

**The Politics of Omission:
Religion in Women's Studies**

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts and Science

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by

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Abstract

In this thesis I attempt to uncover how religion is included as a topic of discourse in Introductory Women's Studies courses across Canada. This examination is framed by theories on difference and the relatively new field of epistemologies of ignorance. More specifically, I discuss the relationship between ignorance and what is included in curriculum, as well as how religion, as a particular kind of difference among women, is treated within women's studies. In order to examine the discourse around religion in Introductory Women's Studies I looked at the textbooks and syllabi used in these courses. This data was collected through website searches and e-mailed surveys. This examination concludes with two case studies (one on Muslim Women in Canada, the other on the same-sex marriage debate) which work to draw out particular discourses occurring in the textbooks used in the courses. Additionally, the case studies point towards directions one could take in order to more knowledgeably include religion as a topic of discourse.

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Chapter One

An Introduction

One of the difficulties in seeking to develop new perspectives is the obvious and oft pointed to distinction between theory and practices or, to put it in commonsense language, between ‘merely’ understanding the world and changing it.

Michael W. Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*, 103.¹

Introduction

The relationship between feminism and religion has been long and somewhat difficult. Some scholars, such as Mary Daly and Carol Christ, have seen traditional, particularly Western, religions as incompatible with feminism. The development of women’s studies as an academic discipline reflects feminism’s movement away from religion in the latter half of the twentieth century. Despite the fact that many of the women involved with the so-called first wave of feminism understood religion to be a significant part of their lives as well as a useful connection for the women’s movement, religion seems to have been removed from this history as well as from the present discourse within women’s studies.

I became interested in the discourse on religion within women’s studies when I was attending Memorial University of Newfoundland. Originally I had no intention of examining religion in my master’s thesis. However, while I was attending classes I felt as though religion was being almost intentionally excluded from the discourse. It was my sense of this exclusion that led to my interest in this topic.

This research takes a two-pronged approach to examining religion within women’s studies, which work together to illustrate if and how religion is included in Introductory Women’s Studies (IWS) discourse in Canada and how the IWS discourse on religion could look.² One prong, comprising the main body of this thesis, includes the

¹ Michael W. Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 103.

² From this point forth, “Introductory Women’s Studies” will be referred to by the acronym “IWS.”

theories that framed my approach to the topic. Drawing on the relatively new field of epistemology of ignorance and theories about difference, I outline how these ideas connect to the treatment of religion within IWS in Canada.³ This theoretical base then shaped the two case studies (found in chapter five), which illustrate what is actually occurring in the discussions within IWS textbooks and what the knowledgeable inclusion of religion on these two particular topics would look like. I will discuss the case studies in greater detail shortly.

Given that I examined IWS textbooks, it was necessary to uncover which textbooks were being used in IWS courses. This brings me to the second prong of this thesis, namely collecting the written aspects of IWS curriculum (by which I mean the syllabi and course texts) and qualitatively analyzing it with regard to how religion is discussed. These data, the syllabi and course texts, were collected through searching university websites and by surveying professors who teach IWS. The methodology of the survey is described in detail in chapter three, and the themes which arose out of the survey responses, as well as the analysis of the textbooks, are outlined in chapter four.

The two case studies are on Muslim women in Canada and liberal Canadian Christian perspectives on same-sex marriage, respectively. The case studies illustrate both what the IWS texts say on these respective topics and show how the knowledgeable inclusion of religion in topics frequently discussed in women's studies can both broaden and clarify the discussion. Each case study begins by describing the literature within the course texts and leads to other texts on the given topic, illustrating what the discourse

³ The bulk of this theoretical examination will be in chapter two.

could look like.⁴ Additionally, each case study concludes with a list of suggested readings on the respective topic.

What is Religion?

For insight into my approach to this research it is key to understand my use of “religion.” As will be reiterated in appendix D, Clifford Geertz’s definition of religion, found in “Religion As A Cultural System”, is the base for my approach to religion.⁵ Geertz defines religion as “(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men [sic] by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.”⁶ This definition illustrates religion as a worldview, depending on a variety of symbols, values, ethics, widely held ideas and ways of life. Religion, therefore, normalized human assumptions about the world, allowing the world to be taken for granted. One example of the normalizing power of religion is the belief that gender roles, such as mothering for women or breadwinning for men, are divinely ordained or commanded.

For my purposes, the value of Geertz’ definition is two-fold. First, Geertz illustrates religion as a multifaceted, contemporary cultural artifact. By this, I mean religion cannot be removed from culture (or vice versa) nor can it be reduced to one

⁴ This research is not perfect. Although I have attempted to include the bulk of the discussions on the case study topics found in the textbooks, I cannot guarantee that all of the possible discussions were included. I have included all of those sections that I noted when examining the texts.

⁵ Clifford Geertz, “Religion As a Cultural System” in *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1973): 87-125.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

monolithic characteristic. Second, the above definition manages to avoid asserting a need for personal faith in a particular religion in order to study it. The necessity of personal faith is an issue continually under debate within religious studies. In any case, religious studies is not about preaching or teaching a faith, but learning about the social and cultural phenomena surrounding religion. Therefore, religion, as discussed throughout this thesis and reflected by Geertz, refers to an aspect of human culture.

An additional point of contention that complicates religion is the attempt to delineate and demarcate religion and spirituality. As will be discussed later with the survey findings, clarifying the distinction between religion and spirituality is significant. There is arguably a movement occurring within Western society, and by extension women's studies, to shift from "religion" to "spirituality."⁷ This supposed shift involves moving away from established religious traditions/practices and towards more interior approaches to one's spiritual self. While the religious and the spiritual have historically been intermeshed, the contemporary shift towards spirituality seems to strive to separate from religion (or at least established forms of religion). I continue to understand religion and spirituality as interconnected, despite various assertions that they are separate.

Related Research

I am not the first person to notice the omission of religion within Women's Studies. Randi Warne has written on this issue extensively, theorizing on the

⁷ Two texts that examine various aspects of the shift from "religion" to "spirituality" are: Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual, But Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) & Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead with Benjamin Seel, Bronislaw Szerszynski, & Karin Tusting, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

“unacknowledged quarantine” of the study of religion and the study of women.⁸ That is, she notes that women’s studies excludes religion and that religious studies excludes women, effectively quarantining each other. More recently, Chris Klassen has written “Confronting the Gap: Why Religion Needs to be Given More Attention in Women’s Studies,” which outlines her theories on why religion has been excluded from women’s studies and why it should be included.⁹

The writings of Warne and Klassen work as a building block for my thesis research. While there are certain differences between what I am striving to do and what Warne and Klassen have done, they have developed significant theories as to why religion is generally excluded from women’s studies. Their analyses both confirmed my feelings that religion is frequently missing from women’s studies and motivated me to attempt to locate the gap left by this omission. While Warne and Klassen have discussed women’s studies in general as having ignored religion, I am looking at IWS in particular, for reasons I explain shortly. My research, in this regard, is an original contribution to

⁸ The concept of the “unacknowledged quarantine” discussed in Randi Warne, “Further Reflections on the ‘Unacknowledged Quarantine’: Feminism and Religious Studies,” *Changing Methods: Feminists Transforming Practice*, ed. Sandra Burt and Lorraine Code (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1995): 75-103 is cited as used by Ruth Compton Brouwer, “Transcending the ‘unacknowledged quarantine’: Putting Religion into English-Canadian Women’s History,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 27:3 (Fall 1992): 47-61. Compton Brouwer attributes “unacknowledged quarantine” to “a review of a 1987 collection of articles, *Disciplines of Faith: Studies in Religion, Politics and Patriarchy*, generated by the History Workshop Centre for Social History of England” (p.47). Randi Warne, “Religious Studies and Women’s Studies: Resonances, Reactions and Future Possibilities,” *Religious Studies: Issues, Prospects and Proposals*, ed. Klaus Klostermaier and Larry Hurtado (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991): 347-60. Randi Warne, “Towards a Brave New Paradigm: The Impact of Women’s Studies on Religious Studies,” *Religious Studies and Theology* 9 (May – Sept. 1989): 35-46.

⁹ Chris Klassen, “Confronting the Gap: Why Religion Needs to be Given More Attention in Women’s Studies.” *Thirdspace* 3:1 (Nov. 2003). Retrieved from <http://www.thirdspace.ca/articles/klassen.htm> March 26, 2006.

this discourse as I am also focusing on how IWS would benefit from incorporating a richer understanding of religion. I am striving to do this by naming IWS texts that appear to have an understanding of religion and suggest ways in which common topics within IWS could be approached in ways that do their religious aspects justice. Furthermore, my case studies illustrate the value of including and understanding religion in relation to two topics frequently raised in IWS.

