by no means exhaustive, description of each model is as follows. Liberal feminist theory is framed as one of the earliest

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5 Some would call them strands of feminist theory. However, there is some contention involving the classification, “strand,” and since it is not my goal to argue the merits or demerits of using this term, I have chosen Boxer’s more general description of “theoretical models” or perspectives.

6 Boxer’s description of the socialist theoretical model is the same as what we will later call an orthodox Marxist theoretical perspective. Later in this chapter, and then throughout the rest of the study, there will be a lengthier discussion on the complex differences between the two.
forms of feminist thought in Western history, is grounded in Enlightenment thought and “natural rights,” and views women’s oppression rooted in the civil, legal, political, economic inequality she suffers in a contract-based society in which all men and women should be considered equal. The remedy to the “woman problem” for those who subscribe to this model involves legal and political reforms and extensions of civil rights to include women. Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill and Anglo-American suffrage leaders such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton are taught as classic examples of liberal feminists. Socialist feminist theory is grounded in Marxist theory’s materialist view that women’s oppression as it exists today can be traced back to the invention of private property and has perpetuated itself due to the secondary status women hold in economic production. The remedy to the “woman problem” for those who subscribe to this model involves a revolution which abolishes private property and class inequality thereby resulting in the equal status of men and women in economic production. Engels’ *Origin of the Family, State and Private Property* (1884) is the most commonly taught socialist work in women’s studies courses, but other such theorists include Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, August Bebel, Alexandra Kollontai, Rosa Luxemburg and Gerda Lerner. Radical feminist theory “... attributed women’s subordination to patriarchal structures based on a sexual division of labor in reproduction” in which men’s direct control over women’s bodies serves as the primary problem (Boxer 1998, p. 129). For many radical feminists, the remedy to the “woman problem” is either a return to more matriarchal social relations or separatism in which woman’s ability to liberate herself lies in her ability to organize her life separately from men. Shulamith Firestone, Susan Brownmiller and Adrienne Rich are taught as classic examples of radical feminist theory. Current theoretical trends, and the implications they have for the discipline, will be summarized in a later section of this chapter. Since this paper’s concern is with Marxist and Marxist/socialist feminist work,
providing a definition of each as well as some historical context at the university is the goal of the next two sections of this chapter.

**Orthodox Marxist Theory**

Women’s studies is not the only place that Marxist theory is relegated to the “classic” theory chapters of texts, implying that it is no longer relevant and that it is no longer being used in contemporary theory and analysis. A shift in central theoretical groundings has occurred throughout the social sciences and humanities as demonstrated by Stuart Sim (2000), who chronicles the development of post-Marxism. He writes, “Marxism is now generally regarded in the West as a discredited system of thought, carrying with it the burden of authoritarianism and totalitarianism at odds with the current commitment (theoretical as well as political) to cultural pluralism and libertarianism” (p. 1). Several historical developments have contributed to this transition. Perhaps the most important of these trends are the legacy of McCarthyism in both US industry and the university and the rise of neoliberal economic models in both US industry and the university. Each trend has made the Academy at best, less hospitable, and at worst, a dangerous place, for those teaching Marx (Bowles and Gintis 1977, Cole 2008).

Marx, himself, stated that the function of formal education in capitalist society is to support bourgeois ideology. In *Renewing Dialogues in Marxism and Education*, the first book of a series of three, Raduntz (2007) provides a concise explanation of how the US University has long been a site of the transmission of bourgeois values supporting the ebbs and flows of capitalist development. This, in turn, has resulted in driving education toward marketization (p. 57). Raduntz’s account includes the role of the Industrial Revolution (1750-1850). As new

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7 “Orthodox Marxist theory” will be referred to as simply “Marxist theory” throughout the rest of this paper.

8 It is clear, for example, given Europe’s Marxist intellectual and political tradition as well as Latin America’s Marxist revolutions of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that Sim’s statement is too broad and “West” could easily be replaced with the United States of America. However, I think this excerpt accurately represents the justification for post-Marxism in the US and this is why I have included it here.
scientific knowledge and technology was created, the demands for a skilled workforce outgrew the capacity of a privatized educational system to provide it. This need played a major part in driving the expansion of nationalized publicly funded education systems. As a result, schools were organized on the commerce/industry model from beginning of our modern education system. As post-WWII economic growth ensued, education enjoyed high levels of government support and expansion. Then the economic recessions of the 1960’s and 1970’s brought an increasing proletarianization and deterioration of conditions of teachers’ work (Ozga 1988 as cited in Raduntz 2007), which have generally continued into the present day’s rise in neoliberal economic policy. The ensuing struggles over the privatization of education characterized by an increasing emphasis on and privileging of more lucrative STEMM professions has resulted in the gradual introduction of utilitarian and instrumental approaches to learning. This continued as education systems restructured along corporate lines to become more flexible and responsive to the needs of economies responding to newly global competition as free trade expanded. This historical trajectory has focused on the reconstitution of education as an explicitly capitalist enterprise. As this business model of education continues, the education system becomes more “… decentralized and fragmented as competitive autonomous units of productive educative activity” (Raduntz 2007, p. 60). An example of this can be seen in the performance-based budgeting models that many public universities are adopting. Here, funding is distributed to departments (unit) based on the ability of the unit’s faculty to enroll large numbers of paying students (customers) in its classes as well as individual faculty’s ability to draw high levels of grant support into the unit and university.

As the university shifts to directly serve the needs of advanced capitalism by operationalizing the system’s values and restructuring itself to mirror the neoliberal business
model, there can be no room in the “business plan” for knowledge that questions these bourgeoisie values and models. Although only a very brief account of the displacement of Marxist theory in the US University, Raduntz’s description provides a historicization of the phenomenon that will serve useful in my examination of the place of Marxist theory in undergraduate women’s studies programs. Now that context is established, the goal of the rest of this subsection is to understand how Marxist theory will be defined throughout this paper.

Marxist theory is huge body of work spanning the last century and a half and, although discussion over its central tenants is often wracked with disagreement, especially by those dependent on more contemporary or post-Marxist theories, the following is a description of what is often termed “orthodox” Marxist theory. It is defined by its central characteristics: philosophical tenets and the political economic tenets as outlined by Marx and Engels (Ollman 1990).

First, the central philosophical tenets of Marxist theory are historical materialism and dialectics, which together comprise dialectical materialism and act as the primary tool of analysis throughout the body of Marxist theory. Historical materialism hails from Marx’s critique of Hegel’s idealism (Marx and Engels 1845). Whereas idealists purported that man’s ability to have ideas was what both distinguished humans from other animals and served as the defining characteristic of humans. Marx insisted that the German philosophers needed to pay more attention to the material world in which humans lived/produced that life in order to understand from where people’s ideas originated. Marx writes, “The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals” and not a nonhuman creator, for example (Marx and Engels 1845, p. 176). As humans had increasing interaction with each other, he says that the nature of these human individuals depended on the material conditions determining their
daily production—whether it be household-based production of food/tools/clothing or factory-based mass production of those same items. So, the nature of individuals depends on the material conditions determining their production as it is used to support the daily reproduction of themselves. The second important premise of historical materialism is that in their productive activities, people are the producers of their consciousness (not chimeras or religion). Marx writes, “Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc., --real active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms” (Marx and Engels 1845, pg. 180). It is here as well that Marx points out that the forces of production or the base (the modes or ways in which people produce their means of survival determine the social relations of people in society or the superstructure.

Dialectical relationships serve as another central tenet of Marxist philosophy. Engels sums up dialectics clearly when he writes, “…the whole world, natural, historical, intellectual, is represented as a process – i.e., as in constant motion, change, transformation, development; and the attempt is made to trace out the internal connection that makes a continuous whole of all this movement and development.” (1880, paragraph 13). The “negation of the negation” is one of these three dialectical laws and, “Negation involves something from an old stage to a new and ‘higher’ stage, so that the elements of the old are carried forward and reworked into the new.” (Dialego 1976, p. 23). It is here that one understands progress as something dynamic, continuous and resembling an upward spiral in its movement. It involves the carrying forward of those practices and ideas which have benefitted a society as well as the creation of new ideas and practices that grow from new developments in the forces and relations of production. There is no such thing as starting completely over because we always have history with which to contend.
Rather, all perspectives (e.g., both sides of a contradiction) are necessary to provide the whole picture of a particular phenomenon and as a rational society.

Second, Marx’s political economic tenets centered on class struggle serve as the second central defining feature of Marxist work. Grounded in the classification of people into classes based on their relationship to the forces of production, class struggle is supported by the labor theory of value. Society is divided into two primary classes under capitalism: the bourgeoisie (the owning class) and the proletariat (the working class). The bourgeoisie owns the means of production and the proletariat must sell his/her labor-power to the bourgeoisie in order to secure his/her access to survival via the ability to produce (Marx 1849).

This class division is the basis of capitalism’s central contradiction: exploitation. The interests of capital (carried out by the bourgeoisie class) and of wage labor (carried out by the proletariat) are diametrically opposed (Marx 1849, Marx 1867). The proletariat creates profit (surplus value) through the portion of his/her labor which is unpaid. Only a portion of the paid working day is necessary to buy commodities that allow the proletariat to reproduce him/herself and family so that s/he can return to work the next day and produce for 8-10 hours again. The other portion of the working day goes toward the creation of surplus value (profit) for the capitalist—the creation of surplus value is the exploitation of the proletariat. The majority of the value created by the proletariat’s labor is either invested back into the company (technical upgrades, space expansion, etc.,) or constitutes profit which goes directly to those who own the company. The lower a worker’s wages, the higher the capitalist’s rate of profit. Profits can grow rapidly only when the price of labor decreases just as rapidly. This exploitation is not sustainable and results in ever-growing contradictions that lead to crises that are perpetually unresolved and increase in severity (Perlo 1973).
Because all that is produced in a society is the result of the proletariat’s labor, the proletariat is the class that will resolve the contradictions of capitalism by overthrowing it through revolutionary action and creating a communist society in which the forces/means of production as well as the resources which feed those means (e.g., raw materials, machinery, space containing them and education/training) are owned by everyone equally, private property is abolished, and the social relations are thereby changed to first and foremost consider the needs and benefit of the common interest as well as the development of the individual (Marx 1845, Marx and Engels 1848). Class consciousness, which is the proletariat’s awareness of this exploitation, is part of what is needed in order to build support for, implement and sustain a revolution.

Although certainly not exhaustive, these three categories of analysis define Marxist theory. Feminist theorists have taken Marx’s work in a few different directions as the work of Marxist and socialist feminist theories is summarized.

**Marxist and Socialist Feminist Theories**

As discussed previously, socialist feminism played a foundational role in the creation of early women’s studies programs, as both Marxist and socialist feminist thought were prominent in feminist academic and activist circles. When defining these unique theoretical models, it is also important to contrast them. One can find a few different versions of Marxist feminist theory, so it is important to classify its overall features as well as discuss nuanced differences between authors.

The key feature of Marxist feminist theory that differentiates it from all other feminist theoretical models is that it locates the site of women’s oppression in the origin and perpetuation of private property—an argument first detailed in depth by Engels in *The Origin of the Family,*
Private Property and the State (1884). This classic work of Engels expands on Marx’s (1845) assertion that latent slavery in the family is the first form of private property. Engels writes, “The modern individual family is founded on open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife and modern society is a mass composed of these individual families as its molecules” (1884, p. 51). He goes on to purport that sexual inequality only came into existence with the advent of private property, which drove the need for women’s sexual monogamy in the family as property was passed on through the patrilineal bloodline. The liberation of women is dependent, therefore, on the abolition of the monogamous family as the economic unit of society, which in turn is dependent on the abolition of private property. Different theorists have applied this logic to varying degrees.

A classic example of some of the differences among Marxist feminist theorists can be seen in an essay and response between two feminists published in the Monthly Review, a well-known Marxist journal, in the late 1970’s when Marxist theory still held a prominent place among feminist theorists. Karen Sacks, an orthodox Marxist feminist, published a piece entitled “The Class Roots of Feminism” in a 1976 issue and its focus attempted to first complicate the question of whose women’s movement we study by bringing to light the importance of the industrial working-class women’s movement that began in New England textile mills in the 1830’s and lasted into the labor struggles of the 1930’s and 1940’s. Unlike most of her contemporaries at the time, Sacks gives it a space of equal importance with both the more traditionally recognized middle-class suffrage movement in the early twentieth century and the middle-class women’s civil/legal equality movement in the mid twentieth century. Sacks used a historical materialist analysis in which she examined each movement’s demands, tactics and goals. After documenting our now commonly understood history of the classism and racism that
troubled both the suffrage and civil/legal equality movements, she goes onto demonstrate that the working-class industrial women’s movement, although not without racism, certainly has the best historical record of the three organizing across race lines. This is attributed to the fact that it was the only movement with a class analysis, from which grew the common tactic of strikes and common goals of equal/higher wages, shorter hours and other such issues. Sacks concluded, “Whom the women’s movements perceived to be the enemy illuminates the primacy of class lines over sex” (p. 46). Since the capitalists who paid their wages were enemy number one, the working-class women understood sex as compounding the class exploitation which was their primary concern.

*Monthly Review* published Lise Vogel’s response to Sacks’ piece in 1977, under the title, “A Tale of Two Feminisms.” Vogel has been recognized as contributing greatly to the body of Marxist feminist work over the last several decades, and some of the early research she cites in this piece was also on mill women of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Vogel, although appreciating Sacks’ Marxist analysis, accused Sacks of being overly economist, which is the foundation, although not used in the same way by Vogel, of the post-Marxist critique of Marxism. Vogel clarifies that “economism” in this case means that the women’s economic experiences (e.g., the factory) are analyzed in isolation from other experiences (e.g., the family) and are prioritized in all aspects of a person’s life. Vogel claims that this economism actually works to obscure class struggle in all of its complexities since not enough attention is given to the lived experiences of people according to their race, gender and other identities.9 She is also

9 It is interesting to point out here that there is a historical precedent of critiquing Marxism for its economism, but that the definitions of economism are diverse due to the historical context and the goals of the person making that critique. As mentioned earlier, Lenin criticized the prominent soviet Marxists of his time for being economist, but he meant something a bit different than Vogel. Lenin was trying to demonstrate the importance of the state and political organizing in the class struggle at a time when other Marxists were only interested in the relationship between base (mode of production) and superstructure (the social relations of production that were determined by the mode of production). The focus only on the relationship b/t base and superstructure, in Lenin’s view, led to a separation of
careful to clarify that, unlike many socialist feminists at that time, she doesn’t advocate for the use of a dual systems theory for a few reasons (including that patriarchy hasn’t been clearly defined). Dual systems feminist theories often purport that capitalism and patriarchy are separate systems grounded in separate power structures that work together to some degree to oppress women. Vogel does not want to de-emphasize class, but she is interested in developing a more complex and dialectical understanding of the relationship between race, class and gender among the working classes and the impact these relationships have on life in the family and political organizing, for example.