Ester Fuchs, Evelyn Torton Beck, and Alana Suskin have all written about the exclusion of Judaism and/or about anti-Semitic practices in feminism/women's studies.¹⁰ Fuchs discusses the exclusion of Judaism in women's studies in a manner similar to Warne's discussion of the exclusion of religion in general; that is, that Judaism (religion) gets excluded from women's studies and that women (feminism) get excluded from Jewish (religious) studies. Suskin points to Judaism being discussed mainly as "a foil for Christianity's own misogyny..." and having to read "article after article that only criticized Judaism" while she was in women's studies.¹¹ As well, Fuchs and Suskin both mention a general lack of knowledge about Judaism. Fuchs states "...there are prejudices and a staggering lack of knowledge among non-Jewish students about Jewish texts, religion, and history,"¹² while Suskin acknowledged that many Jewish women authors

¹⁰ Ester Fuchs, "Feminism, Anti-Semitism, Politics: Does Jewish Women's Studies have a Future?" *Women's Studies for the Future: Foundations, Interrogations, Politics*, ed. Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Agatha Beins (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005): 156-69; Evelyn Torton Beck, "The Politics of Jewish Invisibility in Women's Studies" *Transforming the Curriculum: Ethnic Studies and Women's Studies*, ed. Johnella E. Butler and John C. Walter (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991): 187-97; Alana Suskin, "Hearing the Daughter Voice: The *Bat Kol* as Rrrabbi Grrl" *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century*, ed. Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003): 263-78.

¹¹ Suskin, 265.

¹² Fuchs, 158.

“seemed to know very little about [Judaism].”¹³ This lack of knowledge about Judaism points to a broader religious illiteracy discussed by Stephen Prothero in *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know – And Doesn’t*.¹⁴ Although I am not focusing on the specific ignorance or maltreatment of any one religious group in my research, Fuchs, Torton Beck, and Suskin’s articles are valuable in illustrating a particular way that the omission of religion plays out. That is to say, these articles give examples of reactions to women’s studies/feminism discussing religion (particularly Judaism) as solely negative, to the exclusion of positive consideration of religion. Additionally, these articles point to the unacknowledged assumption within women’s studies that “woman” not only means white, middle-class, and able-bodied, but also Christian.

Susan Muaddi Darraj discusses some of the religious and cultural ignorance of Western feminists in her article “Third World, Third Wave Feminism(s): The Evolution of Arab American Feminism.”¹⁵ Darraj writes of her frustration with Western feminists conflating “Arab” and “Muslim” (Darraj is a Christian Arab American), and the assumptions that feminism does not exist in Arab countries or that being Arab and feminist are contradictory.¹⁶ Lack of knowledgeable discussion on Arab and Muslim women’s issues help reinforce these assumptions and stereotypes.

¹³ Suskin, 265.

¹⁴ Stephen Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know – And Doesn’t* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007).

¹⁵ Susan Muaddi Darraj, “Third World, Third Wave Feminism(s): The Evolution of Arab American Feminism” in *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century*: 188-205.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 190, 192-3

My Reasons and Intentions For This Project

The intention behind this thesis project is not to prove the positive or negative value of religion on/in women's lives; my perspective is not that women's studies should include religion in order to "know thine enemy" (although I gather from comments I have received when explaining my thesis to others that the idea that feminism and religion are in opposition is a fairly common belief). Neither is my goal to see women's studies teaching religious practices or encouraging particular religious beliefs. My intention is to further understand women's lives. Simply put, if women are the majority of religious people (that is people who consider themselves religious or attend religious services)¹⁷ and we, within women's studies, are not discussing religion, then we are not discussing and/or acknowledging that aspect of women's lives. Similarly, Prothero argues in *Religious Literacy* that present day politics and culture are tied up with religion. However, teachers are afraid to mention religion in the classroom for fear that they will be accused of professing faith. As a consequence, Americans know very little about religion at all.¹⁸ Although Prothero is looking at the United States in particular, he writes seems to fit in a Canadian context as well.

One of my main reasons for doing my thesis on the omission of religion from women's studies is that I think that this omission is a problem. As someone who feels religion is a significant part of the world we live in (whether or not we understand ourselves as religious or attend religious services) I find it difficult to understand how

¹⁷ Kathleen J. Buchko, "Religious Beliefs and Practices of College Women as Compared to College Men," *Journal of College Student Development*. 45: 1 (January/February 2004): 89-98. Betty A. DeBerg, *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990): 28.

¹⁸ Prothero, 246.

others can feel that religion is insignificant. Prothero clearly shares this sentiment. I also believe that it is important to be able to see and understand the significance of gender in the world. While these ideas are interconnected for me, a lack of discourse on religion within women's studies seems to illustrate some effort, conscious or not, to disconnect these ideas. The case studies in the latter part of this thesis will help support my claim of the significance of religion within women's studies' discourse.

I have chosen to focus on the IWS curriculum because these courses point to topics that are taken to be significant within women's studies as a whole. Despite the fact that some argue that there is no standard IWS curriculum,¹⁹ there are certainly topics that are frequently discussed in these courses.²⁰ Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge, authors of *Professing Feminism*, state: "Typically, introductory Women's Studies courses include material on rape, sexual harassment, battered women, child sexual abuse, abortion, and reproductive rights, not to mention lessons on all the current -isms such as racism, classism, ableism, and ageism."²¹ By way of illustration, class and race are cornerstone topics in many IWS texts. If these topics were omitted (if that is even possible), it would be thought an egregious error, and, I suspect, the individual teaching the course would

¹⁹ Francis Maher, "Foreword: Knowledge and Resistance" *Teaching Introduction to Women's Studies: Expectations and Strategies*, ed. Barbara Scott Winkler and Carolyn DiPalma (Westport, Ct: Bergin & Garvey, 1999): x.

²⁰ Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge, *Professing Feminism: Education and Indoctrination in Women's Studies*. 2nd Edition (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2003): 92; Miranda Joseph, "Analogy and Complicity: Women's Studies, Lesbian/Gay Studies, and Capitalism" *Women's Studies on Its Own: A Next Wave Reader in Institutional Change*, ed. Robyn Weigman (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002): 281-2.

²¹ Patai & Koertge, p.92. This focus on oppressive and traumatic experience in women's lives within IWS is also noted by Miranda Joseph in her article, "Analogy and Complicity." As Joseph states, "Not so jokingly, my pet name for the course is 'bad things that happen to women.'" p. 282.

find a way to include these topics, either through the creation of a course pack or through class discussion. This leads to why I wanted to look at supplementary reading and course packs, so as to determine whether or not the professors are trying to fill in the gap if religion is absent from the textbooks. However, as will be seen, in light of the responses to the survey, examining supplementary readings and the course pack was beyond the means of this present research project.

The Structure of the Thesis

Given the various aspects of this research project, the structure of the thesis is not as straightforward as might be expected. Chapter two contains the theoretical base of the thesis; that is to say, that chapter will offer the understanding of epistemology of ignorance, the theories of inclusion and exclusions, and issues around difference that this research is based on. Chapter two also contains the definitions of key terms used throughout the thesis, such as curriculum, hidden curriculum, spirituality vs. religion, and women's studies vs. gender studies. As stated earlier, the theoretical basis is central to understanding my approach to this thesis topic.

Chapter three contains the methodology used in the survey required to gather various parts of the IWS curriculum. Due to the fact that the vast majority of the information I collected on the curriculum was gathered through the e-mail surveys, it is important that I clearly outline the steps I took to carry out the survey. With that in mind, although the methodology for the surveys is given its own chapter, I do not feel that the survey itself was the crux of this research project, but more a route to collecting parts of the curriculum. Chapter four consists of the findings of the survey, such as what was

expected and unexpected about the survey responses, which textbooks are used in IWS and how often, and how I evaluated the textbooks.

In part because my main concern and reason for doing this research is that I feel that religion should be knowledgeably included in women's studies discourse, I have included the two case studies which make up chapter five. The intention of the case studies is not only to illustrate how the textbooks portray issues around Muslim Women in Canada and the same-sex marriage debate, but also to give some direction for where one might turn in order to get a broader understanding of these issues. It was particularly important to me to ensure that some suggested directions for dealing with the exclusion of religion were given as part of this research. All too often in women's studies we raise issues and discuss perceived problems, but do not offer any ideas for moving forward or dealing with these problems. I did not want my research to repeat that trend, and the case studies are the directions that I am giving to the reader. Additionally, the case studies work to bring together the two prongs of the data collected through the surveys and the theoretical examination. Finally, chapter six, the conclusion, summarizes the overall findings of this thesis project, including what I feel my research has to say about how women's studies interacts with religion and possible further research.