This tradition, exemplified by Vogel, of theorizing the dialectical relationships between race, class and gender, while maintaining the primacy of capitalist class relations has been the hallmark of Marxist feminist theory throughout its time in academic women’s studies. Marxist feminists subscribe to a “unified systems” theory in which, to varying degrees, Patriarchy exists in the realm of the social relations (the superstructure) produced by the capitalist modes of production (the base) (Howie 2007). A brief sketch of the work of other important Marxist feminist theorists is in order for the sake of further clarifying this category of theory.

Gimenez’s article, “The Production of Divisions: Gender Struggles under Capitalism” (1995), outlines a list of assumptions underlying her position which is similar to Vogel’s earlier work. To illustrate this position, she provides a general list of differences between Marxist feminist theory and (critique of) the more postmodern Marxist theoretical developments. I have included it because it is a concise and clear description of the differences will be useful in economics and politics where economy is more important. He and Vogel would have agreed that this problem obscured the lived experience of the working class in all of its divisions and therefore would not allow the working-class to overcome the divisions in their social relations and work in solidarity with one another. However, the sites of analysis for which economism doesn’t allow differ between the two. Vogel’s body of work is concerned with economism’s disregard for political (and economic) relations in the home, politics and other sites where Lenin focused on economism’s disregard for political relations at the level of the state and the implications for organizing the revolution.
understanding feminist theory’s relationship to Marx throughout the rest of this study. They are as follows:

a. Marx’s work is not deterministic (or economist)—he discusses social structures as constraining, but says these same structures play a role in yielding subjects that can transform it;

b. The material aspects of the human condition (hunger, birth, death, etc.,) are the basis of fundamental political demands;

c. We don’t construct reality, we transform it;

d. Divisions based on race, gender, etc., are phenomena with origins in capitalism;

e. Identity politics cannot be isolated from class politics and although classifications of workers based on race and/or sex results in different embodied experiences, these divisions do not serve as the primary exploitation (Gimenez 1995, pp. 257-258)

Theresa Ebert (2005) sets out similar principles in her critique of contemporary cultural theory and her call for a new “Red” Feminism, which “. . .is not only concerned about the ‘woman question,’ it is even more concerned about the ‘other’ questions that construct the ‘woman question’: the issues of class and labor [and]. . . the root realities of global capitalism” (p. 34). Angela Davis (1983) also addresses this issue of division vs. unity within the Marxist socialist project in her book *Women, Race & Class*.

A. Davis’s book is grounded in the life experiences of Black working-class women under the development of U.S. capitalism. Her work focuses on the different experiences between workers divided by race and sex but artfully uses it to expand and contribute to Marx’s theory of class not to fundamentally change it by claiming that race is an equal category of analysis to class. From explaining why Black women’s experience under slavery make them a model for a
new independent womanhood to her charges that U.S. feminist movements are shackled by a classist, racist, liberal ideology, Davis grounds her work in dialectical materialism and class struggle. Her view of housework (i.e., women’s reproductive labor or domestic work) is demonstrative of this point. Davis writes, “. . . housework cannot be defined as an integral component of capitalist production. Rather, it is related to production as a precondition” (p. 234). She supports this by pointing out that capitalists care very little about how labor-power is produced; in fact, it is a presupposition that labor power exists. Women’s unpaid domestic labor is unproductive in this instance and suggesting that women are paid for it simply reinforces the idea that women should remain in the “unproductive” private sector. She suggests instead that it would be more productive, so to speak, to organize women to demand better pay for and access to wage-labor jobs, public childcare, and higher tech, socialized housework. This falls in line with the classic Marxist argument that women’s full entry into the public wage-labor economy is a step in the right direction to their emancipation sexism. However, Davis furthers this argument by pointing out that all parts of women’s labor needs to become part of the public sphere in order to further women’s, and therefore the entire working-class’s, emancipation from capitalism.

In contrast to Marxist feminist work, the most defining characteristic of socialist feminist theorists is the use of a “dual systems theory” (Young 1981). The dual systems theory is grounded in the idea that capitalism and patriarchy are separate but related systems of oppression with a different historical development. Typically the work of socialist-feminists is centered on determining to what degree and in what ways capitalism and patriarchy are related. The dual systems theory in U.S. feminist scholarship seems to have developed from the lived activist experiences of Left women in the 1960’s and 1970’s. Several socialist feminists have written about being marginalized within socialist movements that were dominated by Marxist men
Not only were these men sexist in their treatment of women in new left organizations in that the male public leaders often put women in service positions such as cleaning the office, answering the phones, writing the speeches, etc., but socialist feminists perceive that this sexism grew from Marxist theory itself as they claim that because it has an under-developed analysis of gender-based oppression, it is no wonder the men of the new left treated women’s oppression as something to deal with after the “real revolution” happens (Sargent 1981). In other words, what is lacking in Marxist theory is the role that patriarchy plays in the everyday lives (in both the public and private sphere) of women in a capitalist society.

Socialist feminists critique Marx’s economic theory of capitalism for being reductionist and exclusionary of women’s experiences. This critique comes from the larger theoretical tradition of poststructuralism, which resists modernist theories (such as Marxism) based on essentialist identities in which structure takes precedence over individual agency (Kellner 1995, Hay 1995, Goldstein 2005). Hartmann (1997) opens her famous piece by charging the Marxism with the disregard of women and issues specific to them, “The ‘marriage’ of Marxism and feminism has been like the marriage of husband and wife depicted in the English common law: Marxism and feminism are one, and that one is Marxism” (p. 97). The socialist feminist conception of patriarchy is loosely derived from the radical feminist theorization of it as the primary system of domination through which women are subject to sex-based oppression both individually and through institutions (Hartmann 1997, Eisenstein 1981). Socialist feminists differ from radical feminists in their conception of patriarchy, however, because many socialist feminists believe that patriarchy has a material base. Socialist feminists criticize radical feminists

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10 Hartmann’s piece cited here, The Unhappy Marriage between Marxism and Feminism, was originally published in 1981.
for claiming that patriarchy is ahistorical and without a known material base except for the psychological desire of men to control women.

Judith Kegan Gardiner (2008) studies the question “What Happened to Socialist Feminist Women’s Studies Programs?” and expands the definition of socialist feminism to include other poststructural and postmodern characteristics:

This socialist feminism emerged from a women's liberation movement that included multiple radical but often competing perspectives. These perspectives drew not only on Marxist and other anticapitalist views, but also on egalitarian practices derived from the social experiments of the 1960s and the identity politics that were inspired by the Black Power movement. The socialist feminist programs whose history I trace were influenced by all of these perspectives, but differed from other strains within the women's liberation movement in their insistence on the centrality of class and race oppression (pp. 559-560).

So socialist feminism can be described as both a dual systems theory at its core which draws from approaches and perspectives grounded in both utopian social communities and identity politics.

While socialist feminism is more pervasive throughout feminist theory, adequate time has been dedicated to demonstrating some of its key components through the examination of key Marxist feminists. As a result, it isn’t necessary to subject the socialist feminists to as in-depth of an examination as Marxist feminists in this study, but at least one comprehensive example of this feminist thought is useful. Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James (1974) are credited for the analysis that socialist feminists make of labor that they define as women’s unpaid reproductive or domestic. This analysis is centered on the idea that women’s unpaid role in the household
actually creates surplus value for the capitalist by contributing to the reproduction of labor power. Dalla Costa and James suggest that women’s domestic work be paid and that housewives should even use strike methods to struggle for their rightful piece of the capitalist’s profits. The socialist feminists generally agree and even take this view a step further by claiming that this reproductive labor is actually productive labor, because it creates surplus value, so it should be incorporated into the productive base of Marxist theory. This is a common and fundamental way in which socialist feminists believe Marxist theory should be changed in order to accommodate feminist concerns (Eisenstein 1981, Bryson 2004).

The examination of differences between Marxist feminist and socialist feminist theory is important in order to define each of them. Marxist feminist theory simply extends orthodox Marxist theory to more completely account for women whereas socialist feminist theory often uses more poststructuralist concepts and aims to re-theorize Marx for women. The subject of research in this study is the place of orthodox Marxist theory (which includes Marxist feminist theory) in US undergraduate women’s studies core curriculum.

Now that I have provided a historical sketch of the women’s studies as a field, explored its core curriculum and defined its foundational key theoretical models, the last piece is to discuss the discipline’s current conceptualization of theory and its impact.

Current Theoretical Trends in the US University and the Implications for Feminist Theory

Many agree that the dominant theoretical paradigm throughout the US University curriculum falls under the broad umbrella of “post-theories,” resulting in the marginalization and exclusion of orthodox (or classical) Marxist theory (Cole 2008, Kelly 2002, Ollman 1990). The editors of Post-Ality: Marxism and Postmodernism perhaps put it most succinctly when they offer the following as a justification for their journal that focuses on classical (orthodox) Marxist thought,
“Classical Marxism has been so violently and systematically excluded from the scene of social struggle and analysis…The entire knowledge industry under wage-labor-capital is freely available to the opponents of Marxism” (Zavarzadeh, Ebert & Morton 1995, p. iii).

Although the goal of this research is to define what Marxist theory is and is not, and not to define what is other than Marxist theory, some brief definitions of post-theories will be useful since work that falls under this designation is diverse and subject to much contestation among post-authors about which classification of post might best describe a certain work. So to avoid confusion, the following outlines the definitions this paper will use when referring to post-theories. Poststructuralism’s defining characteristics are antipathy to any system, rejection of Marxist view of history and focus on the local or the “small” story as opposed to a focus on the metanarrative (Cole 2008, p. 45). Foucault’s diffusion of power from social structures to individual discourse and Derrida’s destabilization of the subject are classic illustrations of poststructuralist theory. Postmodernism’s defining characteristics include resistance towards certainty and resolution, rejection of fixed notions of reality, acceptance of complexity and multiplicity, irreverence for traditions of philosophy or morality, deliberate attempts to unsettle subjects and the disruption of binaries (Cole 2008, p. 46). Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984) is a classic example of postmodern theory. Seidman (as cited in Cole 2008, p. 228) says of Lyotard’s postmodernism, “Nothing can be reduced to a universal logic, such as class struggle or traditional feminist struggle against patriarchy” because all knowledge is relative, metanarratives are dangerous and there are so many variables to consider in defining a subject, that the task becomes nearly impossible (as cited in Cole 2008, p. 47). Characteristics of both of these post-theories came into dialogue with the search for a new paradigm, known as post-Marxism, which would correct the perceived mistakes of Marxism or
change Marxism to reflect the political and economic changes of the twentieth century. This need to change Marxism grew largely from its perceived failure as evidenced by the rise of repressive Stalinism throughout the twentieth century and the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc by the century’s close. Goldstein (2005) defines post-Marxist theory as poststructuralist Marxism that addresses many traditions and methods that

…do not form a [single] movement or a school: however, they all restate and revise Althusserian and/or Foucauldian theory, and, unlike traditional Marxism, which… emphasizes the class struggle and the common humanity of oppressed groups, [post-Marxist] scholars all reveal social life’s sexual, racial, class, and ethnic divisions and progressive import (p. 2).

Multicultural, global and postcolonial feminist theorists as well as critical race scholars can typically be counted among the post-Marxists. Kellner (1995) extends one’s understanding of post-Marxism as, “A reconstructed Marxism, a Marxism without guarantees, teleology, and foundations will be more open, tolerant, skeptical, and modest than previous versions” (p. 40) It is these post-theories, the name by which they will now be referred, in all of their incarnations which dominate the US academy today.

Women’s studies is no exception when it comes to the dominance of post-theories, as evidenced both by those feminist theorists who subscribe to this paradigm and those who critique it. In a review of thirteen Introduction to Women’s Studies course textbooks, the books held in the highest esteem were those in which multicultural perspectives were the central focus and those comprised of many different women writing about their own experiences as opposed to the more traditional textbook authored by one to two people only (T. Brown 1994). By the mid-1990’s there was clearly a preference for a focus on the differences between women and on the
local narrative—key characteristics of the posts. Those feminist theorists who subscribe to the
post-theories focus on deconstructing women’s subjectivity, replacing metanarratives in favor of
more local narratives/meanings and focusing on difference, specifically difference in identity.
Ermarch (2000) is clear about the preference for post-theories in women’s studies in her article,
What Counts as Feminist Theory, as she writes, “Postmodernity offers to women precisely the
opportunity to redefine problems of identity and agency in terms suitable to their experience. It
would be ironic, though not without precedent, for feminists now to deflect an opportunity that
has been so patiently built” (p. 117). Wendy Brown’s seminal article, The Impossibility of
Women’s Studies (1997) predicts that women’s studies future as a renewed cite of “critical
inquiry and political energy” will be determined by the extent that women’s studies centers itself
on postmodern questions of identity and subject deconstruction. However, some feminist
theorists have been consistent and vocal about their critiques of what they see as the
unquestioned dominance of post-theory in the field.

Those feminist scholars who critique post-theory’s hegemonic discourse in women’s studies
are largely Marxist or socialist feminist theorists who charge the field with an exclusion of Marx
as well as a host of consequences that result from the metanarrative of the posts. Ebert, in her
seminal piece (Untimely) Critiques for a Red Feminism (1995), makes the case against the
cultural (or ludic as she terms it) turn in feminist theory. Referencing Foucault’s privileged place
in feminist theory she writes,

. . . because power is everywhere and comes from everywhere, it is an ineffectual theory
of power for any politics of social transformation—it is yet appealing for ludic or cultural
feminists because we don’t have to confront global relationships of power OR the
resulting exploitation (p. 35).
Jane Kelly (2002) points to the “theoreticism”\(^\text{11}\) characterizing post-theories as having a devastating impact on feminist theory. This theoreticism results in the lack of obvious connection between theory and women’s lives, which in turn, leads to a refusal to make connections, for example, between women’s oppression in the family and women’s oppression in the labor market (p. 213). Kelly writes, “For women’s studies as an academic subject, the actual lives of women, including working-class women, have always been an impetus both to study itself and to the development for theories to understand oppression. Without that link between real experience and ways of understanding it—praxis—we are on the road to nowhere” (p. 232). Howie (2007) believes that Marx’s writings were actually replaced, in women’s studies, with the work of post-Marxist theorists such as Foucault, Althusser and Lacan. Ebert, Kelly, Howie and other feminist scholars charge that the dominance of post-theories in women’s studies, which essentially started out as a critique of the Marxist theory, has developed into a hegemonic discourse that is often without any real understanding of Marx’s work in the first place.