Chapter Two

The Terms and Theories

In itself, naming things is of course a useful and necessary occupation, especially if the things named exist. But it is hardly much more than a prelude to analytical thought.
Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed*, 23.²²

The intention of this chapter is to outline the theories that this thesis is shaped around, define some of the key concepts and terms used repeatedly throughout and discuss potential concerns raised in regard to this research.

What is Curriculum?

I am beginning this chapter by defining curriculum because, as will be seen, there are certain aspects of curriculum that lend themselves to a shift in discussion to my theoretical basis, namely theories on difference and epistemologies of ignorance. “Curriculum” has a variety of definitions. There are different types of curriculum. The planned curriculum, involving syllabi and texts, is what the educator intends to impart to the students. The enacted curriculum is what happens during the span of the course. The experienced curriculum is what the students take away from the course.²³ For the purposes of my thesis, I will be examining the planned curriculum, specifically noting its written aspects, namely the course texts and to a lesser extent the syllabi. I examined the written aspects of the curriculum because I wanted to look at if and how religion is included in course texts. Originally, I intended this examination to include course packs and supplementary readings, but as will be shown, this was not possible. Nonetheless, examining the syllabi should give a sense of how much, if any, class time is formally allotted to discussion on women and religion.

²² Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1968): 23.

²³ Colin J. Marsh & George Willis, *Curriculum: Alternative Approaches, Ongoing Issues* 3rd Edition. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall, 2003): 4.

While it is beyond the scope of this study to examine how religion is incorporated into the enacted and experienced curriculum of IWS, it is certainly an interesting and possible extension of this research. It seems in order to study how religion is included in the enacted aspects of the curriculum one would have to attend IWS courses or at least follow-up with the professor during the progression and at the conclusion of the course. Studying the experienced curriculum could involve interviewing the students who are or have attended an IWS course. However, at this point for the purposes of this project, I am concerned with whether or not the students are being given an opportunity to learn about religion, as it relates to women's lives, in IWS courses. If there is little to no mention of religion in the course texts or on the syllabi then it is hard to imagine an experienced curriculum that includes religion.

Another aspect of curriculum significant to my thesis is the concept of the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum is the unacknowledged practice of “epistemological and ideological assumptions that help structure the decisions they [educators, educational systems] make, the environment they design, and the traditions they select...which the students tacitly experience and which helps recreate hegemony.”²⁴ While Peter McLaren defines the hidden curriculum as “*the unintended outcomes of the schooling process*” (original emphasis), I would argue that although the hidden curriculum is unacknowledged, the outcomes are intentional, particularly with regard to maintaining the status quo.²⁵ Colin Marsh and George Willis defined hidden curriculum as “...parts of the environment that are unplanned, or even unplannable (such as all the

²⁴ Apple, 103-4.

²⁵ Peter McLaren, “Critical Pedagogy: A Look at the Major Concepts” *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*, ed. Antonia Darder, Marta Baltodano and Rodolfo D. Torres (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003): 86.

unacknowledged attitudes, beliefs, codes of conduct, and conventions for social relationships that form the overall, but constantly shifting milieu of the school) [which] seem to exert a more subtle but far greater influence over what students learn than does the official curriculum itself.”²⁶ This is not to say that the hidden curriculum’s significance trumps the planned curriculum, but that its causes, effects and influence are frequently unrecognized or unacknowledged in comparison. Debbie Epstein also points to the general belief in the significance of the hidden curriculum, stating: “It is a common sense of educational theory and politics that the hidden curriculum of schooling is at least as important as the taught curriculum.”²⁷ Epstein’s definition of hidden curriculum is shorter, but no less significant. The hidden curriculum “has generally been taken to refer to the ethos or atmosphere of the school and what the pupils/students learn from it.”²⁸

One of the key aspects of the hidden curriculum is its role in reinforcing hegemony. The concept/theory of hegemony was developed by Gramsci, who

sought to explain the manner by which this change [changes in methods of domination, particularly in modern, Western society] was being exercised less and less through brutal physical means and more and more through the moral leaders of society (including teachers) who participated in and reinforced universal ‘commonsense’ notions of what is considered to be truth within society.²⁹

What is important to take away from this understanding of hegemony is that the maintenance of social norms/truths occurs through consensual socializing acts and locations, such as attending school or places of worship, through the mass media, in the

²⁶ Marsh & Willis, 11.

²⁷ Debbie Epstein, “In Our (New) Right Minds: The Hidden Curriculum and the Academy” *Feminist Academics: Creative Agents for Change*. ed. Louise Morley and Val Walsh (London: Taylor & Francis Ltd., 1995): 57.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 57-8.

²⁹ Antonia Darder, Marta Baltodano, Rodolfo D. Torres, “Critical Pedagogy: An Introduction” *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*: 7.

family, and through cultural and political sites.³⁰ Additionally, it is significant to note that while this is a way of understanding the structuring of common, dominant values in society, McLaren insists that this does not mean that these values are necessarily oppressive. “Critical educators [including feminist professors], too, would like to secure hegemony for their own ideas.”³¹

The concept of hidden curriculum is very useful for helping to explain one of my greatest concerns about the omission of religion and the possibilities for including religion more frequently. Just as it is fairly easy to point at what is included in the planned curriculum, it is difficult to explain how that which is omitted can help maintain the status quo. It is a strategic use of ignorance.³² If there is a belief that (rightly or wrongly) religion is not important, then not educating people about religion reinforces that belief. As Prothero states: “Silence can lie as well as words, of course, and in this case the lie is that religion doesn’t matter: it has no social, political, or historical force so students can get along just fine without knowing anything about it.”³³ Consequently, the omission of religion would help maintain the cultural belief that religion is not significant, because if it were, surely, it would be included in the curriculum. The idea of strategic ignorance will be discussed in greater detail later in this proposal.

In a circular fashion, the cultural belief that religion is no longer significant may also be contributing to the omission of religion in IWS. Epstein argues that the students help to enforce the hidden curriculum, especially in institutes of higher education where

³⁰ McLaren, 76.

³¹ Ibid., 78.

³² For more information on “strategic ignorance” see Alison Bailey, “Strategic Ignorance,” *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, ed. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007): 77-94.

³³ Prothero, 247.

“it is... commonly held that university students learn as much from each other as from the lecturers...”³⁴ If society has already convinced the majority of the students that religion is insignificant, then those students will profess that belief to others, continuing the cycle.

Potential Issues

There are a variety of broad issues that may be raised in relation to my thesis; for example, I am concerned that this research may be interpreted as backlash against women’s studies. There have been authors who have attempted to understand and explain the institutional reality of women’s studies, who have received harsh criticism. Two of the most notable are Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge who wrote *Professing Feminism: Cautionary Tales from the Strange World of Women’s Studies*, later revised, expanded and renamed *Professing Feminism: Education and Indoctrination in Women’s Studies*.³⁵ Patai and Koertge interviewed some people about their experiences, “hopes and expectations of feminism and Women’s Studies programs” and draw out themes from those interviews.³⁶ Instead of illustrating Women’s Studies in an idealized manner, they illustrate some of the issues faced by and constructed within Women’s Studies as an institutionalized discipline. Both Patai and Koertge had academic careers in Women’s

³⁴ Epstein, 58.

³⁵ The first edition of *Professing Feminism* was published in 1994, the second in 2003. The majority of critiques I found were explicitly of the first edition, although the main difference between the editions appears to be the addition of a section titled “Part Two: Women’s Studies in the New Millennium” containing three chapters (216-362).

³⁶ Patai & Koertge, 2003, xxv.

Studies and eventually grew frustrated with the “internal conflicts,” “ideological policing,” “intolerance” and “dogmatism” they found.³⁷

Professing Feminism reflects many of the conflicts I have felt as a Women’s Studies student and the issues drew me to this particular thesis topic, yet it was harshly criticized. Marilyn Jacoby Boxer referred Patai and Koertge’s assertions as “accusations by critics from within the [feminist] academy...”³⁸ Mary Rogers and C. D. Garrett charge Patai and Koertge with backlash against women’s studies and feminism, asserting that they use bad methods and that their book leaves “nonsensical impressions.”³⁹ *Professing Feminism* has also been compared to the writings of the infamous Camille Paglia.⁴⁰

Rogers and Garrett also seem to dislike the concept and usage of “identity politics,” a term that I find particularly useful and relevant to potential issues others might take up with my thesis. They feel that “identity politics” is often used as code “among critics of women’s studies and other interdisciplinary studies focusing on specific sociocultural groups.”⁴¹ Furthermore, they do not acknowledge the identity politics present in women’s studies, but discredit those who witness it occurring. Patai and Koertge use the term “IDPOL,” which they note has the double meaning of “ideological policing,” as well as of identity politics.⁴²

According to the logic of IDPOL, one must always act in one’s own group’s interest as long as that group is oppressed. Oppressors are assumed to be doing the same thing for

³⁷ Ibid., xxi.

³⁸ Marilyn Jacoby Boxer, *When Women Ask The Questions: Creating Women’s Studies in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998): 3.

³⁹ Mary F. Rogers and C. D. Garrett, *Who’s Afraid of Women’s Studies? Feminisms in Everyday Life* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002): 117, 134. Rogers & Garrett do not detail what it is about *Professing Feminism* that leaves the “nonsensical impressions,” indeed they do not even indicate what those impressions might be.

⁴⁰ Boxer, 3; Rogers & Garrett, 133.

⁴¹ Rogers & Garrett, 140.

⁴² Patai & Koertge, 71.

their side, but they should be castigated for doing so. Thus, a man who does not support a feminist cause is automatically a sexist; a white person who disagrees with a black person is racist. The reverse, however, is not the case. Consequently, those defined as oppressed place a high premium on that identity.⁴³

This understanding of identity politics helps to explain why I was able to find examples of Judaism being treated negatively and/or ignored within women's studies, but not a similar treatment of Christianity. In part because Jewish people have historically been oppressed, and because of the complexity of Judaism being both an ethnic and religious identity, Jewish women are in a position to be able to challenge the level of their inclusion within women's studies. However, because Christianity is the dominant religion of North America, it would be more suspect if one argued that religion (being read as Christianity) receives little to no space in women's studies. I want to be clear that I am not just concerned about Christianity not being discussed in women's studies, but other religions as well.

This leads to one of the points on which I differ with Prothero. While he acknowledges that Americans know very little about religion in general, he advocates for teaching about the Bible above teaching about world religions.⁴⁴ He argues that the Bible is more applicable to the knowledge Americans need to understand their cultural and political situation than other religious texts, stating "...the Bible...is of sufficient importance in western civilization to merit its own course."⁴⁵ I would argue that Western religions (that is Judaism, Christianity and Islam) are especially important for women's studies to discuss and understand, particularly in this era of postcolonial feminism. One such example is the frequent discussion of Islamic women wearing the hijab (the head

⁴³ Ibid., 71-2.

⁴⁴ Prothero, 252-7.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 256. Keep in mind that Prothero is referring to a high school level course, and not a university level course.

covering): is it possible to have a serious, informed discussion on this topic if the professor and the students do not know that not all Islamic women wear it, or what parts of the Quran are used to support or refute the necessity of the hijab?

This points to another potential issue with my thesis research. While it is useful to be able to point to the gaps in women's studies, if the professors know little to nothing about the topics being omitted, how successful can the inclusion of those topics be? In this regard, my thesis is quite limited. I am examining whether or not, and how, the omission of religion may be occurring, but I cannot ensure that the professors teaching women's studies will know enough about religion to discuss it knowledgeably. However, I can point to textbooks that in my assessment deal with religion in a knowledgeable and equitable manner. Furthermore, the case studies are meant to illustrate what the current discourse looks like and offer further direction to the reader. Ideally, professors are constantly (re)educating themselves on issues that are significant to their field. The case studies will, hopefully, help professors recognize the need for self-education to carry over to religion.

While it seems that an ideal future project related to this research would be to create educational sessions on religion for professors teaching IWS, I am hesitant to suggest such a project. My main concern about any attempts to create a project to educate or encourage the inclusion of religion in the IWS curriculum is reflected in Susan Hardy Aiken et al.'s article "Trying Transformations: Curriculum Integrations and the Problem of Resistance."⁴⁶ Aiken et al. conducted a four-year project attempting to

⁴⁶ Susan Hardy Aiken et al. "Trying Transformations: Curriculum Integrations and the Problem of Resistance," *Reconstructing the Academy: Women's Education & Women's*

encourage interdisciplinary curriculum change to include women and feminist issues by educating professors on these issues. They mention a frequent comment of resistance, that the inclusion of women requires sacrificing other “more important” topics.⁴⁷ The same reasoning could be used to excuse the exclusion of religion from women’s studies. Additionally Aiken et al. raise the problem of “gender blindness,” particularly that they were continually “explaining basic concepts, defining essential terms, and correcting misconceptions born of partial understanding.”⁴⁸ I am concerned that there would be a similar religion blindness, where none of the key concepts would be absorbed by the intended parties.

Dealing with the Issue of Difference

The issue of difference is significant enough with regard to this research that it deserved its own section. How to properly or appropriately acknowledge differences among women has been a key issue within Women’s Studies for quite some time, arguably since the inception of Women’s Studies. I am concerned with how to thoughtfully include the difference of religion in feminist/Women’s Studies discourse. As Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewel state: “[b]ecause recent scholarship has shown that gender, class, religion, and sexuality produce different kinds of women in relation to different kinds of patriarchies, we must design classes that present a more complex view of how women become ‘women’ (or other kinds of gendered subjects) around the

Studies. ed. Elizabeth Minnich, Jean O’Barr and Rachel Rosenfeld (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988): 104-24.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 109.

⁴⁸ Ibid.,

world.”⁴⁹ However, this works more as an ideal to strive towards than an actual practice, for no matter how hard a professor may try to include as many types of differences as possible in their course, there will always be some kind of difference that will be overlooked. Janet R. Jakobsen discusses the importance of questioning and understanding why certain differences are included in the development of a course. She asks questions such as “What issues are most relevant given the context of this college or university? How do the courses relate to each other? ...If we use an intersectional approach, should we also have specific courses that are focused on gender and race or gender and religion?”⁵⁰

Unfortunately, not everyone deals with the issue of difference in such an open-minded, considerate way. Susan Stanford Friedman outlines scripts of denial, accusation and confession, which can be understood as reactions to difference.⁵¹ The script of denial asserts that difference is not the real focus or even an issue within feminism or Women’s Studies. The script of accusation, similar to Patai and Koertge’s description of IDPOL, seems to assert that those marked as oppressors, whoever they might be (white women, men, etc.), cannot fail to oppress. Finally, the script of confession is generally associated with the apologetic response to difference by white feminists, acknowledging and trapped in their guilt (as oppressors), and not able to see themselves as active in dealing with difference (other than as listeners or as oppressors).

⁴⁹ Caren Kaplan & Inderpal Grewel, “Transnational Practices and Interdisciplinary Feminist Scholarship: Refiguring Women’s and Gender Studies” *Women’s Studies on its Own*. 79.

⁵⁰ Janet R. Jakobsen, “Different Differences: Theory and the Practice of Women’s Studies” *Women’s Studies for the Future*. 138.

⁵¹ Susan Stanford Friedman, *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998): 41-7.

While Friedman's scripts are very useful in categorizing reactions of dealing with difference, they address only negative, hindering reactions. These clearly cannot be the only possible responses to difference, or there would be no way to work forward, dealing with difference in a positive manner. This does not mean that these concepts of scripts are not useful in this discussion, but that they are not without problems. It is also important to note that Friedman is particularly concerned with the difference of skin colour, and notes that these types of discourse about difference frequently forms into a "binary of white/other" that "inhibit[s] the development of scripts about the relations of one kind of a other to (an)other."⁵² Although Friedman focuses on racial difference, her comments seem applicable to dealings with other types of difference, including religious difference. Thus, I have hypothesized that the majority of professors teaching IWS are using the script of denial with regard to religion within Women's Studies. This does not mean that I think that the professors are necessarily consciously asserting that religion is not important, or that they are ignoring religious differences, but that they are denying that religion is significant to Women's Studies. In thinking that religion is not important for women's studies, professors can then justify the exclusion of religion to leave space for other "more important" topics.