**Research Question and Hypothesis**

This research investigates the competing claims that Marxist theory and the centrality of class struggle to women’s liberation are either absent from feminist theory and academic women’s studies or pervasive throughout feminist theory and academic women’s studies. Marxist feminists often claim that Marx is either absent from the field’s mainstream academic discourse or that Marxist work is only examined for the purpose of critique according to post-theory frameworks. In contrast, some women’s studies faculty and founders conclude that concepts such as globalization and anti-racism\(^\text{12}\) are innately socialist or Marxist in nature and are pervasive throughout the curriculum but simply are not explicitly labeled Marxist or socialist

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\(^{11}\) See Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* for the type of example of theoreticism Kelly is critiquing.

\(^{12}\) Anti-racism and globalization are concepts that are heavily represented in the undergraduate curriculum as we will discover in later chapters.
(Gardiner 2008). This investigation attempts to discover which of the aforementioned claims is supported by focusing on what is actually taught in women’s studies undergraduate core curriculum. These courses serve the purpose of defining the scope and theoretical underpinnings of the field by providing an examination of its central questions and concepts, through assigned course readings.

The question that guides this inquiry is as follows: *What is the current place of Marxist Theory in the undergraduate women’s studies core curriculum?* This is an especially interesting question given the importance of Marxist theory, which loosely underpins socialist feminist theory (Gardiner 2008), to the field’s beginnings and the central role socialist feminists played in the founding of early women’s studies programs. My hypothesis is that Marxist theory does not enjoy the same privileged status as post-theories in women’s studies introduction and feminist theory courses.
Methods

This study is a descriptive, deductive content analysis of commonly required course readings from degree-granting Women’s Studies undergraduate core curriculum. According to Neuendorf (2002), “Content analysis may be briefly defined as the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics” (p. 1). She continues that “. . . it is not limited as to the types of variables that may be measured of the context in which the messages are created and presented” (p. 10). This study analyzes assigned course readings to determine their theoretical orientation. Specifically, I will look survey the content of the most common course readings and analyze those using key components of Marxist theory. The analysis of each commonly assigned course reading will determine if a particular reading can be labeled as an example of Marxist theory. This content analysis is deductive in aim as “. . . data are analyzed according to an existing framework” (Patton 2003, p. 453). The framework in this case is the three components of Marxist theory as constructed by key Marxist texts. It is descriptive in that the goal is to use the course readings as a barometer that will describe the place of Marxist theory in the undergraduate women’s studies core curriculum.

Researchers have studied educational curricula for many purposes ranging from understanding the use and importance of technology in instruction, gauging the effectiveness of assessment and deciphering the political orientation of textbooks. This example of content analysis applied to textbooks has been commonly used in the past to determine if the content of textbooks used in a child’s early literacy education was sexist, for example, by creating a Sex-Bias Index (Britton 1974, Grund-Slepack 1980). “Among techniques which have been used by social researchers to evaluate a society’s values is that of coding children’s textbooks for both implied and stated cultural attitudes” (Grund-Slepack 1980, p. 77). The Sex-Bias index used in
Grund-Slepack’s content analysis of early childhood education readers (textbooks) measured sex-bias by deconstructing the concept into empirically measurable components that could be applied to the analysis of the textbook’s content to quantitatively calculate sex-bias (Grund-Slepack 1980). One such component was career-role frequency (the types of frequency careers in which women and men regularly found themselves employed).

Similar to the tool in Grund-Slepack’s study, this study will utilize a Marxist Theory Filter as the primary tool of content analysis and method of coding. I will run content through the Marxist Theory Filter, which uses core components of Marx’s philosophical and political economic analysis. Each reading’s use (nonuse) of each core component will determine if a particular reading, commonly assigned as part of the women’s studies undergraduate core curriculum, is an example of Marxist theory. Both this study and Grund-Slepack’s study share the goal of measuring “latent content.” Latent content is defined as content that “...cannot be measured directly but can be measured or represented by one or more . . . indicators” (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black 1998, p. 581). My study and the sex bias studies, however, differ in purpose because my study classifies a reading into a category of theoretical orientation, and by doing so, determines the current place of Marxist theory in the women’s studies undergraduate core curriculum. This, in turn, will provide insight into the current value placed on Marxist theory by the discipline just as Grund-Slepack’s study (and Britton’s study prior to that) yielded insight about our society’s values on issues of gender equity. However, given the history of women’s studies curriculum development, commonly assigned course readings (and not traditional textbooks) will serve as the units of analysis here.

13 The Marxist Theory Filter will be described in more depth towards the end of this chapter.
Sample

Women’s studies core courses rarely use traditional textbooks written by one or even a few different experts. Instead faculty teaching these courses often assign a compilation of individually authored course readings that range from excerpts of classic feminist texts (such as de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*) to more current critiques of the classics or applications of feminist theory (such as hooks’ *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*) to pieces of feminist fiction (such as Gilman’s *Yellow Wallpaper*). This compilation makes up the many syllabi reading lists that serve as the core of the undergraduate women’s studies curriculum, and this use of individual core readings has been a consistent historical feature of women’s studies courses from the birth of academic women’s studies (see Edwards 1978).

These frequently assigned readings serve as this study’s units of analysis and are often found in textbook anthologies, compiled in professor packets\(^{14}\) or posted individually to online course management systems such as Blackboard. However when one considers the following, it is not surprising that a consistent list of core readings used across the discipline is not readily available: a. it was only recently that the existence of women’s studies core courses has been established (Salley, Winkler, Celeen, & Meck 2004), b. women’s studies is an interdisciplinary endeavor (often drawing faculty and course readings from other disciplines), c. and traditional textbooks are not commonly used. So how is one to determine which course readings are most commonly used in core courses and ultimately serve as a core curriculum reading list?

A sampling of course readings will be derived from current syllabi in use in U. S. undergraduate women’s studies core courses (introduction to women’s studies course and feminist theory course). The population is defined as all U.S. undergraduate degree-granting institutions.

\(^{14}\) A “professor’s packet” is usually a bound copy of a course’s required readings, printed on campus, constructed by a particular professor since the readings cannot be found in another textbook anthology or easily accessible place.
women’s/gender/feminist studies programs, which will all be referred to as women’s studies programs for simplicity’s sake. Given the interdisciplinary nature of women’s studies programs, research has indicated that women’s studies curriculum has developed over the last forty years to include core courses that consist of introduction and feminist theory courses as the centerpiece of degrees (Salley, Winkler, Celeen, & Meck 2004). Although the existence of multiple curricula in one course is well-established in the field of curriculum and instruction (the designed, delivered, expected and experienced curriculum), this study is specifically concerned with the designed curriculum. The designed curriculum is the explicit curriculum intended to fulfill course requirements (Stark & Lowther 1986; Ewell 1997). The delivered, expected and experienced curriculum are also integral to student learning; but when one needs to do a systematic and objective study of curriculum (i.e., a content analysis), examination of the designed curriculum is a priority. The course syllabus is perhaps the most common tool or technique used by college faculty to communicate the designed curriculum, such as required readings (Smith 1993). Since this mandatory tool serves as an agreement between students and faculty regarding the purpose and direction of the course, it is logical that required course readings will consistently be listed as part of the syllabus (Lowther, Stark & Martens 1989). As the location of the units of analysis (course readings) is clear, gathering a sample of course syllabi is the next step.

A complete list of undergraduate, degree-granting women’s studies programs has been drawn from the *Artemis Guide to Women’s Studies* at [http://www.artemisguide.com](http://www.artemisguide.com). The site

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15 It is not relevant to this research to discuss the name trajectory of what often started out as women’s studies programs as this is a complex topic that in no way impacts the investigation at hand. However, this study’s reference to all such programs as women’s studies programs is not meant to disregard or minimize the complex and meaningful reasons why some programs have changed their names or others conceived during and after the 1980’s may have never called themselves women’s studies, but instead opted for gender or feminist studies. It is only meant to simplify language and keep the focus on the content of the core courses in these programs as the core courses are very similar in objective, regardless of the names of the programs.
was established in 1995, is updated annually and links to 436 women’s studies program sites. The limit in using this resource is that the site only lists programs with websites, but since the vast majority of women’s studies programs have websites in 2012, this limitation will not have a significant effect on the sample. I chose Artemisguide.com from which to pull my sample because the site provides a complete, accurate and periodically updated listing of women’s studies undergraduate programs in the US, has served as the basis for the sample in the most recent and similar women’s studies curriculum study (Salley, Winkler, Celeen, & Meck 2004), is consistently a part of many women’s studies resource guides at university library websites across the country (see University of Delaware, Wichita State University and George Washington University in St. Louis for starters) and is well-known and used by students seeking admission to undergraduate and graduate women’s studies programs. A limitation to the information found in the Artemis Guide is that the site provides the names of all US graduate and undergraduate women’s studies programs/departments/concentrations (degree-granting and otherwise), but it does not include individual contacts (names/emails/phone numbers) of department faculty and staff who are most likely to respond to a request for syllabi. This necessitated further investigation to compile a current and accurate listing of relevant personnel contacts in only degree-granting, undergraduate women’s studies programs.

The procedure used to obtain the syllabi sample is as follows. I used the Artemis Guide to Women’s Studies as a starting point since it listed 436 women’s studies programs and research centers (as of January 2012), some offering undergraduate or graduate degrees in the discipline, some offering minors only, and some simply housing related research centers not at all involved in offering coursework. Then I isolated only the 258 undergraduate degree-granting women’s studies programs. I then visited each program/department website to obtain the names of both the
program director or department head and program/department administrative coordinator or secretary, as faculty and staff in these positions:

- are very likely to have their names and contact information conspicuously listed on their web sites whereas it is much more difficult and sometimes impossible to obtain the names of faculty teaching a particular course on the program website,

- are more permanent fixtures in often small women’s studies programs which may rely heavily on affiliate faculty from other degree programs or contingent faculty such as graduate teaching assistants and adjuncts rather than more permanent tenure-track faculty to teach especially some of the lower level courses such as Introduction to Women’s Studies,

- have more knowledge about who to ask for what materials, since they work closely with other program faculty.

I then emailed each of the program contacts to explain the nature of this study and to request that each send a syllabus from the program’s core introduction to women’s studies and feminist theory courses. The email introduced me, informed the participants of the study’s purpose as stated in the research question and ensured confidentiality of both the instructor and institutional name to which the syllabus belongs. Participation is voluntary and no reward or incentive was offered for participating in this study. This is a convenience sample. I received 34 qualifying syllabi from 24 universities of diverse region, size and mission.

**Procedure**

After the syllabi are collected, I will catalogue each individual course reading and its author into a database according to the university from where the syllabus came as well as the specific course in which it is assigned. Frequency calculations will be performed to determine
the most frequently assigned titles and authors. These frequently assigned readings will serve as
the units of analysis as each is examined for classical Marxist theoretical content. A content
analysis will then be conducted on each of the most common required readings from the sample.

Since the goal of the study is to determine the place of traditional Marxist theory in
women’s studies undergraduate core curriculum and the required course readings serve as the
central focus of women’s studies core courses, this study will conduct a content analysis of each
of the most common required readings by utilizing a Marxist Theory Filter. The Marxist Theory
Filter is constructed of the primary characteristics of Marxist theory which, when applied
together, differentiate it from all other social science theories. There are three primary
characteristics found in the theory’s two central components: Marx’s philosophical tenets of a.)
historical materialism and b.) dialectical relationships, and Marx’s theory of political economy
based in c.) class struggle born of the labor theory of value. Although certainly not an exhaustive
list of characteristics of Marxist theory, these three central and defining characteristics were
determined through a study of the theory’s key texts authored by Marx, Engels, and other
Marxist theorists. A definition of each characteristic can be found in the previous chapter’s
Orthodox Marxist Theory subsection, but below is an explanation of the Marxist Theory Filter’s
key components.

**Marxist Theory Filter**

While analyzing each of the most frequently assigned course titles, the following is a
more detailed description of the Marxist Theory Filter, based on key excerpts and concepts from
Marxist texts that will guide my analysis of each of the study’s readings.
a. Historical Materialism

- Marx’s theory of knowledge: the nature of an individual and the knowledge each produces is dependent upon the material conditions determining his or her mode of production which, in turn, determines how one reproduces him/herself on a daily basis. All knowledge and consciousness is grounded in the material conditions of an individual’s life. Humans create their own consciousness.

- The forces of production (the base) determine the relations of production (the superstructure).

b. Dialectical Relationships

- The world exists in various connections of opposites. “[T]he whole world, natural, historical, intellectual, is represented as a process – i.e., as in constant motion, change, transformation, development; and the attempt is made to trace out the internal connection that makes a continuous whole of all this movement and development” (Engels 1880, paragraph 13).

- Everything is connected, perpetually in motion. Change is natural, necessary and comes as the result of the connection of opposites. “…whereas metaphysics sees the world as a complex of things, dialectics examines these elements as part of an interconnected whole in which everything is related to and determined by everything else” (Dialego, p. 18).

- When it is difficult to determine the possible use of a dialectical relationship, I will apply the three laws of dialectics: the law of transformation of quantity into quality, the law of the unity of opposites and the law of the negation of the negation.
c. Class Struggle

- There are two classes under capitalism (the bourgeois or capitalist class and the proletariat class) and their interests (capital vs. labor, respectively) are diametrically opposed. The proletariat creates profit (surplus value) from the portion of their labor, for the capitalist, which is unpaid. The capitalist controls profit and uses it to create capital.

- Because everything of value is the result of the proletariat’s labor, the proletariat is the only group that can overthrow capitalism through revolution and move to a system where private property is abolished and production is socialized. This is done through class struggle.

Marxist Theory Filter (Figure 1)

Marxist Theory
Each of the three components will be independently considered during the analysis of each reading, essentially making the Marxist Theory Filter a nominal scale. There is no relationship, and certainly not one of hierarchy, assumed between the filter’s components. For example, a course reading does not need to possess a Marxist approach to historical materialism in order to also possess a Marxist approach to dialectical relations.

After each of the most frequently assigned readings is run through this Marxist Theory Filter, I will measure the frequency of Marxist readings commonly assigned in core courses in order to determine the place of Marxist theory within the undergraduate core curriculum. If a reading contains any of the three characteristics, it will be coded as containing the characteristic/s and an excerpt from the reading will be recorded to support that coding. If a reading possesses all 3 characteristics, it will be considered Marxist. If a reading possesses 0-2 of those characteristics, it will not be considered Marxist.
Results

*Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prodding with a purpose.*\(^\text{16}\)

-Zora Neale Hurston, folklorist, writer and foremother to US Black feminist thought.