The discussion on Fuchs, Torton Beck, Suskin and Darraj's ideas about the exclusion of particular religions from Women's Studies in the introductory chapter could be understood as scripts of accusation. To various degrees, these academics are accusing the women's studies academy of dealing poorly with religious differences (particularly those religions different from Christianity or even possibly, to be more specific, different

⁵² Ibid., 45.

from Protestantism).⁵³ One would hope that part of the reason why these academics point to women's studies' seemingly poor methods for dealing with Jewish, Islamic and Arab women's issues are because they would like to see women's studies change for the better. Ideally, the people who point to the negative reactions to difference (those who are accusing) will not continue a cycle of accusation, but be able to note when difference is treated in a positive way as easily as noting its negative treatment. Darraj does a good job at this. She does not just discuss the frequent conflation of "Arab" and "Muslim" and the Western feminist stereotype that it is impossible to be Arab and feminist. She also notes recently translated texts by Arab feminist scholars from the past 100 years, illustrating the actual relationship of Arab culture and feminism and not simply the Western feminist perspective.⁵⁴ Enacted in this way, the script of accusation can be an invaluable steppingstone towards attempting to minimize the exclusion of differences.

Friedman's concepts of scripts are very relevant to how I am approaching my research and the potential reactions to my thesis. I am striving to approach my research without being overly confessional or accusatory, although I see the need for both reactions to a certain extent. There is a need to explain or confess why I feel this topic is significant and to point to or accuse institutional women's studies for what is happening. However, too much of either reaction would not only be unprofessional and highly unacademic, it would also make this research and its underlying reasons easy to discredit and refute as simply a blind charge against women's studies. I clearly do not want either of these extremes to occur.

⁵³ Although it is easy to associate the language of accusation with specifically "unfounded accusations," the script of accusation does not imply that the accusations are founded or unfounded.

⁵⁴ Darraj, 193.

Epistemologies of Ignorance

The fairly new field of epistemologies of ignorance works to draw together my understanding of Friedman's scripts and my earlier discussion around curriculum. I will now offer a brief genealogy of epistemologies of ignorance.

Traditional Western epistemology, the theory of knowledge, has been largely framed by the works of René Descartes. According to Alison Jaggar and Susan Bordo, the six main assumptions of traditional epistemology are:

- 1) Reality has an objective structure or nature unaffected by or independent of either human understanding or perspective on it...
- 2) The structure or nature of reality in principle is accessible to human understanding or knowledge...
- 3) Humans approach the task of gaining knowledge of the world as solitary individuals, rather than as socially constituted members of historically changing groups...
- 4) The principal human faculty for attaining knowledge of reality is reason (rationalism), sometimes working in conjunction with the senses (empiricism)...
- 5) The faculties of reason and sensation are potentially the same for all human beings, regardless of their culture or class, race or sex (universalism)...
- 6)... The assumption that genuine or reliable knowledge is built from simple components that are thought of as epistemologically certain or indubitable is known by philosophers as foundationalism.⁵⁵

Traditional epistemology recognizes only one way of knowing. Hence, human and social differences, which could develop different types of knowledge, become understood as “conquerable impediments” to “real” knowledge.⁵⁶ However, contemporary critics of traditional epistemology, such as feminist philosophers of epistemology, argue that there are *epistemologies*. These critics acknowledge that there are various ways of knowing and many types of knowledge rather than the traditional Western approach to a singular knowledge.

⁵⁵ Alison M. Jaggar, & Susan R. Bordo, “Introduction” *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*. ed. Alison M. Jaggar & Susan R. Bordo. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989): 3.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Traditional epistemology also relies heavily on dualism, reinforcing ideas that the mind is different from/opposite to the body, that the universal is different from/opposite to the particular, “reason from emotion” and so forth.⁵⁷ One consistently asserted dualism is that knowledge is different from and opposite to ignorance; that ignorance does not/cannot exist where there is knowledge. However, it is not difficult to find examples of ignorance and knowledge not only co-existing, but also maintaining each other. One such example illustrated by Ziauddin Sardar and Meryll Wyn Davies, authors of *Why Do People Hate America?*, is “the problem of ‘knowledgeable ignorance’: knowing people, ideas, civilizations[sic.], religions, histories as something they are not, and could not possibly be, and maintaining these ideas even when the means exist to know differently.”⁵⁸ Thus, the relatively new field of epistemologies of ignorance challenges the dualistic assumptions about knowledge and ignorance specifically, in addition to many other assumptions found in traditional epistemology.

There are many ways that epistemologies of ignorance connect with the possible omission of religion from IWS, as was explicitly touched on in the section “Explaining Curriculum” and repeatedly gestured to throughout the above discussion. According to the logic of epistemologies of ignorance, there are many types of ignorance. Ignorance is not simply a matter of not knowing something, or even choosing to ignore something; it is not the opposite of knowledge. Just as there are various types of knowledge, there are many kinds of ignorances. Strategic ignorance can describe using another person’s ignorance for one’s benefit or using one’s own ignorance to cope with or resist

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ziauddin Sardar & Meryll Wyn Davies, *Why Do People Hate America?* (Cambridge, England: Icon Books, 2003): 11-2.

unbearable situations.⁵⁹ Willful ignorance, however, is like Sardar and Davies's "knowledgeable ignorance", where one has the ability to know more adequately but chooses to remain ignorant. Aiken et al.'s report, "Trying Transformations," offers some examples of both strategic and willful ignorance. Many of the professors who attended the workshops meant to foster interdisciplinarity, particularly in relation to the inclusion of women, resisted not only learning about women and gender issues, but also the idea of including "women" in their courses.⁶⁰

Systemic ignorance, such as certain beliefs about gender and race relations that maintain and are reinforced by the present society, seem to rely on educational systems. Charles Mills' concept of "white ignorance" is a perfect example of a systemic ignorance.⁶¹ He describes society as a world that whites have created but cannot make sense of because of their ignorance of race relations. In the instance of systemic ignorance, it is not simply an issue of individuals not knowing or choosing not to know, but of society being structured to help perpetuate ignorance.

Entwined with this idea of systemic ignorance is a lack of acknowledging relationality. The ability to deny one's relationship to something/someone allows ignorance to flourish. Inversely, Sarah Lucia Hoagland has argued "that epistemological and ethical practices of ignorance are strategic and involve a denial of relationality."⁶² It is much easier to remain ignorant if one can disavow one's relationality to that about

⁵⁹ Bailey, 87-9; Vivian M. May, "Trauma in Paradise: Willful and Strategic Ignorance in *Cereus Blooms at Night*." *Hypatia* 21:3 (Summer 2006): 107-35.

⁶⁰ Aiken et. al., "Trying Transformations," 109.

⁶¹ Charles Mills, "White Ignorance" *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*. ed. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007): 11-38.

⁶² Sarah Lucia Hoagland, "Denying Relationality: Epistemology and Ethics and Ignorance" *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, 96.

which one is ignorant. In the case of religion, if people can assert that religion does not relate to or affect them, then it is easier for those people to remain ignorant of religion.

Shannon Sullivan offers a particular example of denying relationality in her article “White Ignorance and Colonial Oppression: Or, Why I Know So Little about Puerto Rico.”⁶³ In this article she discusses how systemic ignorance is grounded in lack of acknowledging our (societies’ and individuals’) relationships to one another. She writes specifically about the US’s relationship with Puerto Rico; specifically how her questioning how Puerto Rico could have its own Olympic Basketball team if it is “part” of the United States which led to learning about the connections between the countries. Sullivan also discusses the role of education, such as the U.S. creating an educational system in Puerto Rico with the intention of making Puerto Ricans into “good American citizens” and not quite as Puerto Rican. In this sense Sullivan is focusing specifically on formal education. I feel it is important to see the significance of self-educating in Sullivan’s example. In her moment of questioning she chose to learn more about the relationship between Puerto Rico and the U.S. It is my hope that this research project might create a watershed moment for someone; that they might suddenly wonder, as I have, why religion is not discussed in women’s studies, and go forth to learn about the relationship between religion and women’s studies.

Now that I have outlined my concerns about how this research might be perceived and the various theories I am drawing on, I will move on to discussing the surveys.

⁶³ Shannon Sullivan, “White Ignorance: Or, Why I Know So Little about Puerto Rico,” *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, 153-72.

Chapter Three

The Survey and Case Study Methodologies

Survey Methodology

My methods for collecting data relied on two main components. First, I collected information from university websites and from e-mail surveys given to the professors teaching IWS. Second, I analyzed the collected information to attempt to determine if and how religion is included in the written aspects of IWS curriculum. While I used a survey to gain access to the data I analyzed for my research, I want to be clear that this part of my research is centered on the written aspects of the IWS curriculum and not those who teach these courses. As stated before I examined the textbooks and, to a much lesser extent, the syllabi. Originally I was hoping to examine course packs and additional or supplementary readings, but as will be seen, I did not receive enough data on those aspects of the written curriculum.