It is in this chapter that the results of my poking and prodding will be presented and it is in the next chapter that the analysis/purpose will receive the attention it deserves. The results are presented in three subsections which describe the sample, establish the exact course readings that will serve as the units of analysis, and present the results of the Marxist theory content analysis of those particular course readings. The first subsection provides an overview of the sample yielded by this study’s gracious participants. The second and third subsections present the data yielded by the sample, but for two different purposes that allow the reader to have a more complete and complex view of what is formally being taught in the women’s studies undergraduate core curriculum. A description and overview of the women’s studies core curriculum, centered on assigned readings, is the second subsection’s focus. Whereas the third subsection directly addresses the hypothesis as it answers the question, “What is the place of classical Marxist theory in today’s undergraduate women’s studies core curriculum?” through the presentation of the results of the content analysis of the most commonly assigned readings in Introduction and Feminist Theory core courses.

**Overview of the Sample**

The response to my request for study participation surpassed my expectations. Of the 258 undergraduate, degree granting women’s studies programs to which I emailed my request for core course syllabi, faculty and administrators from 24 university programs responded by submitting a total of 42 syllabi. Given that I directed my request to all 258 institutions comprising the population, this study yielded a response rate of nearly 10% of the population.

\(^{16}\) This quotation is taken from her 1942 work, *Dust Tracks on a Road.*
(9.3% to be exact). Nearly 10% of all of universities offering women’s studies undergraduate degrees are represented in this study.

Of the 42 originally submitted syllabi, 34 syllabi met the requirements for inclusion in the study. In order to be included in the study, a syllabus had to be for one of the following core courses: introduction to women’s studies, feminist theory, or Marxist and socialist feminist theory. So some of the 24 universities represented in the study submitted syllabi for an intro and feminist theory course, which is why there are more syllabi than universities. No Marxist and socialist feminist theory (or related) course syllabi were submitted. Most of the course syllabi included in the study are clearly labeled with the titles “Introduction to Women’s Studies” or “Feminist Theory.” There was some variation in the literal titles of the syllabi, such as a course titled, “Foundations of Feminist Theory,” but this example of a literal title variation is still clearly a syllabus for the core feminist theory course in that program’s core, so it was included in the study as a feminist theory course syllabus. However some course title variations were not so clear and required further investigation to determine whether they would qualify for inclusion in the study. The following two examples of submitted syllabi that were not as clearly titled will provide you with a clearer picture of how determinations for inclusion were made. First, an example of a syllabus not immediately labeled “Introduction to Women’s Studies”, but included in this study as an introduction to women’s studies course syllabus is titled “Gender and Feminism in Everyday Life” and is numbered, in terms of course level, as an introductory course. The primary reason this course was included in the study as an intro course is because its course description is very similar to intro course descriptions. An excerpt from the syllabus’s course description is as follows:

17 At times in this paper, introduction to women’s studies courses will be known as “intro” courses.
What is gender? Why does it studying it matter? This course will explore how feminism as a political movement and as a set of critical perspectives has understood gender as a category of social analysis.

The secondary reason this course was included is because it is listed as one of three required courses (this course plus two that can be chosen from a list of five others) that fulfills the undergraduate degree’s introductory core course requirement. Second, an example of a syllabus that was originally submitted but not included in the study’s sample is a course titled “Marxism in Politics and Literature.” The primary reason it was not included in the study sample is that the main focus of the course is Marxist theory, and not feminist theory, as exemplified in its course description, although the faculty member (who also teaches in women’s studies) teaching this course did write to me that the course included a small section on Marxist feminist theory:

This course looks at the intersection of politics and literature through the prism of Marxism, past and present. We will examine Marxism as a political theory from its origins and as it has developed over time, and we will read a variety of types of literature that either spring from Marxist politics or invite a Marxist analysis.

The secondary reason it was not included in the study sample was because it was listed as both an English and political science course and not listed or cross-listed as a women’s studies course, so it is not required as part of that university’s women’s studies undergraduate curriculum. Other submitted syllabi that were not included were syllabi for graduate courses, and graduate coursework is beyond the purview of this study.

Although the names of the faculty and the institutions at which these courses are taught will not be revealed to protect confidentiality, it is important to provide other information to
determine if this sample is representative of the population. The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education provides an adequate description of the sample’s universities as it provides a “...a widely used [classification framework] in the study of higher education, both as a way to represent and control for institutional differences, and also in the design of research studies to ensure adequate representation of sampled institutions, students, or faculty” (http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/). According to the most recent Carnegie Classification study, the 24 institutions participating in this study cover five of the seven Carnegie classifications used to classify the majority of undergraduate degree-granting institutions. The classifications are based on 2010 institutional information, such as enrollment, instructional program, and size and setting. Chart 1 gives a breakout of Carnegie Classification representation for ALL universities offering an undergraduate degree-granting women’s studies program (also known as all universities in the population AND all universities contacted for study participation). Chart 2 provides a breakout of Carnegie Classification representation for only those universities who are participating in this study (also known as those universities with syllabi in the sample AND those universities that are included in the study). When comparing Chart 1 and Chart 2, one can easily conclude that those universities participating in this study are indeed representative of those in the population.

For a detailed description of each Carnegie Classification, please refer to organization’s website, http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/.
Carnegie Classifications of ALL Universities Offering An Undergraduate Degree-Granting Women's Studies Program (Chart 1)

- RU/VH: Research University (very high research activity)
- RU/H: Research University (high research activity)
- DPU: Doctoral Research University
- Master's L: Master's College and University (larger programs)
- BAC/A&S: Baccalaureate Colleges: (arts and sciences)

Carnegie Classifications of Universities Participating in This Study (Chart 2)

- RU/VH: Research University (very high research activity)
- RU/H: Research University (high research activity)
- DPU: Doctoral Research University
- Master's L: Master's College and University (larger programs)
- BAC/A&S: Baccalaureate Colleges: (arts and sciences)
The course syllabi are representative as well, meaning that syllabi for both introduction to women’s studies courses and feminist theory courses are each adequately represented in the sample. There are 20 introduction to women’s studies and 14 feminist theory syllabi in the sample. This is not the ideal 1:1 ratio of syllabi exactly evenly distributed over both courses, although it is also certainly not skewed to the point where one would, for example, altogether abandon analysis of course readings in feminist theory courses due to lack of representation. It is also important that both courses’ readings are counted together when determining the frequencies of readings and authors as the purpose of this study necessitates the examination of the core curriculum, through the determination of the most commonly assigned reading titles, and not any one course. However there are some reasons that it will be useful to describe the course readings according to the specific course in which they are assigned.

Given the response rate, mirror representation of the population (despite a convenience sample), and adequate representation of syllabi from both core courses, this sample allows for the generalization of results to the population of all US undergraduate degree granting women’s studies programs.

**Overview of Common Authors and Titles**

Before one can analyze the content of core course curriculum readings, one must determine which readings, and therefore which ideas, theories and perspectives, comprise the core curriculum. As demonstrated in the Theory/Literature Review chapter, the last study to include information on women’s studies curriculum was published in 2004 and its main contribution to an understanding of the curriculum is that, unlike earlier inquiries into women’s studies curriculum, it established the existence of a core curriculum largely centered on the introduction to women’s studies and feminist theory courses (Salley, Winkler, Celeen, & Meck).
Other than that, the literature yielded no research into what exactly it is we teach in women’s studies core curriculum, in terms of common course readings and authors. Therefore a necessary project here, although secondary in focus to the research question, is to determine which readings and authors are most frequently assigned in core courses in order to get a better understanding of what is taught.

Most course reading titles assigned in both introduction and feminist theory courses are authored by well-known feminists from various perspectives and theoretical strands and are either short pieces (e.g., The Combahee River Collective’s *A Black Feminist Statement*) or excerpts from longer key works (e.g., the first chapter of Friedan’s book *The Feminine Mystique*). Although not always the case, anthologies of these course readings are required as the course text on the great majority of sample syllabi. In addition to the readings in the anthologies, most women’s studies core course faculty then assign other key readings not included in the anthology and often direct students to access those via professor packets or through online course management systems.

There are a grand total of 1,350 individual assigned readings yielded by the 34 total syllabi. This grand total includes all assigned readings from each syllabus. So each of the 14 syllabi assigning the introduction to Simone de Beauvoir’s *A Second Sex*, are counted as 14 separate individual assigned readings in this 1350 total. This list of 1350 is then used to determine those authors and readings that are assigned most frequently. It was found that there are clearly some authors and particular readings that are assigned at much higher frequencies and they are detailed in the following charts and subsequent explanations. It is these authors and readings that make up the core curriculum.
Table 1, outlines the most frequent readings (these readings are the units of analysis for this study) and the second table outlines the top ten most frequently assigned authors. Table 2, lists the top ten most frequently assigned authors, and is different from the readings table as some frequent authors had a variety of their titles assigned and therefore may not be represented on the readings table. Running frequency calculations on both the most commonly assigned readings and authors provides a more complete picture of the women’s studies core course curriculum.

I have identified 19 readings as the most frequent readings in the US women’s studies undergraduate core course curriculum. I performed frequency calculations on the list of 1350 readings and found that, in the most basic interpretation of frequency, there were a total of 158 titles that were assigned readings on two or more course syllabi. After isolating those 158 readings and analyzing the frequency spread, I decided that any reading assigned on at least 20% of more of the syllabi should be considered commonly assigned and analyzed for Marxist content as part of this study. This yielded 12 readings. In order to increase the sample to ensure sufficient representation, I decreased the percentage of syllabi on which readings must be assigned to 18% and this increased the number of most frequently assigned readings to 19 total, which are listed in Table 1. These readings will serve as the units of analysis for this study.

Table 1 should be understood as follows. The title and author columns provide just that. The syllabi frequency column simply gives the number of individual syllabi on which this course reading was assigned. The feminist theoretical orientation column classifies the particular
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Total Syllabi Frequency</th>
<th>Feminist Theoretical Perspective</th>
<th>% of Total Syllabi</th>
<th>Intro Theory Course Syllabi</th>
<th>Feminist Theory Course Syllabi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Black Feminist Statement</td>
<td>The Combahee River Collective</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Multicultural(^{19})</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Second Sex (Introduction)</td>
<td>de Beauvoir, S.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Radical</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>This Sex Which is Not One</td>
<td>Irigaray, L.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Psychoanalytic</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>The Feminine Mystique: The Problem that Has No Name</td>
<td>Friedan, B</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oppression</td>
<td>Frye, M</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Radical</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses</td>
<td>Mohanty, C.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Multicultural</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>Declaration of Sentiments from The History of Women, Seneca Falls</td>
<td>Stanton, E. C.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Ain't I a Woman</td>
<td>Truth, S.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Multicultural</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Vindication of the Rights of Woman</td>
<td>Wollstonecraft, M.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression</td>
<td>hooks, b.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Multicultural</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Master's Tools Will Not Dismantle the House</td>
<td>Lorde, A.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Multicultural</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence</td>
<td>Rich, A.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Multicultural</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>A Day without Feminism</td>
<td>Baumgardner, J. &amp; Richards, A.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Postmodern/Third Wave</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism</td>
<td>Hartmann, H.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Socialist</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Age Race, Class, and Sex</td>
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<td>Multicultural</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>Lugones and Spelman</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Multicultural</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>White Privilege and Male Privilege</td>
<td>McIntosh, P.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Radical</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism</td>
<td>Pharr, S.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Multicultural</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{19}\) In both Tables 1 and 2, “Multicultural” denotes the Multicultural, Global and Postcolonial feminist theoretical perspective and is simply shortened for lack of space.
reading under a particular feminist theoretical approach (more details on the classifications will be provided shortly). The percentage of syllabi column provides the percentage of the sample syllabi on which this reading was assigned. The intro and fem theory columns give the frequency of reading assignment in both intro and theory course syllabi. For example, Truth’s *Ain’t I a Woman* was assigned on 2 intro course syllabi and 8 theory course syllabi.

Table 1 provides two pieces of important descriptive information about the US undergraduate women’s studies core curriculum. First, slightly over half of these readings are mostly assigned in feminist theory courses, which are 41% of the total sample. This confirms something that women’s studies students and faculty are probably not surprised by, which is that feminist theory courses are more likely than introduction to women’s studies courses to have a more established and consistent set of core readings and therefore a more consistent curriculum. Possible reasons for this difference are grounded in both the nature of theory courses and the difference in course objectives. In her forward to *Teaching Introduction to Women’s Studies: Expectations and Strategies*, Maher (1999) describes the very broad and complex nature of the intro course:

> Because Women’s Studies, particularly ‘Intro,’ is about all women in the world, or rather about gender relations, which include race and class relations, all over the world…and because we all, teachers and students, want the course to speak to our lives and our commitments and not just our academic knowledge, there can be no general ‘Intro’ course, in the way that there can perhaps be a generally accepted body of knowledge for, say, ‘Introductory Psych’ (in Winkler and DiPalma 1999, p. x).

In that same book, Winkler and DiPalma (1999) assert that that the intro course “… speaks for the broader field of women’s studies” (p. 5). They also acknowledge that although there are often
no fixed rules concerning course content, an approach has emerged in which both the social
construction of gender and intersectionality are central foci of intro courses. These observations
of intro courses are consistent with the sample syllabi data in this study. In contrast, feminist
theory course objectives are much narrower in focus and the primary objective is, as one of the
sample’s feminist theory syllabi puts it, “An investigation of various texts historically significant
in the development of feminist concepts and theories.” So intro courses cover the field in broad
strokes and grapple with topics such as the oppressions facing US and potentially global women.
In contrast, feminist theory courses focus almost exclusively on the important classical and
contemporary contributions that have defined feminist theory. Theory courses also often take a
chronological approach that begin, for example, with early European liberal feminist
contributions such as Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and end with
postmodern/third wave feminists such as Baumgardner. Given this information, it is logical that
theory courses are likely to have a more consistent set of readings, regardless of the faculty
member instructing the course.

The second important piece of information Table 1 provides is a description of which
theoretical perspectives are most represented in the US undergraduate women’s studies core
curriculum. As I analyzed each reading for Marxist theoretical content, I also made decisions
about the broad feminist theoretical category in which each reading can be classified. As
acknowledged earlier, definitive agreement within the field does not exist concerning both how
one names and defines different feminist theoretical perspectives (Lorber 1998). I can however
describe a bit about the process of classification and the definition I used for each classification
and provide each theoretical perspective’s key characteristics. Two sources, whose authors are
well established and respected in the field, were used to determine why a reading fit a certain
classification. Rosemary Tong’s textbook, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction* (2009), not only provides description and critique of what many would consider the eight primary classifications of feminist theory, but also explicitly discusses and classifies many of the titles and authors in Table 1. Judith Lorber’s piece, *The Variety of Feminisms and Their Contribution to Gender Equality* (1998), gives very simple/practical definitions of the characteristics of many different feminist theoretical perspectives. These two sources serve as the basis of the theoretical classification.

Of the 19 most commonly assigned readings in the US undergraduate women’s studies core curriculum:

- **9 readings represent the Multicultural, Global and Postcolonial feminist theoretical perspective**

  Key Characteristics: all women are not created or constructed equal and a woman’s oppression is defined or primarily impacted by her personal location at the intersection of multiple and interlocking identities (her ethnicity, race, class, sexual orientation, ability, age, etc.,) as defined by her culture. These feminists agree that no woman is free until all women are free so we must work to understand these multiple and interlocking sources of oppression in each woman’s particular context before women’s liberation is a possibility.

- **4 readings represent the Liberal feminist theoretical perspective**

  Key Characteristics: humans are rational and have the right to choose what each considers is good and satisfying for oneself as long as others are not deprived of their rights. Gender differences are not based in biology and therefore women should not be

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20 Tong’s text is also the most frequently assigned textbook in this sample’s theory course syllabi, so it is representative of how many faculty teach theory in women’s studies.
discriminated against and treated as inferior to men. Liberal feminists work for the equality of women and men—often through legal or other state-based routes.

- **3 readings represent the Radical feminist theoretical perspective**
  Key Characteristics: Men’s control over women’s bodies, self-identity, self-esteem and self-respect (known roughly as the Patriarchy) is the most fundamental of all oppressions human beings can experience. Radical feminists opt for radical and not reformist solution (as they saw Liberal feminists) to women’s oppression. Refusal of biological reproduction and lesbian separatism are two of many solutions for women’s liberation supported by some radical feminists.

- **1 reading represents the Psychoanalytic feminist theoretical perspective**
  Key Characteristics: Women’s psyche is the source of women’s thoughts and behaviors and this psyche is formed through our relationships (parental relationships being key) during infancy and early childhood. In order to achieve a nonpatriarchal society, these early experiences must be altered to support different conceptions of masculinity and femininity that are valued equally.

- **1 reading represents the Socialist feminist theoretical perspective**
  Key Characteristics: Socialist feminists typically believe in a dual or interactive systems paradigm in which both capitalism and patriarchy work in varying relationships with one another to reinforce capitalist class relations. Both capitalist and patriarchal relations must be destroyed to make women’s liberation a possibility.

- **1 reading represents the Postmodern and Third Wave feminist theoretical perspective**
  Key Characteristics: Women are not a presupposed category, knowledge and truth are relative concepts and a focus on difference necessitates an eschewing of meta-narratives
(like Marxism) in favor of understanding the local. Due to this focus on the local and resistance to classification, it is unclear what needs to be done to liberate women other than to personally work to deconstruct gender binaries.

True to the recommendations and predictions made by seminal women of color feminists and influential proponents of women’s studies in the 1980’s and 1990’s, multicultural, global and postcolonial Feminist theoretical perspectives are by far the dominant feminist theoretical perspective represented in the most frequently read titles in both the introduction and feminist theory core course curriculum. This chapter’s third subsection will further analyze the Table 1 readings for Marxist or Socialist feminist content.

**Table 2: Most Frequently Assigned Core Course Authors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author Name</th>
<th>Sum of Total Titles Assigned</th>
<th>Feminist Theoretical Perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hooks, b.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Multicultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorde, A.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Multicultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collins, P. H.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Multicultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frye, M.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Radical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baumgardner, J.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Postmodern/Third Wave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butler, J.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Postmodern/Third Wave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Combahee River Collective</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Multicultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de Beauvoir, S.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Radical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truth, S.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Multicultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich, A.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Multicultural</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 should be understood as follows. The sum of total titles assigned is simply a calculation of the sum of total titles authored by a particular person and assigned throughout the sample syllabi. For example, one syllabus assigned 4 course readings authored by bell hooks: 1 entire book, two essays, and a chapter from a different book. These 4 titles each contributed to the sum of 30 total hooks titles assigned. Also notice that Judith Butler and Patricia Hill Collins appear on this list, but none of their titles appears on Table 1. This is because a greater diversity
of their titles is frequently assigned on core course syllabi. This means that although they are both widely read authors, neither has a single title as frequently assigned as those included in Table 1. Conversely Chandra Mohanty and Heidi Hartmann are included in Table 1, but not in Table 2 because each has one foundational feminist title that is frequently assigned, but do not have many, if any, others assigned in core course syllabi. As in Table 1, the feminist theoretical perspective classifies each author’s general body of feminist work into a broader category. Again, the dominant theoretical paradigm represented by the majority of authors is multicultural, global and postcolonial feminist theory. More specifically, 5 out of the 6 total authors in this category are US Black feminist theorists (Black feminist theory is a specific subset of the multicultural, global and postcolonial theoretical perspective). There are no Marxist or socialist feminist authors in Table 2. So both tables reinforce the dominance of multicultural, global and postcolonial feminist theory in the US undergraduate women’s studies core course curriculum.

Content Analysis Results of the Prevalence of Classical Marxist Theory in the Undergraduate Degree-Granting Women’s Studies Core Curriculum

Each of the 19 most frequently assigned core course readings in Table 1 were analyzed via the Marxist Theory Filter (see Methods for a detailed description of the filter). I will first give the quantitative results and then examples from the analysis will follow in order to provide the reader with a more detailed understanding of the Filter’s application. Only 3 of the 19 total readings contain any Marxist theoretical components. Two of the readings only incorporated a Marxist approach to historical materialism: Chandra Mohanty’s Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses and Heidi Hartmann’s The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism. Two of the readings only incorporated a Marxist approach to dialectical relationships: Suzanne Pharr’s Homophobia A Weapon of Sexism and Heidi Hartmann’s The


Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism. None of the most frequently assigned core course curriculum readings incorporated all three of the classical Marxist Theory Filter’s components. As a result, none of the frequent core course curriculum readings are Marxist readings.

**Historical Materialism**

Mohanty and Hartmann’s readings incorporate a Marxist approach to historical materialism. Hartmann is widely recognized as a socialist feminist who uses a dual or interactive systems approach to women’s oppression in which both capitalism and patriarchy are important structures in defining women’s lives. She agrees with Marx’s analysis of capitalism, but critiques the analysis for not adequately theorizing women’s position under capitalism. Hartmann says Marxist theory is sex-blind and does not explain why women, specifically, are oppressed under men. To remedy the problem, she proposes that a material definition of patriarchy can more completely explain women’s oppression. Unlike her radical feminist contemporaries at the time, she spends much of The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism explaining that patriarchy has a materialist base. She writes, “We argue that a materialist analysis demonstrates that patriarchy is not simply a psychic, but also a social and economic structure. “We suggest that our society can best be understood once it is recognized that it is organized both in capitalist and patriarchal ways” (Hartmann 1997, p. 98). She continues,

We can usefully define patriarchy as a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women. … In the hierarchy of patriarchy, all men, whatever their rank in the patriarchy, are bought off by being able to control at least some women (Hartmann 1997, p. 101).
So, patriarchy is not an idealist conception and men as a group utilize various social (capitalist) institutions in order to control women’s labor in the market and in the home.

Mohanty uses historical materialism to resist the construction of all “third world” women as a monolithic subject in some western feminist writing. She writes, “. . . the feminist writings I analyze here discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/re-presenting a composite, singular ‘third world woman’” (Mohanty 2000, p. 345). To avoid this ahistorical construction of third world women as powerless and without determination, she suggests that feminists locate women within their specific economic (base) and cultural (superstructural) experiences by “… uncovering the material and ideological specificities that constitute a particular group of women as ‘powerless’ in a particular context” (Mohanty 2000, p. 346). Consistent with Marxist tradition, women’s lives must be understood through the analysis of their specific and material conditions and Mohanty is one of the first postcolonial feminists to make this demand of western feminism.

In contrast, the following examples are useful in understanding why some other readings did not use a historical materialist analysis. Opposed to Hartmann and Mohanty’s call for historicism in feminist theory, radical and psychoanalytic feminists, such as Simone de Beauvior and Luce Irigaray, often use what Marx terms an idealist) analysis in which women’s oppression can only be understood in terms of her relationship to men (patriarchy) or in terms of how the patriarchy has structured her psyche to always consider herself as the Other. On the other hand, the multicultural feminist members of The Combahee River Collective agree with Hartmann that classical Marxist theory does not adequately explain women’s specific oppression and extend this shortcoming to a perceived lack of Marxist analysis of racial oppression. Combahee writes,
Although we are in essential agreement with Marx’s theory as it applies to the very specific economic relationships he analyzed, we know that this analysis must be extended further in order for us to understand our specific economic situation as black women (The Combahee River Collective 1997, p. 66).

However, Combahee was very much founded as a consciousness-raising group that is rooted in the individual experiences of its members and based on their personal identities as Black lesbian women. So it is possible to analyze women’s oppression simply according to how a particular woman feels or identifies at the time in her specific and personally observable culture; and the analysis of women as a group, of any composition, is not a necessary prerequisite to reach this analysis. An analysis of women’s oppression rooted in idealist conceptions of society/the psyche or an analysis that requires no further investigation than a woman’s personal experiences can both easily be ahistorical and/or only superstructural. These types of analyses are common among the radical, psychoanalytic and multicultural feminist readings examined, which is why most were not found to utilize a Marxist conception of historical materialism.

Dialectical Relations

The pieces by Hartmann and Pharr utilize dialectical relationships. Hartmann’s _The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism_ spends discusses the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy in two ways that are consistent with Marxist dialectics. The relationship between capitalism and patriarchy firstly is mutually influencing to varying degrees and secondly it is mutually flexible as one is able to respond when the other is in any way changed. Hartmann uses the example of the early twentieth century’s trade union- supported family wage campaigns to exemplify the relationship of capitalism and patriarchy. Providing men with a wage upon which they are expected to support a family (a family wage) innately
justifies lowering wages for women (since they weren’t expected to be providers) and keeping women dependent upon men for livelihood. The family wage serves capital by ensuring a surplus pool of people who expect less pay and patriarchy by ensuring that men don’t have to compete with their wives for wages and can return home to dinner, a clean house and healthier children due to their wives’ unpaid home-based labor. Since the early twentieth century, the relationship between patriarchy and capital has maintained itself via incredible flexibility allowing both to successfully adjust to various historical forces. Although the family wage is a thing of the past and the wage gap between men and women is decreased (but still there), women today work a double and triple shift. As capitalism has benefitted from bringing more women into the wage labor market, women are in the public sphere and are earning wages, but also still doing the bulk of unpaid childcare and housekeeping in their own homes.

Similarly, Pharr’s *Homophobia A Weapon of Sexism* establishes the dialectical relationship between homophobia and heterosexism in which both social relations influence and impact each other in various ways and depend on their interconnection to always find new and better ways to control groups of people. Pharr extends this analysis of interconnectedness among many other types of social relations, “We are examining sexism, racism, homophobia, classism, anti-Semitism, ageism, ableism, and imperialism, and we see everything as connected” (Pharr 2007, p. 90).

In contrast, multicultural feminist Audre Lorde’s *Age, Race, Class and Sex* does not use a dialectical approach although it is primarily focused on the varying oppressions that help define relationships among individuals. Pharr, and others who use a dialectical approach, roots her discussion of differences in structure and interconnection with an emphasis on mutually impactful relationships among differences. Lorde, and others who use what multicultural
feminists call an intersectional approach, discuss such differences in terms of personal
experiences/identities and in terms of the intersection of (not interconnection between) these
identities as playing an integral role in defining an individual’s oppressed and/or privileged lived
experiences. Much of Lorde’s piece here is, in fact, a personal narrative about her own
experiences of oppression as a Black lesbian single mother. She makes no attempt to either
discuss which structuring institutions support racism and for what purpose or to discuss the
interconnected relationship between gender, class, race, parent status and sexual orientation that
impacts her personal identity and experiences. Lorde writes,

Certainly there are very real differences between us of race, age, and sex. But it is not
those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize
those differences, and to examine the distortions which result from our misnaming them
(Lorde 2000, p. 289).

Lorde, and some other multicultural feminists who were writing at a time when the perspectives
of women of color were marginalized within the women’s movement and academic women’s
studies, concludes that the recognition of these differences will be the solution to ending
women’s oppression.21

My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts
of who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back
and forth freely through all my different selves, without restrictions of externally

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21 Interestingly this idea of recognition, rooted in identity-based intersectionality, is taken up again, and more
comprehensively, in the 2003 book, *Redistribution or Recognition: A Political-Philosophical Exchange*. Authors
Nancy Fraser, a socialist feminist, and Axel Honneth debate over whether a redistribution of wealth and resources or
a recognition of identity-based differences would do more to end oppression. In many ways some of Honneth’s
discussions in this book are a continuation of Lorde’s views on the centrality of difference to identity and
oppression. Honneth concludes that the socialist struggle for redistribution is simply a subvariety for the struggle of
recognition, since recognition is the fundamental overarching moral category, while distribution is derivative. Fraser
disagrees and denies that distribution can be subsumed under recognition. Instead, she proposes a dualist analysis
where 2 categories are co-fundamental and mutually irreducible dimensions of justice (in line with other dual
systems socialist feminists who discuss the systemic structural purpose of and relationship between differences).
imposed definition. Only then can I bring myself and my energies as a whole to the service of those struggles which I embrace as part of my living (Lorde 2000, p. 291).