The first step in collecting the data was the preliminary research of examining the websites of universities across Canada that offered IWS courses during the 2007/2008 academic year. From these websites, I recorded the following information, when available: the name of the university, the name and e-mail address of the coordinator or chair⁶⁴ of the women's studies program or department⁶⁵ and/or the names and e-mail addresses of the professors teaching the introductory courses, the official title of the introductory courses and the texts and syllabi of those courses. From this information I was able to gauge how many universities I had to contact, how many professors I could contact directly, and how many chairs I had to contact. Through this preliminary

⁶⁴ From this point on, all of those contacted who might be chairs, directors, coordinators, heads or head administrator of women's studies programs or departments will be referred to as "chair."

⁶⁵ Henceforth both women's studies departments and programs will be referred to as "department(s)."

research I was also able to compile a list of textbooks used in IWS based on information on university bookstore websites. I also went forward and surveyed the professors, not only as a means of accessing the syllabi and hopefully other course readings, but also to confirm which textbooks were being used. As can be seen in Appendix E, the preliminary research and the survey findings did not lead to the same information on the textbooks used for IWS.

For the universities where I was able to find the e-mail addresses of the professors who were teaching IWS, I contacted them directly, e-mailing a letter of introduction and a short questionnaire asking what they used for course texts and for a copy of their syllabus.⁶⁶ For the universities where I was unable to find the names and e-mail addresses of the professors teaching IWS, I contacted the chair of the department or a general departmental e-mail address, e-mailing a separate letter of introduction and requesting that they forward the e-mail to the professors teaching IWS at their institution.⁶⁷

Samples and Response Rates

Given certain difficulties in being able to define my sample, it is useful to discuss how I calculated my response rate. According to Floyd J. Fowler, Jr., sampling is “select[ing] a small subset of a population representative of the whole population. The key to good sampling is finding a way to give all (or nearly all) population members the

⁶⁶ For the letter of introduction sent to the professors and the survey questionnaire see Appendices A and C.

⁶⁷ See Appendix B for the letter of introduction sent to head/coordinator.

same (or a known) chance of being sampled...”⁶⁸ In the instance of my research, the population is those professors who taught IWS in Canada during the 2007/2008 academic year. By using the methods stated above for finding the contact information of those who teach IWS, I strived to contact all of the population. However, knowing now that not all of the e-mails addresses were correct, it was not possible to contact the entire population.

Fowler also states that sampling means using “probability methods for choosing a sample.”⁶⁹ However, my sample group is a nonprobability sample, as defined by Arelene Fink, “because the units appear representative or because they can be conveniently assembled.”⁷⁰ I did not use a method involving randomization for contacting the professors, but instead I attempted to contact everyone in that population. Additionally, I relied to some extent on snowball sampling; that is, a “type of sampling [that] relies on previously identified members of a group to identify other members of the population.”⁷¹ In this instance, the chairs I contacted are the group members who in many cases helped “identify other members of the population” to me. The chairs are not only members of the larger population of people involved in women’s studies. In many cases they were also members of the more specific population I was seeking, those who teach IWS.

Determining the sample size of this project is not simple. Although I recorded a set number of universities that I examined, I do not have a means of knowing how many professors I was potentially surveying. This makes it difficult to be able to give an accurate sample size. It is false to assume that each university offers one IWS course, or

⁶⁸ Floyd J. Fowler, Jr. *Survey Research Methods*. 2nd Edition. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1993): 4.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Fink, Arelene, *How to Sample in Surveys*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995): 17.

⁷¹ Ibid., 19.

if multiple courses are taught, that each course is taught by a different professor. Therefore, if I used the universities as my standard for the sample, I could have potentially received more responses than my sample number leading to an error in calculating the response rate. From a brief examination of the preliminary research prior to e-mailing the surveys, it appeared that I would be contacting 46 universities, 35-37 chairs and 23-26 professors.

Given general university protocol I submitted an application to the Ethics Board and did not begin e-mailing the surveys until the application was approved. The ethics application was submitted late February and was approved as of late March/early April. The surveys were sent out in three rounds: the first round was sent out April 3rd, the second round between April 15th and 18th, and the third round on May 2nd. These dates do not include follow ups sent to professors who showed an interest in participating, but stated that they would not have time to fill out the survey until a later date. I waited up to eight weeks from when the original round of surveys was sent. I did not attempt to solicit more responses nor did I receive any survey responses after the first week of June.

Originally I set my ideal response rate as roughly 30%, meaning that I would get responses from professors teaching at at least 15 of the 46 universities. This response rate was based on general response rates to mailed surveys. According to Fowler, “one occasionally will see reports of mail surveys in which 5% to 20% of the sample responded.”⁷² However, he also states, “that better educated people usually send back mail questionnaires more quickly than those with less education.”⁷³ Given that I only contacted highly educated individuals and the biases against mailed surveys (which I

⁷² Fowler, 40.

⁷³ Ibid., 41.

have extrapolated to include e-mailed surveys), I proposed that an ideal response rate of 30% is a fairly modest, but attainable goal. Sending the surveys out in 3 rounds that were roughly 2 weeks apart helped to reach the final response rate of 41%, which will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

The survey itself is quite short, asking question that are direct and to the point. According to Giuseppe Iarossi the length of a survey does not have a “clear association” to the response rate, but it does have an effect on “data accuracy.”⁷⁴ Length is not a great concern with my survey and I highly doubt its length affected the data accuracy. The greatest problems I predicted involving data accuracy were the professors attaching the wrong syllabi or course text list to their responding e-mail and/or professors not responding because of personal issues with releasing the data I requested, such as academic freedom. Both of these issues did arise with regard to the survey responses, and they will also be discussed in the following chapter.

The questions that I asked the professors were intentionally straightforward so that they would be easy to answer. Out of consideration for the professors and chairs that I contacted, no names, e-mail addresses, or original course syllabi are included in this thesis. Once this thesis has been accepted I will shred and dispose of any data forms containing names and contact information of the respondents, as well as delete any computer files comprising said data.

⁷⁴ Giuseppe Iarossi, *The Power of Survey Design: A User's Guide for Managing Surveys, Interpreting Results, and Influencing Respondents*. (Washington, D.C.: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/ The World Bank, 2006.): 78.

Analyzing the Data

The main questions I asked when examining the texts and syllabi are: 1) Is religion mentioned at all?; 2) To what extent is religion mentioned?; 3) How is/Is religion analyzed/critiqued?; 4) When “religion” is engaged, what does the author mean? With the syllabi in particular I was mainly concerned with whether or not religion was mentioned on the syllabus, denoting that time is formally allotted in the course for religion. I hypothesized that religion would not be included very frequently, and when it was included that the discussion would most likely be negative. The majority of my concern in relation to the texts centered on those texts used most frequently as either noted in the survey responses or on the university websites. I used the above guiding questions to shape my grading of the textbooks.

When looking at the grading scale (Appendix D) used to form the grades found in Appendices E and F, it is important to recall my application of Clifford Geertz’s definition of religion. Geertz’s definition portrays religion as a multifaceted, contemporary cultural artifact that can be examined from (inside and) outside religious/faith structures. I am concerned with an “anthropological” approach, which is not concerned with judging or grading religious beliefs or understandings of God. My concerns are centered on whether or not the course texts (and by extension the IWS courses themselves) illustrate religion as a diverse aspect of the world we (that is all people) inhabit. This means that religion should not be reduced to one or two monolithic elements (such as the hijab in Islam or the priesthood in Roman Catholicism) nor should religion be treated as being all negative or positive. Instead I was looking for an

understanding of religion that is multifaceted and complex, allowing it to be viewed and assessed from a range of perspectives.

Case Studies Methodology

As stated in the introduction, chapter five of this thesis consists of the two case studies. One case study will examine discourse around Muslim women in Canada; the other will focus on the same-sex marriage debate, particularly from the perspective of liberal Christian Canadians. These two topics were chosen because they are commonly discussed in women's studies, although frequently under the umbrella of a different topic. For example, same-sex marriage might be understood under the topics of queer rights or sexualities, whereas Muslim women might be discussed in the context of the oppression and the hijab, North American post-9/11, or immigrant women. Additionally, these topics are inherently connected to religion. Although it may seem apparent that Muslim women in Canada is a topic based in religion, reducing the discourse to issues around veiling also effectively works to make the focus cultural or national, removing the religious significance. In the instance of same-sex marriage, when the discourse is limited to the perspective of same-sex marriage as a human rights issue, then the historical and modern connection between religion and marriage is negated. This is not to say that same-sex marriage is not a human rights issue, but that same-sex marriage is at least as much a religious issue as a human rights issue.

Furthermore, discussions around both topics, when they do attempt to include a critical religious perspective, tend to focus mainly upon conservative and/or fundamentalist religious perspectives. The media (such as television, newspapers,

popular documentaries and radio) also tend to highlight the most extreme and negative religious perspectives on these topics. Both of these case studies will illustrate how the knowledgeable inclusion of religion can challenge the simplistic stereotypes frequently recreated in both of these discussions.

Each case study begins by outlining which of the IWS textbooks discussed the given topic and how frequently each of the textbooks was used according to the preliminary research and survey findings. I then summarized the intention of the articles and sections in the textbooks on the given topics. These summaries are meant to help the reader understand the current discourse in the IWS textbooks. After drawing out some shared themes from the sections in the textbooks, I put forth some suggested readings on the case study topic. My starting point for locating suggested readings for the Muslim women case study began with the works of Dr. Shahnaz Khan, a professor of Global Studies and Women's Studies at Sir Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario.⁷⁵ Dr. Khan's research interests include Immigrant Muslim women in Canada; she has written extensively on this topic.⁷⁶ The starting point for locating suggested readings for the same-sex marriage case study began with the works of Dr. Pamela Dickey Young, a professor of Religion and Culture, Theology, and Women's Studies at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario.⁷⁷ Dr. Dickey Young was ordained as a minister in the United Church of Canada during her twenties and has assisted the Church in forming its policies on same-sex marriage. I do not limit the suggested readings in either case study

⁷⁵ <http://info.wlu.ca/~wwwws/faculty/skhan/> retrieved Jan. 25, 2008.

⁷⁶ For example, Shahnaz Khan, "Muslim Women: Negotiations in the Third Space" *Signs* 23:2 (Winter 1998): 463-94; and *Aversion and Desire: Negotiating Muslim Female Identity in the Diaspora* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2002).

⁷⁷ <http://rels.queensu.ca/fac.pdy.php> retrieved Jan. 25, 2008.

to the works of Khan or Dickey Young, but used their bibliographies as resources for finding more texts on the topics.⁷⁸

My intention with the case studies is that they shed some light on how religion is actually being dealt with in IWS discourse. While it is fine for me to continually assert that I feel that religion is ignored or treated mainly negatively within IWS, the case studies show how religion is being portrayed in the textbooks that are being used in these courses. Additionally, I hope that the suggested readings will offer guidance for those who recognize the need to include religion in women's studies' discourse, but are unsure how to go about including religion.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the responses to the surveys, themes that arose from the responses, and what happened that was expected and unexpected.

⁷⁸ While Khan and Dickey Young are affiliated with their respective university's Women's Studies programs, neither taught IWS in 2007/2008 nor were they survey respondents within my research.

Chapter Four
The Survey Findings

The goal of this chapter is to outline the results of the surveys. I will first discuss some of the statistics, that is the number of e-mails that were sent compared to the number of responses received, how many e-mails did not reach the intended respondent, etc. From there I will draw out themes that arose out of the responses. The chapter will come to a close with a discussion about my grading the textbooks.

The Statistics

As stated previously, the goal of the survey was to collect the written aspects (textbooks, syllabi, course packs and supplementary readings) of IWS courses across Canada for the 2007-2008 academic year. Clearly, the best source for this information is the individuals who are teaching these courses. While some university websites list the professors teaching IWS, many neither do that nor offer an up-to-date list of these professors. Therefore, in order to contact the professors teaching IWS I contacted the chairs of women's studies departments requesting that they forward the survey to the professors teaching IWS at their institution.

From a list compiled by searching university websites, I attempted to contact forty-two chairs. Of the forty-two attempted e-mails, four failed to reach the intended recipients. Furthermore, at least six of the original e-mails went to people who were no longer acting as chair and they either forwarded the survey to the appropriate people or gave me the contact information of the present chair. Therefore, I am certain that I contacted (directly or indirectly) thirty-eight chairs.

In many cases I did not hear back directly from the chairs, but through responses by professors at their respective institutions. These types of indirect responses were

noted as though the chair had responded. By this standard, I received responses from twenty-three of the thirty-eight chairs contacted.

It is important to note that some of the contact e-mails used that have been classified as “chairs” are actually general contact e-mail addresses for the women’s studies departments. This was the case for four of the e-mails. Additionally, in some cases the chair of the department and the professor teaching IWS were one in the same. This type of double response was counted as both responses from the chair and the professor teaching IWS.

I attempted to contact thirty-nine IWS professors directly. Of these thirty-nine e-mails, six failed to reach the intended recipients. In one instance a survey sent to a professor failed, yet the professor responded to the survey because they received it from their chair (this was not included in the six failed e-mails). Additionally, I received six responses either from chairs who teach IWS or from professors who received the survey from their chairs. In total twenty-seven responses were received from the professors. Of the twenty-seven responses, seventeen included course syllabi that apply to the 2007-2008 academic year. Some professors forwarded syllabi from additional years, which, while being quite interesting, are not part of this present research project. Whether or not and how religion was included on the syllabi will be discussed in greater detail below.

There were a few instances where professors e-mailed that they were interested in participating, but would not be able to fill out the survey until a later date. All of these professors were sent reminders that they showed an interest in participating and only one did not eventually complete the survey. One respondent was forwarded the letter of introduction and survey by a friend who felt they would be interested in my research

project. Luckily, this respondent teaches an IWS course and was quite interested in participating.

In my thesis proposal I stated that I was hoping to receive responses from fifteen of the forty-six universities contacted. As of June 1, 2008, I had received responses from nineteen different universities and multiple responses from five of those institutions. This means that I had a response rate of 41%.

Notable Themes

The vast majority of responses were neutral or positive. A few responses seemed to reflect internal university politics and/or personal qualms about my research or my survey questions on the part of the professors. One example is of a university where the Religious Studies department was dismantled over a decade ago. In part due to this dismantling, the university offered a wide range of very focused introductory level women's studies courses, one of which was "Women and Religion." This issue of specialized introductory level women's studies courses compared to survey style IWS will be discussed in greater detail below. Another example is a professor who responded to the survey, but answered the questions in such a way that I did not really gain any information. For example, besides stating that they did not use a course pack they added that asking the contents of the course pack "is far too much to ask for academic freedom" (although their responses were in cap lock). They also did not forward a copy of their syllabus stating that they did "not feel comfortable with this." I can only assume that this response is based on the previous experiences of that respondent. Additionally, that was

the only respondent who illustrated a concern I voiced prior to conducting the surveys about academic freedom being used as a reason to effectively not respond to the survey.

Although the survey questions were short answer and direct as possible, almost all of the respondents wrote long, explanatory answers. The first question, “What textbook(s) do you use when teaching your introductory Women’s Studies course?” frequently received responses such as why the professor does not use a textbook, whether or not the professor feels the textbook discusses religion, what articles in the textbook the professor feels include religion, and/or other critiques of the textbooks. One likely reason for the survey responses being longer and more personalized than required is that it reflects a trend in women’s studies to be personal and confessional. This tendency will be discussed in greater detail below.

Other trends within the responses include: 1) respondents disclosing personal information such as their own religious background or beliefs, 2) comments about religion vs. spirituality and requests to clarify my use of “Introductory Women’s Studies,” 3) explanations as to how the respondent tries to include religion/spirituality into their courses, and 4) positive feedback with regard to this master’s research project.

1) The tendency to offer personal information seems to be common within Women’s Studies, where concepts such as “the personal is political” are taught, and highly personal experiences such as sexual abuse and abortion are routinely discussed. A common teaching practice in IWS is to have the students write journals about how their IWS course affects them academically and personally.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Please note that not all professors teaching IWS use these kinds of journals.

“The personal is political” was meant as a means of politicizing so-called women’s issues that had traditionally been deemed personal or private concerns. Academically, this means challenging the status quo for what is considered “appropriate” research subjects and methods. One of the results of “the personal is political” movement is that the lines between academics and private/personal actions/thoughts/reactions are frequently over-stepped. One example is of the sense that disclosing one’s religious background is necessary to understand why/how one integrates religion into their IWS course. Even though personal religious beliefs/heritage affects how one relates to religion, it does not justify the exclusion of religion. Therefore, while I was not surprised that the respondents frequently disclosed personal information, I did not anticipate personal disclosure to result in such lengthy responses.