Lorde concludes that it is destructive and fragmenting to allow oneself or others to focus on only one aspect of one’s personal identity at a time and at the same time deny other identities. So instead of focusing on the interconnectedness and mutual influence of these different identities as dialectics does, she believes that each identity exists as separate and simultaneous. It is only by standing at the intersection of multiple separate and simultaneous identities, one can truly understand his or her own personal experiences with privilege and oppression within a culture. This analysis gets at the heart of an important distinction between Marxist theory and multicultural feminist theoretical use of intersectionality that will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

**Class Struggle**

None of the 19 most frequently assigned core course readings utilize a Marxist conception of class struggle. Those readings that even address class more often than not treat it as an equal to any other personal identity (e.g., race, class, gender) or systemic institutional oppression (e.g., racism, classism, sexism). It is important to note that Marxist theorists do not use “class” as simply another component of an individual’s identity (or another systemic structural oppression), as race/racism, gender/sexism, and sexual orientation/heterosexism identities/structural oppressions are often used to describe a person’s relationship to oppression or privilege in contemporary feminist theory. The women’s studies core course readings use the more common and contemporary conception of class as an identity descriptor. In this use of the concept, class is often measured in terms of one’s class status (e.g., earning a middle class income or gaining access to culturally meaningful resources such as higher education) or
classism as a type of structural oppression (e.g., attributing the achievement gap between poor and middle class students to classism and using as evidence the dominance of middle class cultural values represented in schools). In contrast, Marxists see class as the foundational division among humans and determine it according to a person’s relationship to a society’s means of production.

Marxists see race, gender, age and other categorical divisions as means of superexploitation. Superexploitation drives superprofits as the capitalist class enjoys an increase in profit by decreasing the value of labor when it is performed by individuals who are members of these secondary categories. Superprofits are “. . . the exceptionally high profits which a corporation makes by paying lower than normal wages to Black [insert “woman”, “undocumented,” etc.,] workers” (Perlo 1975, p. 146). Perlo, a Marxist economist, calls this superexploitation and superprofits, because worker exploitation measured in the amount of capitalist profit is already assumed, as this concepts is central to Marxist theory. So increased exploitation, based on categorical divisions such as gender, class, citizenship status, etc., is superexploitation. For example, US women workers are systematically paid $.76 for each $1.00 that US men workers earn for the same work with the same (and sometimes higher) qualifications; and Black women workers are paid less as a group than white women workers. Here, the dialectical relationships between class (working-class since she is exchanging her labor for wages) and gender (woman) AND class and race (Black) converge to further increase superprofits for the capitalist class. Marxists see this wage gap, not as evidence only of gender or race-based oppression, but also and primarily as a benefit to the capitalist who owns the company for which the woman works. The capitalist benefits both in terms of the ability to utilize over half of the population as cheaper labor and the benefit of creating a smokescreen that
divides the working-class with the illusion of differences in interests based on difference of "identity." So when workers organize themselves on the metaphysical basis of differences in identity (e.g., political organizations of women only who work only on "women’s issues" such as the wage gap) and not on the basis of common interests across identity differences (e.g., working women and men of many races fighting together for equal wages), they play into the divisions created by the capitalist and, at best, only achieve often temporary reformist measures and not more sustainable solutions.

To reiterate, since none of the 19 most frequently assigned women’s studies core course readings fulfilled all three components of the Marxist Theory Filter, Marxist theoretical perspectives are clearly marginalized at best, and more often completely absent from women’s studies core courses.

Just in case the reader is asking whether a content analysis based only on frequently assigned core course readings is the most comprehensive means of assessing the place of a specific theoretical perspective, I offer another piece of evidence for consideration. Although the content analysis of the readings provides plenty of evidence in support of my hypothesis, I decided to examine the authors whose readings are listed specifically under the syllabus subsection title, “Marxist Socialist Feminist/ism”, 22 most of which/whom are not frequently assigned readings/authors and are typically not listed on Tables 1 and 2. Of the 34 total sample syllabi, 9 specifically included a subsection titled, Marxist Socialist Feminist/ism. Of the readings assigned under this subsection, Hartmann’s Unhappy Marriage is the only one assigned frequently enough for inclusion in the top 19 most frequently assigned readings. Table 3, below,

---

22 Course reading subsections are commonly used on many syllabi, including those in women’s studies courses, and serve the purpose of joining a particular group of readings under a common topic or theme. Aside from Marxist Socialist Feminist/ism, Globalization, Difference and Liberal Feminism are other examples of common subsections.
gives a list of the authors assigned under Marxist Socialist Feminist/ism syllabi subsections as well as the number of syllabi on which each were assigned.

Table 3 is not an exhaustive list of core course assigned readings from these authors, it is only a list of authors assigned under the specific subsection. For example, A. Davis and Ehrenreich authored specific readings listed under Marxist Socialist Feminist/ism syllabi subsections (A. Davis: *The Approaching Obsolescence of Housework* and Ehrenreich: *Maid to Order*), but authored other assigned readings listed elsewhere on the syllabi. As I was already familiar with most of the authors and particular readings assigned here, I simply used Tong and Lorber as guides in classifying each author’s theoretical perspective (as was done in Table 2). The majority of the authors listed under Marxist Socialist Feminist/ism syllabi subsections are indeed socialist feminists. Some, however, neither write from Marxist nor socialist theoretical perspectives. Only 3 of these authors/readings represent a Marxist theoretical perspective, defined as demonstrating each of the three components of the Marxist Theory Filter. Engels wrote during the nineteenth century and both the pieces by Reed and A. Davis were written over thirty to forty years ago in 1970 and 1981, respectively. So, absolutely no contemporary Marxist or Marxist feminist author/readings (such as Teresa Ebert or Martha Gimenez) are assigned in the women’s studies core curriculum. I will also add that of all 1350 total readings assigned on all sample syllabi, Karl Marx is not once listed as an assigned author. In fact, neither his name nor image is ever once included anywhere on any syllabus for any purpose. The data in Table 3 simply reinforces the utter marginalization and near absence of Marxist theoretical perspectives already supported in the content analysis of the readings.
Table 3: Authors and Frequencies of Readings Assigned under Marxist Socialist Feminist Theory Syllabi Subsections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Feminist/Theoretical Perspective</th>
<th>Syllabi Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engels, F.</td>
<td>Marxist</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartmann, H.²³</td>
<td>Socialist</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ehrenreich, B.</td>
<td>Socialist</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eisenstein, Z.</td>
<td>Socialist</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrett, M</td>
<td>Socialist</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davis, A. Y.</td>
<td>Marxist</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firestone, S.</td>
<td>Radical</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glenn, E. N.</td>
<td>Multicultural</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanna, K.</td>
<td>Postmodern/Third Wave</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hochschild, A.</td>
<td>Socialist</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaggar, A.</td>
<td>Socialist</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reed, E.</td>
<td>Marxist</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubin, G.</td>
<td>Socialist</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study’s results overwhelmingly prove the hypothesis. Marxist theory does not enjoy the same privileged status of post-theories, such as multicultural, global and postcolonial feminist theory, which serve as the dominant perspectives.

²³ Hartmann’s *Unhappy Marriage* piece is only listed on Table 3 with a frequency of 3, but has a frequency of 6 on Table 1. This is because the other 3 times it is assigned, it did not appear under a Marxist Socialist Feminist/ism syllabus subsection.
Discussion

*The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force.*

Karl Marx, 1845

The results of this study are of importance to both those of us who believe women’s studies should be a site of resistance inside and outside of the academy as well as a space for the study and construction of many theoretical perspectives, including Marxist theory. First, the study found that virtually no Marxist or Marxist feminist theoretical perspectives are being taught as part of the US undergraduate women’s studies core course curriculum. The reader will recall that neither Marxist nor Marxist feminist titles or authors are represented in the most frequently assigned readings (Table 1) and authors (Table 2) in the core curriculum. This finding supports the critiques of the marginalization of Marx in feminist theory made by Marxist feminists such as Ebert (1995, 2005), Gimenez (1995, 2005, 2010) and Cotter (2007) for the last two decades. This result also refutes the idea put forth by some faculty coming from socialist and other feminist theoretical perspectives that Marxist theory is a pervasive part of all we do—that it is at this point built into the system in our teaching about concepts such as “globalization” and “antiracism” (Gardiner 2008). These claims are not supported by the data as we have established that common socialist, multicultural and postcolonial feminist theories that discuss globalization and antiracism may utilize one aspect of Marxist theory such as historical materialism or dialectical relations, rarely utilize both and never utilize both plus Marx’s concept of class struggle. Second, the findings also supported the assertions made by Guy-Sheftall (1995) and Salley, Winkler, Ceileen, & Meck (2004) that multicultural and postcolonial feminisms should move and, in fact, were moving from the margin to the center of feminist theory as that is now reflected in what is taught in undergraduate women’s studies core courses. Authors writing from
these perspectives occupy 6 spots in the top 10 authors assigned and readings representative of these perspectives are clearly dominant as they are assigned more frequently than readings from any other individual perspective and nearly as frequently as readings from all other perspectives combined.

The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to interpreting the results in light of the following questions with a brief conclusion:

I. Implications of the study results for current feminist theory and academic women’s studies programs

II. Findings that fail to support or only partially support the hypothesis

III. Limitations of the study

IV. Directions for further research

V. Conclusions

**Implications of the Study Results for Current Feminist Theory and Academic Women’s Studies Programs**

The results of this study hold two main implications for feminist theory. First it makes glaringly obvious the need to learn from and continue to work beyond the nebulous catch-all theory of intersectionality theory. The theory dominates feminist theory to the point that it accounts for most of what we teach in core women’s studies classrooms given its origins in multicultural, global and postcolonial feminist theory. Second, and conversely, we need to learn from and continue to develop other theoretical tools and perspectives including those that are Marxist. Here, it will help to give a more formal definition of intersectionality and a summary of some of the main differences between intersectionality and Marxist theory.
Very simply, intersectionality is the dominant theoretical tool used in women’s studies to understand oppression. US women of color, responding to both the racism within the women’s movement and to the lack of feminist theory that dealt critically with race, sexual orientation and other identity markers, coined intersectionality. Depending on whom you ask, some attribute its origins to the activist and consciousness-raising work of The Combahee River Collective, others to the legal writings of Kimberlé Crenshaw and still others to the sociological perspective of Patricia Hill Collins. All of the reading titles in Table 1 and author names in Table 2 listed as Multicultural use an intersectional analysis as well. The women of color originally theorizing intersectionality believed that their life experiences, and therefore their political positions, were different than those of their white middle-class counterparts writing about feminism at the height of the second wave. Instead of identifying “women” as one homogenous group with the same interests and same path to liberation, they wrote from their own experiences as Black women, poor women, lesbian women, older women, mothers, disabled women, etc., and from their own identities grew an analysis of oppression as multiple, simultaneous and intersecting. For some, such as Patricia Hill Collins, intersectionality is based in a structural analysis of institutional power, and for others, such as Audre Lorde and The Combahee River Collective, an intersectional analysis is grounded in a person’s individual identity and self-defined experiences.24 K. Davis (2009) gives a comprehensive definition:

‘Intersectionality’ refers to the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural

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24 Patricia Hill Collins’ work on intersectionality, as well as that of a few other feminist theorists, is grounded in a structural analysis (which explores concepts such as institutional racism and sexism). However, those who ground intersectionality in a structural analysis are far outnumbered in the field by those who use an approach based more in individual experiences, interpersonal relationships, and an analysis that doesn’t go much beyond the local. The reader will recognize this latter approach as following the defining guidelines of post-theory projects. Because those multicultural readings (see Table 1), most frequently assigned in core courses, subject to the content analysis used the latter approach, I will focus much of this subsection on these more prominent titles and their authors.
ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power . . . intersectionality was intended to address the fact that the experiences and struggles of women of color fell between the cracks of both feminist and anti-racist discourse. Crenshaw argued that theorists need to take both gender and race on board and show how they interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women’s experiences. . . It is not at all clear whether intersectionality should be limited to understanding individual experiences, to theorizing identity, or whether it should be taken as a property of social structures and cultural discourses (p. 69).

Many prominent faculty in women’s studies programs as well as feminist theorists agreed, during the 1990’s, that the use of intersectionality to theorize difference should and would become a central characteristic of feminist work in the academy as well as a kind of measurement of the relevance of what is being taught in women’s studies (Guy-Sheftall 1995, Brown 1997).

Although having started as a means for US Black women, in particular, to locate themselves within feminist theory, intersectionality also satisfies the loose requirements of post-theory projects. Intersectionality grew out of the poststructuralist projects of identity politics which, according to Gardiner 2008, involves at its core “. . . organizing with and for the sake of groups with which one identify[ies] on the basis of ascribed characteristics like race and gender rather than on the basis of beliefs…” (p. 560). Intersectionality also incorporates other poststructural and postmodern projects such as the construction of power as a process with ever-changing centers and the resistance to essentializing and reductionist metanarratives that claim to explain everything to the detriment of the self or the local, such as Marxism. Given the current
dominance of post-theories throughout the humanities and social science university curricula, it is easy to see the benefits of intersectionality to women’s studies programs.

However, if one’s goal is praxis via the application of intersectionality to the task of organizing for solutions to the problems presented by oppression and dependent on one’s identities, one has essentially two options. First, one can work to personally empower herself by accepting all of her different parts (identities) and integrating them into a meaningful whole (which presumably did not exist prior to this work on herself) (see Lorde’s piece, Age, Race, Class, Sex: Women Redefining Difference, originally published in 1984). Second, she can work to create strategic and temporary alliances between groups with different identities on particular issues in which they share common interests such as rights to adequate childcare, for example (see Spivak’s 1983 piece, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* for more on the “strategic essentialism” referenced here). On one hand, intersectionality represents the hard earned visibility of women who have been marginalized in the recent past as well as their contributions to feminist theory’s understanding of oppression and identity. On the other hand, as demonstrated by its definition and application above, it is a nebulous theory based largely on how one self-identifies.

If one can even assume the goal of intersectionality’s application to praxis, its contradictory solutions are problematic. One solution is the *refusal to essentialize* oneself to any one identity instead opting for full integration of all identities. The other solution is the *absolute necessity to essentialize* oneself to one or some identities one may share with others. The first solution leads to only personal action at the level of the individual. The second solution leads to the possibility of acting only within a group that shares that essential identity/ies and in possible coalition with, but separate from, another group whose members have a different essentialized identity.
To complicate matters, there are some in the field who believe that intersectionality’s indeterminacy, its dependence on a person’s self-identification rather than objective social category, its inability to result in any long-term or sustainable redress to the oppressions it first set out to describe/eradicate and its flexibility to be everything to everyone is exactly what makes intersectionality an ideal theory, even if it is “... in need of a definition to achieve its full potential” (K. Davis 2009). My intended sarcasm in the last sentence is telling of the irony that both feminist theory and academic women’s studies, projects once defined by their quest for theory that could support the practice of women’s liberation in all of its dimensions, now find central to their conception a theory without even a cohesive definition. Regardless of how important one believes the struggle against essentialization, few will challenge that its usefulness ends once one leaves the realm of theory and enters the realm of social change. Given this fact, it is obvious why some who are interested in the liberation of women, among other radical causes, recognize the limits of intersectionality and may find Marx’s method more useful for the project of social change. As I have already defined in detail the central components of Marxist theory (historical materialism, dialectical relations, class struggle) in both the Literature Review and Theory and Methods chapters, I will turn now to the key differences between Marxist theory and intersectionality.

First intersectionality is not usually based in historical materialism, although a minority of those who use intersectional theory also employ historical materialism. In fact, one can be subject to violence as a lesbian woman and stop analysis at the phase of observation, “I don’t feel safe walking alone in my neighborhood because my neighbors discriminate against lesbians; so I am oppressed because of my lesbian identity.” Although LGBT people are certainly.

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25 See Sears and Mooers (1995) for more on the particular challenges of intersectionality’s indeterminacy.
26 The content analysis of Mohanty’s *Under Western Eyes*, detailed in the Results chapter, demonstrates her use of historical materialism, for example.
disproportionately subject to violence in US society—something that has been empirically verified—defining the problem according only to the phenomenon as one experiences it will at best provide descriptive data about the oppression. It is only when one asks why lesbian women are subject to more violence in a particular society than their heterosexual counterparts or who benefits from this violence that one can get to a deeper analysis of the root causes of a particular type of oppression which, according to Marx, lies in the nature of the exploitative relationships.

Unlike intersectionality which would most likely determine prejudiced cultural values as the root culprit in LGBT oppression, Marxist historical materialism gets at the deeper analysis by interrogating the historical modes of production (base) that produce the relations of production (superstructure of which culture is an integral part). This is to say that intersectionality often has an idealist conception of identity in which identity is rooted in culture and culture is dehistoricized—culture is the point of origin for all else whether it be the conception of identity and oppression or the modes of production. A central feature of idealist philosophy, as Marx defined in his critique of Hegel, is that from the idea flows all else. In contrast, historical materialism asserts that our ideas, our social relationships (superstructure) and all else in the realm of human experience exists as a result of the material conditions that determine our ability to reproduce ourselves on a regular basis (modes of production or the base). So, asking questions like “Who profits from heterosexism and homophobia?” can not only provide a consistent method of analysis that is more likely to result in an objective and reproducible analysis, but it historicizes the issue at a particular moment which allows for a solution tailored to the specific economic relations driving cultural values. This is not to say that asking, “How do I feel about my safety as a lesbian woman?” isn’t an important question, because it is—especially to the person experiencing the violence. But it isn’t the only question that needs to be asked if one
wants to understand the reasons behind the violence and then find effective short and long-term solutions to eradicate the violence. In other words, historical materialism uncovers the exploitation underlying the oppression; and intersectionality simply describes a person or group’s experience of oppression.

Second, intersectionality is different from dialectical relations and I will provide a few brief examples of those differences. As discussed in the Literature Review and Theory chapter, the central feature of dialectical relations is that the whole world is represented as a process in which constant motion and changes as well as mutually impactful interrelationships between everything in that world are core. Modeled after laws of the physical sciences, Marx described this process of continuous change, in detail, as governed by the 3 laws of dialectical development: the transformation of quantity into quality, the unity and struggle of opposites, the negation of the negation. Everything is related, everything changes, and change constantly impacts those relationships. In this examination, let us first address intersectionality’s incompatibility with the dynamism at the heart of dialectical relations, then we will discuss its incompatibility with the interrelationships that form the other half of that core.

The dehistoricization of culture, from which flows identities and the values placed upon them in a particular society, can cause a treatment of identity as essential and unchanging. This metaphysical interpretation of identity clearly challenges the core of dialectical relations. A reader familiar with Fanon’s work may recall his discussion of a national culture—particularly a “Black” culture—in his foundational work on the dynamics of decolonization, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963). Fanon explains that when the threat from the natives becomes too much and the colonizer (bourgeoisie) knows he can no longer maintain power over the colonized, he wages

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a campaign in the fields of culture, values and technology (the superstructure) (1963, p. 9). In essence, the colonizer creates the culture of the colonized, and often creates it in opposition to what the colonizer presents as his purer, better culture. During the struggle for decolonization, the colonized will make attempts to reclaim and reconstruct their culture in an attempt to use culture as a unifying force of the colonized, from which they think decolonization will flow. This cultural reconstruction is often as homogeneous and static as the colonizer’s version of the colonized’s culture as its defining feature is dehistoricization and its accompanying essentialism, which produces a sort of timeless and eternal version of the colonized.

Fanon explains this metaphysical tendency as a mistake on the part of the colonized as he clarifies that decolonization (the shift of power, including ownership, from the colonizers to the colonized) causes cultural changes and not the other way around. There is no such thing as “Black” culture since those who created “Negroes” were physically disappearing from colonized nations at the time Fanon wrote. Fanon says, “There is no common destiny between the national cultures of Guinea and Senegal, but there is a common destiny between the nations of Guinea and Senegal dominated by the same French colonialism” (p. 168). Here Fanon moves the analysis beyond organizing on the bases of a “shared” Black/African cultural identity and towards organizing on the basis of anti-imperialism. Since a common cultural identity doesn’t exist and since cultural relations are produced by economic relations, there is no common cultural destiny between Guinea and Senegal’s Black people. However since their common economic positions as colonies of imperialist France provides the Black people in these nations with a shared working-class experience, their transnational common destinies exist on the basis of international anti-imperialist struggle.
Now fast forward and traverse an ocean to the US context during the latter part of the twentieth century, out of which identity politics (a mainstay of much feminist intersectionality theory) developed. The movement towards Afro-centric cultural values was a core feature of Black Nationalism in the US during the mid to late twentieth century. In an attempt to unify African Americans against US white supremacist society, one popular approach was to reclaim an alleged African cultural values system in direct opposition to that of mainstream White America. This served as an attempt to both unite African Americans as a group and to unite African Americans with Black peoples (some would call this the African diaspora) in all African, Caribbean, South American and other nations. The message here is that the struggles of Black people everywhere are the same and that their recognition and adoption of a common culture will serve to unite their common struggles. The primarily urban nationalist organizations such as the Black Panthers and the Nation of Islam attempted to express this new found connection to an eternal and timeless African culture through adopting some styles of particularly West African dress, music, religion and language (e.g., Swahili, a predominantly East African language, serves as the basis of Kwanzaa, a holiday created in the US to support this cultural shift).

It is not to say that every, or even most, African Americans participated in this cultural version of the “back-to-Africa” movement. What is important here in examining identity politics is that late twentieth century Afro-centrism serves as just one example of how we in the US began to identify our differences as cultural, rather than biological for example, based primarily on visible identity markers such as race. That culture, in turn, is recognized as static and unchanging—as essential. Intersectionality, when it turns in the direction of essentialism (as

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28 To be fair, some may say that the view of differences via culture is an improvement over the early twentieth century’s view of racial difference based in biology (i.e., the Eugenics Movement). This point is worthy of recognition, but since I am not arguing here about the difference in severity of ways in which non-Whites are viewed (and disciplined) in this society (in other words, which basis of the conceptualization of the Other is better for the Other), I will not dwell upon it here.
Lorde and The Combahee River Collective use it), is completely counter to dialectical
materialism’s dynamic processes that mold and shape everything, including culture.

In contrast to US Black cultural nationalism, Fanon (and Du Bois before him) proposes
proletariat internationalism in Lenin’s tradition as the cornerstone of the Black struggle across
national and cultural boundaries (Winston 1973, p. 16). Proletariat internationalism underscores
the fact that because capitalism is now global and is not subject to national boundaries, the
working-class is also global and must work across boundaries in its struggle against capital.

Henry Winston (1973), a Black US Marxist and communist, describes the differences between
Fanon and Du Bois, for example, and the Black Panthers by differentiating Pan-Africanism from
Neo-Pan-Africanism in his book Strategy for a Black Agenda. Neo-Pan-Africanism is often anti-
communist and in the tradition of Garvey’s separatist capitalism. Membership in the struggle is
based on skin color, which is the basis of an African identity, and Black liberation strategies are
the same across nations. In contrast, Pan-Africanism is built on the premise of proletariat
internationalism and calls for Blacks (the majority of whom are working-class) everywhere to
ground liberation strategies in their particular national context. Pan-Africanism calls for Blacks
everywhere to unite in solidarity with one another and with working-class peoples of all races
and nations to support each other’s parallel but different struggles.

Although all members of the African diaspora share a heritage of racist oppression, that
oppression happens in different historical contexts. The nature of that oppression changes over
time even within the same historical context. Culturally speaking, what could Black South
African migrant miners possibly have in common with successful African American business
owners living in Martha’s Vineyard? This is not to say that the Black Martha’s Vineyard
residents aren’t subject to racist oppression. It is to say that the dynamics of racist oppression
between the two groups are different because the forms of exploitation are different due to different economic (historical) contexts. In 1970, the US was nearly 200 years past its colonial period and just over 100 years past Black slavery. In 1970, South Africa was not quite 40 years past independence with the UK and it would be another 25 years until apartheid ended and Blacks gained independence from minority white rule. This is only one example of two fundamental differences in productive relations that cause fundamental differences in cultural relations between these two nations.

Next, I will examine intersectionality’s incompatibility with dialectical relations’ other core feature: the mutuality and interrelatedness of all that is part of the world. In particular, the focus again is on intersectionality’s conception of identity. As discussed earlier a core feature of intersectionality is indeterminacy when it comes to understanding how different identities interact with and are related to one another both in the context of an individual’s experience and in the context of a particular identity-based group’s shared experience. Women’s studies courses often make use of a kind of Venn diagram of roads intersecting when discussing how identities relate to one another in intersectionality theory. Imagine that one road represents African American racial identity, another road represents lesbian sexual orientation identity, the next road represents a female gender identity and still another road represents working-class identity. If a Black working-class lesbian woman stands at the intersection of these four roads, it is understood that the oppression that she experiences is the result of the interlocking relationships between these identity-based oppressions.

So essentially, each of these identities is an individually autonomous social category. As it is the individual person at the center who is the nexus of these social categories, it becomes impossible to understand the nature of the identities’ relationships to each other since the
experience of them is valid only through its localization within the individual. The goal of intersectionality is often not application to a larger social group nor is it to understand the “whole” as identity is often seen as a construct autonomous of both history and generalizable connections to other identities. Marxist feminist Ebert (2005) writes that Marxist theory, “... supersedes this theory of autonomy and argues for the relating of several categories to each other, not by separate and multiple logics of race, gender and sexuality, etc., but through the single, inclusive logic of wage-labor and capital” (Ebert 2005, p. 40). Because intersectionality often refutes the very existence of any inclusive logic (or metanarrative) through which to examine the dynamics of interrelatedness, it is impossible to use it to determine the nature of the relationship between, let’s say, race, class, gender and sexual orientation in a particular society.

As discussed in the prior chapter, because the Marxist conception of class is defined by one’s relationship to the modes of production (the owning class or the working class), Marx’s dialectics is able to and has the purpose of determining the exact nature of the relationship between race and class, for example, in order to unveil to the individual the relationship of him or her to the whole. A Marxist dialectical analysis of race and class in the contemporary US context would, in its simplest form, demonstrate that the logic of class employs the use of race to further exploit non-Whites in the labor market by justifying a lower wage. For example, the well-documented wage gap between US African Americans and US whites doing the same work with the same qualifications primarily serves as an example of superexploitation that produces superprofits for the capitalist class.29 Sears and Mooers (1995) are careful to point out that understanding of class does not intend to collapse all forms of oppression into class relations, “It simply means that we need to take seriously the specific ways in which capitalist social relations

29 Victor Perlo notably put forth this conceptualization of the dialectical relationship between race and class in contemporary times in his 1975 book Economics of Racism USA: The Roots of Black Inequality. Please see the Results chapter for a comprehensive explanation of superexploitation and superprofits.
have shaped and configured various forms of oppression” (p. 237). They go on to point out that a
dialectical understanding of identity (and the oppression that is experienced by those with a
particular identity) resolves the aforementioned paralysis of solutions innate in the postmodern
and multicultural roots of intersectionality since it, “... provides a basis for connecting diverse
and partial movements to an overall strategy for emancipation” (Sears and Mooers 1995, p. 238).

The whole purpose of discussing these differences between Marxist theory and
intersectionality theory is to discuss the limits of intersectionality both as a theory in and of itself
and in the context of understanding and eradicating the exploitation and, therefore, the
oppression of women. Yet it is interesting that an academic field of inquiry, whose theoretical
endeavors were once so closely intertwined with the goal of the liberation of women, now holds
at its core a theory that is incapable of adequately describing the dynamics of oppression as
experienced by a particular group and thereby incapable of eradicating that oppression at its very
root. The result of putting all our eggs in one basket—the basket of intersectionality—is the
creation of a hegemonic force within feminist theory, and as a result, within the field of academic
women’s studies in which the theory we produce and teach is dominated by this single
perspective.30

As the meaning of this hegemonic approach has been examined at length in terms of
feminist theory and women’s studies, a very brief discussion of what it may mean for students is
useful to practitioners who teach women’s studies core courses. The most frequently assigned
Marxist author of the three total Marxists who are assigned under Marxist Socialist Feminist

30 It is worth mentioning as well that intersectionality is feminist theory’s major contribution to several social
sciences, through the interdisciplinary nature of women’s studies. A general search of “intersectionality” as a
keyword in the scholarly journal database, Academic Search Complete, yields 552 journal article results. A very
quick perusal of the first page of results demonstrates articles in the last five years that are grounded in
intersectionality or advocate intersectionality as a useful theoretical construct or tool within a particular social
science field outside of women’s studies. Examples of these journal titles are Sociology, Nursing Inquiry,
International Journal of Equity in Health, Political Research Quarterly, Rehabilitation Counseling, and Journal of
Social Issues.
Theory syllabi subsections is Frederick Engels (see Table 3) and his assigned title is *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. In all five of the sample syllabi (all of which are feminist theory course syllabi) that assigned Engels under this subsection, the majority of other readings under this subsection are (non-Marxist) feminist critiques of Engels’ *Origins*. This frames Marxist theory in women’s studies as a theory primarily valuable to feminists because of its shortcomings--as a launching point for multiple critical feminist interventions necessitated by what is taught as Marx’s alleged original sin: his failure to account for women’s paid and unpaid labor in his analysis.\(^{31}\)

Of course, since most syllabi do not assign any readings from Marxist theoretical perspectives, the critique of Marx is a best case scenario in women’s studies core courses. The importance of this theory (even if only to discuss its alleged deficits) to both second wave feminist theory and approach to women’s liberation is more often invisible and therefore denied, as if it never existed. Students learn by omission that Marxist theory has never been a viable tool in analyzing women’s oppression and exploitation. Marx, one of the most famous scholars and revolutionaries in modern history, is simply phased out of use in one of the only academic disciplines that concerns itself with questions of justice, equality and liberation. This happens with hardly a whisper to the contrary. So whether Marxist theory is actively framed only in terms of its deficits or is passively framed through its complete invisibility, the message is clear in women’s studies core courses: Marxist theory has little or nothing to contribute.

This marginalization of Marxist theory also has serious implications for academic freedom throughout the US University. Recall that this paper opened with the Introduction chapter’s discussion of the right-wing political tactic of framing President Obama as a socialist in

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\(^{31}\) Here we will ignore the feminist and other theorists who disagree with this assertion since the point is to consider how orthodox Marxist theory is actually read and potentially understood by students in women’s studies core courses.
order to inspire fear in both his supporters and opponents. This characterization is of course incorrect by all measures, but the strategy is effective because Americans know so little about Marx/socialism, except that it should be feared. Obama is victimized and Americans buy into a lie since they don’t have easy access to information that would tell them otherwise. Now take that scenario from society at large and apply it to the US University.

Politically conservative academic, David Horowitz, has written extensively about the “left wing” university and the threat it poses to American freedom. He employs the same strategies of red-baiting in his work. The profile of the quintessential “dangerous professor,” in his 2006 book The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America, most often reads like a three-ingredient recipe. The faculty member: 1. is an alleged Marxist theorist or has at some point been influenced by Marxist theory, 2. teaches in an interdisciplinary academic program (women’s studies and feminist faculty, specifically, are well-represented32), 3. has participated in progressive social change movements (often dealing with issues of class, race and/or gender inequality). Horowitz charges that this recipe results in inappropriate political agendas in the classroom, lack of professionalism and an overall decline in academic standards (p. 377) and warns university board members, administrators, students and paying parents to be on high alert.

What most people reading the book wouldn’t know is that the work of many of those he charges as Marxist clearly fits into post-theory categories and is sometimes explicitly anti-Marxist. Professors Maulana Karenga33 (cultural nationalist and founder of Kwaanza), Stanley

32 Similarly, Horowitz’s 2009 book, One-Party Classroom, lists the “most dangerous classes” taught at the university. A large percentage of the classes on this list are taught in women’s studies departments—many of them are specifically introduction to women’s studies courses.
33 An example of Karenga’s anti-Marxist position is as follows. Karenga writes, “. . . the insistence on stressing ‘class differences’ among blacks is counterproductive” (1972, p. 12). Winston (1973) uses this quote from Karenga to point out the Karenga is actively obscuring class differences and privileging racial identity as the crux of movement building (p. 103).
Aronowitz (post-Marxist proponent of cultural studies) and bell hooks (pioneer of multicultural feminist theory) are some of the many examples of “dangerous” professors that Horowitz inaccurately charges with Marxist or communist viewpoints. The broad stroke with which he paints so many Left professors, as Marxists, socialists, or communists, is even more curious given the evidence my research has provided to the contrary. Given my findings, I would ask Horowitz where all of these Marxist women’s studies faculty are since there is a well-documented near absence of Marxist theory in the US University in general and, particularly, in the core curriculum of academic women’s studies.

Essentially Horowitz labels any faculty member with whom he disagrees a Marxist, communist or socialist regardless of whether or not that label is accurate. The effect of Horowitz’s neo-McCarthyism is an ideological cleansing, which is ultimately a threat to academic freedom. Faculty who work in this climate feel real pressure towards accommodationism and fear, which results in the narrowing of one’s research agenda in order to avoid being labeled and disciplined accordingly. Academic freedom for all faculty is compromised when unfounded assaults against them go unquestioned due to ignorance.

The marginalization of Marxist theory and socialism, both in the university and in society at large, has largely left people without the tools to determine the merits of these types of conservative and other attacks. This ideological gap creates a blind spot and makes both the university and society vulnerable to the political will of Horowitz and others like him.

Now that I have discussed the potential implications of this study for feminist theory, the field of women’s studies, and US society, I will address the study’s hypothesis, limitations and directions for further research.
Findings that Fail to Support or Only Partially Support the Hypothesis

Since my hypothesis was proven and it was found that Marxist theory does not enjoy the same privileged status as the post-theories outlined in the Literature Review and Theory chapter, I could easily give a resounding “no” in answer to this question. The post-Marxist nature of multicultural, global and postcolonial theories classify authors and readings using this feminist theoretical perspective fit solidly under the category of post-theories, and these particular readings and authors were found to clearly dominate undergraduate women’s studies core course curriculum. However, there are two findings that I personally did not expect, both of which are observations about the degree of post-theory dominance and Marxist theory marginalization.

First, given my own personal experience as a women’s studies student and faculty member, I expected that specifically poststructural and postmodern feminist perspectives (i.e., J. Butler) would dominate the undergraduate core course curriculum. I assumed this because multicultural, global and Postcolonial feminist theoretical perspectives are typically framed in the classroom as important but historically marginalized contributions to feminist theory. I have personally never heard a women’s studies faculty member say that Multicultural perspective now dominates our curriculum. It is therefore implied that this perspective never stopped being marginalized.

Second, while I did expect post-theories to enjoy privileged status in women’s studies core courses, I did not expect Marxist and Marxist feminist theoretical perspectives to be marginalized nearly to the point of invisibility. Karl Marx was never assigned, no Marxist or Marxist feminist readings made the list of most frequently assigned core course readings, no contemporary Marxist feminists were assigned at all, and readings from authors with socialist feminist perspectives (which are different from Marxist feminist perspectives) dominated even the syllabi subsections titled “Marxist Socialist Feminism.” I personally expected, for example,
at least one reading from Angela Davis to make an appearance in Table 1. I interpret this finding to support those who write on the systematic marginalization of Marxist theory in the university (Cole 2008 and Chomsky 1997 provide notable examples of this assertion). I am especially surprised by the degree of marginalization within the women’s studies undergraduate core curriculum, given the integral role Marxist theory (in agreement or contestation) played in early second wave feminist theory and its relationship to the development of academic women’s studies programs.

**Limitations of the Study**

While this particular study has some limitations, specifically concerning external validity, I also want to address how a qualitative methods component could strengthen the study (but doesn’t necessarily limit it as is). Since the Marxist Theory Filter accurately defined, in total, the theoretical components central to Marxist theory, internal validity is strong. External validity, particularly the ability to replicate the study now and in the future, is a limitation. Although, I predict that this study could probably be replicated in the next two to five years, there are some limits to that time estimation. For example, my research validates what others have theorized in that introduction to women’s studies courses are less likely than feminist theory courses to use an established curriculum that is built mostly on consistently assigned readings and authors. Since intro course curriculum is more subject to the whims and preference of the instructing faculty, it is possible that a new sample of syllabi even within the two to five year time frame, could yield a slightly different set of common readings or a set that has lower and/or higher frequencies. Another challenge to replicability may result if one waits five years or longer to repeat this study. Given its interdisciplinary nature as well as its comparative newness as a discipline, women’s studies core curriculum is subject to greater rates of change over shorter periods of time than say
the core curriculum in a course on sociological theory. These rates of change can be described so far as being representative of theoretical trends. Early reading lists for new women’s studies courses from the 1970’s focused largely on readings that would now be classified as liberal, socialist and radical feminist perspectives. Over time multicultural, global and postcolonial feminist theoretical perspectives now dominate women’s studies curriculum. However, given recent trends in the field, it is quite possible that in five to ten years from now, the most frequent readings and authors in the core course materials may hail from Queer Theory and/or Masculinity Studies, both of which are now seen as marginalized in the field. So the inability to replicate the study in this case is not a serious threat to this study’s validity, but more likely a commentary on the nature of women’s studies as a fairly new discipline. Here, we move from external validity to limits remedied by a more comprehensive study of the curriculum.

An expansion of the scope of this study is the focus of those limits that had more of an impact on this study. As explained in the Methods chapter, the existence of multiple curricula in one course has been established. These multiple curricula have been described as the designed curriculum, the delivered curriculum, the expected curriculum and the experienced curriculum (Stark & Lowther, 1986; Ewell, 1997). This study only examines the designed curriculum, which is the curriculum put forth and documented by the instructor for the fulfillment of course objectives, and the syllabus often serves as the most comprehensive vehicle for the communication of the designed curriculum. Further this study only examines one component of the designed curriculum, though certainly the core component in women’s studies courses, which are the most frequently assigned core course readings.

One limit this obviously presents to understanding the designed curriculum is that it answers the “what” and provides historical context and contemporary critical perspectives in an
attempt to theorize the “why.” But since the “why” is not the focus of this study, it is only engaged to bridge basic understanding and to consider implications of the study’s findings. That said, actually interviewing women’s studies core course faculty and program/department administrators would provide valuable information about the “why” by deepening our understanding of designed curriculum by asking questions such as “Why were these particular readings chosen?” “What is the faculty member or administrator’s personal and scholarly experience with and opinion of Marxist theory and how does this affect treatment of Marxist and other theoretical perspectives in the classroom?” and “Are there program/department or university-level general curriculum decisions that affect design?” Answers to these questions provided by core course faculty and program/department administrators would be valuable in providing a deeper understanding of the purpose for some designed curriculum decisions. Faculty and administrator interviews could also yield information about the delivered curriculum by examining how variables such as classroom management, teaching pedagogy and assessment and evaluation methods actually affect how a particular reading is taught and what are the core concepts from each reading that is emphasized in the classroom interaction. Finally, the survey and interview of women’s studies graduates would provide useful information about the experienced curriculum and what students actually learn in the classes.

Despite these limitations, the address of this study’s research question was adequately achieved by the methodology and sample. As a result, many of these limits play an integral role in my suggestions for further research.

**Directions for Further Research**

Because continuing to study what we teach and why we teach it are important endeavors in the social and cultural foundations of education, the following are my recommendations for
further research. First, when examined in addition to this study, the interview and survey of women’s studies administrators, core course faculty and graduates discussed in the previous subsection would provide a much more comprehensive understanding of core course curriculum in US undergraduate degree-granting women’s studies programs. An important result of this type of comprehensive research is that it could lead to a national conversation about the potential risks and benefits of systematically standardizing women’s studies core curriculum to some degree. I am of course not a proponent of cookie cutter, prepackaged curriculum. First this type of curriculum approach increases hegemony, which could have dire effects on a field that does, and I believe should continue to, work hard to maintain its interdisciplinarity. Second it displaces the instructor’s most valuable tools: his or her knowledge base and pedagogical creativity. But a systematic national conversation on the field’s core knowledge base has not occurred since the field’s birth in the 1970’s when suggested reading lists were popular and The Women’s Studies Curriculum Development Project was in full swing. There is a need for this research and this type of potential project as it does not yet exist and could give the field valuable information upon which to make curricular decisions of all sorts.

Second, true to Marx’s method, a related and very worthwhile project for the future is a political economy of academic women’s studies. Of particular interest are brief excerpts I came across in my research for this study that offer thoughts on the roles of both large foundations (e.g., Ford Foundation) and smaller local feminist community organizations in providing financial and other support for women’s studies programs/departments and national organizations. For example, I am aware of some academic women’s studies programs have partnerships with small groups of wealthy women in the community who are passionate about women’s studies and, although they certainly don’t single-handedly fund a program, they may
offer support by means of scholarships for students or endowed faculty positions. Although these community-based groups are generally supportive of women’s studies and often hale from the second wave women’s movement, some of the more conservative members may not be comfortable supporting a program offering coursework in what they may see as more radical or politically oriented subjects such as Marxist theory or sexual rights. An investigation into the funding of academic women’s studies would provide an opportunity to historicize the field and would give us valuable insight into the relationship between financial support and curriculum construction. Many have written on today’s neoliberal or corporate university and the challenges it presents to issues of the academy such as academic freedom (Bousquet 2009), but I have yet to see a comprehensive political economy of women’s studies programs examining the impact on the field of private foundation funding and alliances with community organizations external to the university.

This chapter provides not only a basic discussion of study limitations and directions for further research, but also some points for consideration of the over-arching implications of the research to feminist theory and within the field of women’s studies.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates the marginalization of Marxist theory and the subsequent dominance of post-theories within US undergraduate women’s studies core course curriculum. However, given the forty-year backlash against feminism and women’s studies in the US as well as the contentious history between feminist and communist/socialist social movements, I want to be clear that I am in no way making a case that women’s studies is not a legitimate field of study or that it hasn’t made significant theoretical contributions. In fact, I am a feminist and a strong supporter of women’s studies. I consider this work to be part of the body of contemporary
Marxist feminist literature that seeks an understanding of women’s experiences, oppression and exploitation that is grounded in Marx’s method and, ultimately, that seeks to produce knowledge that will support women’s full emancipation and personhood in this society and throughout the world. Women’s studies, as the only academic discipline which guarantees the study of women as a subject (in all of the contested meanings of the word “women”), has an integral role to play in this project and it is my sincere hope that this research will shed some light on curriculum deficits that, if addressed, could help move women’s studies further in this historic role.

A knowledge base that excludes a significant body of theory is deficient in and of itself. Allowing for the systematic inclusion, not dominance, of Marxist and Marxist feminist theory in women’s studies would yield two benefits. First, if Marxist and Marxist feminist theory are presented as viable theoretical perspectives in the core, students and faculty in the core courses would be provided with more diverse theoretical tools with which to analyze women, gender and sexuality. Second, it would serve as a means to reconnect women’s studies to the struggle for the emancipation of women and all peoples from oppression and exploitation. These benefits advance the interests of those who want to pursue scholarship, absent of activism, as well as those interested in pursuing both or only activism.

Orthodox Marxist theory is a living, breathing theory to which people have been contributing for more than 150 years. Hopefully, this dissertation has provided some insight into the importance of continuing to contribute to it by reintroducing to the women’s studies core a Marxist class analysis as well as historicizing and dialectically analyzing the complex relationships between types of oppression. Marx and Marxist feminist theory must be reclaimed from those that would claim only its “reductionist” or “deterministic” tendencies as justification for its eradication from the field. Instead, let us include the perspectives of those who have
studied Marx in depth and who know the incredible flexibility and power of this theory; and let us allow it to stand on its own merits. As the Marxist feminists before me have done and as those writing contemporarily still do, this study provides support for the reintroduction of Marx to feminist theory and the women’s studies undergraduate core curriculum. This reintroduction of Marx will reinfuse diversity of thought as well as support the production of knowledge and praxis that is rigorously and unapologetically revolutionary.
Works Cited


Dialego (1976). *Philosophy and Class Struggle*. As found in the course packet for Marxist Theory (18EDFN825) published at University of Cincinnati during Winter Quarter 2006.