2) I was expecting some comments about religion versus spirituality and about my use of “Introductory Women’s Studies.” I have placed these arguably very different issues together as I believe they both reflect discourse about the politics of naming. As stated in the introductory chapter, there is a debatable shift from “religion” to “spirituality” occurring in Western society. When this shift is discussed it is generally in relation to a movement away from established “mainstream” religious traditions and towards more interior approaches to one’s spiritual self. Within the discourse of the supposed shift “spirituality” frequently becomes used as a blanket term to cover those faith practices which might fall outside of organized religious traditions, such as Neo-Paganism, Native American religious practices, and the Goddess Movement. Whereas “religion” becomes generally understood as a set of community practices (such as going to a house of worship) and the conventional or dominant spiritual culture, “spirituality” is

then more eclectic, mystical and focused on internal transformation. However, what should be clear is that using the term “spirituality” does not mean that religion is excluded. Almost all, if not all, spiritual practices can be understood as connected to one or more religions, such as yoga being related to Hinduism and Buddhism or the medicine wheel being connected to Native American religions. Furthermore, the academic study of religion generally understands religion and spirituality as closely connected.

Similar to the naming issues between “religion” and “spirituality” is the present debate over the terms “women’s studies” versus “gender studies” versus “women’s and gender studies.” Although I stated in my letter of introduction and in the survey that I was looking at IWS, I was conceiving “women’s studies” as all three possibilities. While this was not overly problematic, I feel that the movement to change the name of women’s studies deserves some attention here. In the few cases where a university offered an Introduction to Gender Studies (with or without an IWS course) and clarification was requested about my interest in those courses, I replied that I was interest in introductory women’s *and* gender studies courses. This was not a major concern, as the majority of the undergraduate women’s studies departments across Canada do not seem to have changed their names.

Although the name change from “women’s studies” to “women’s and gender studies” or “gender studies” did not have a strong effect on my findings, it seems that in recent years there has been a growing movement across Canada to change, or at least discuss possibly changing the name of “women’s studies.” The reasons for this shift may vary from the name change as a means to clarify the focus of the departments to external pressure placed on the departments. “In itself, naming things is of course a useful and

necessary occupation, especially if the things named exist. But it is hardly much more than a prelude to analytic thought.”⁸⁰ In the case of this particular naming, the analytic thought over what the name change signifies does not necessarily seem reflected in the departments themselves. To draw on the program I am currently attending, the inter-university Master’s of Arts in Women’s Studies at Saint Mary’s and Mount Saint Vincent Universities has officially changed its name to “Master’s of Arts in Women’s and Gender Studies” in the past year or so. However, to my knowledge, this change has not altered the content of this degree in any way. In some cases, the gender studies programs/departments are definitely more gender focused than woman focused (such as the department of Gender Studies at University of New Brunswick, Saint John). However, in other cases, Women’s and Gender Studies programs are still very women centered, despite the name change.

An adjunct issue that I had not fully considered in doing this research is that not all IWS courses are titled or conceived of in the same manner. By this, I mean I was anticipating that the introductory level women’s studies courses would be a survey-style course of women’s studies topics. However, at least one university in Ontario does not offer this kind of introductory level course. Instead, this university offers a variety of courses at the introductory level about specific issues, such as women and friendships or women and religious traditions. These very focused introductory level women’s studies courses are much less likely to use the common, survey-style IWS textbooks, such as *Feminist Issues: Race, Class & Sexuality* edited by Nancy Mandell. Additionally, unless the focus is specifically women and religion, it could potentially be more difficult to

⁸⁰ Geertz, *Islam Observed*, 23.

include religion in the discourse without arguably subtracting from the focus of the course (although some might argue the same thing of IWS courses).

3) In many of the more drawn-out responses the respondents would attempt to illustrate how they are including religion that would not otherwise be obvious with regard to the survey questions. While I can appreciate the respondents' desire to show that they are being inclusive, in some cases these attempts to show how they included religion illustrated how little they actually knew. For example, one respondent mentioned that they discuss "Mary Gage's Women's bible [sic]" in their IWS course. However, *The Woman's Bible* was commissioned and edited by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Matilda Joslyn Gage wrote *Woman, Church and State*. Another respondent forwarded me a copy of her course notes for a unit on "religion and biology." While I appreciated this gesture, I found that the course notes mainly discussed religion (read Christianity) as a means for maintaining strict, traditional gender roles, to the exclusion of anything positive.

Other examples include the attempt to make a stark distinction between religion and spirituality, as discussed above, and claiming that an article that discusses a specific religious tradition's worldview "is more on culture than religion." The latter example points to a misplaced idea that religion is somehow outside or separate/separable from culture, something which is counter-intuitive. This idea of religion being outside of culture, as well as being outside of history, will be discussed in greater detail below.

One respondent attempted to give me a course syllabus from a few years back because the professor who taught the course was studying theology at a post-graduate level. This connects with both the desire to illustrate how religion is included in IWS and confusion over including studying religion compared to studying theology, which

literally means to study the nature of god, and is generally more faith-based. Although it was not the respondent's own course syllabus he offered, he clearly thought that having a professor with a background in theology meant that that course would be more inclusive in regards to religion. Furthermore, I suspect that the respondent was unclear as to the differences between theology and the general studying of religions. Whereas theology is the study of the nature of god and religious beliefs, generally studying religion does not have a faith component; one does not have to believe in a higher power or practice any particular faith in order to study religion.

While these kinds of responses point to a lack of familiarity with the academic study of religion, they also reflect an ahistorical and acultural approach to religion within women's studies. Attempting to conceive of culture as divorced from religion (or vice versa) is tantamount to removing religion from world history. How can one think of culture without religion being present? Can one talk about history, including Canadian history and the history of women's rights, without mentioning religion?

4) This brings me to the respondents who stated that they felt this particular research project, of trying to uncover how religion is approached in IWS, is very important. In two cases respondents who identified themselves as having an academic background in history openly supported my research. One respondent in particular noted how much it annoys her when "analysis of the past does not include belief and the actions of religious institutions." She also notes how researchers' negative personal relationship with religion unwittingly bias their approach to history. This particular grievance is a clear reflection of my concerns with how personal disclosure is used to excuse the

exclusion of religion. The same respondent also noted how the students “might know nothing” about religion and their perspectives might “range from interested to hostile.”

Textbooks According to Survey vs. Websites

In preparation for this research I collected as much info from university websites (women’s studies’ homepages and campus bookstores) as possible. From my preliminary research I found that 38 different textbooks were being used. The term “textbook” is being used loosely here, as many of the “textbooks” are not traditional textbooks, but plays or novels, such as Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues* or *The Red Tent* by Anita Diamant. While I looked at almost all of these books (34 of the 38) I found that the textbooks collected through the survey did not necessarily correlate with the preliminary list. Using the information from the surveys I compiled a new and revised textbook list. This newer list contains nineteen textbooks, most of which are traditional academic textbooks. While some of the books on the newer list were on the preliminary list, roughly half of the books were not listed on websites when the preliminary list was compiled. Additionally, I was more concerned with the analysis of the textbooks on the list based on the survey responses as they are definitely being used in IWS courses.

My approach to analyzing the textbook was to go through them and grade them on how they deal with religion. The grades are based on a grading scale (one for the traditional textbooks, another for the non-traditional textbooks) which can be found in Appendices E and F. The textbooks were graded based on whether or not they discussed a wide range of religions (not just Christian or Islam), illustrated contemporary concerns, and reflected religion as a cultural/societal factor, affecting women positively and

negatively. Simply containing a section on religion or spirituality was not enough to justify a grade of B or higher. Non-traditional textbooks were graded similarly, although with less expectations of diverse religions being mentioned, and higher expectations that religion would be illustrated as being part of the characters' lives. Textbooks containing glossaries and/or an index that helped to locate "religion" were given higher grades. Terms searched for included: religion, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Muslim women, mosque, hijab, Buddhism, Hinduism, and women and religion.

I would like to note that although some textbooks received low grades based on this scale it does not mean that they are not quality textbooks. One such example can be drawn from *Turbo Chicks: Talking Young Feminism*, edited by Allyson Mitchell, Lisa Bryn Rundle & Lara Karaian, which is an exceptional book in many ways, but received a grade of D- according to the grading scale because it barely mentioned religion or spirituality at all.

What is on the Syllabi?

Of the seventeen syllabi gathered through the surveys only nine mentioned religion as part of the planned curriculum, where a course reading explicitly discussing religion was assigned or where certain dates were set aside to discuss religion. These nine syllabi fitted into three groups containing three related syllabi: one group contained syllabi for courses that were either a year long or half of a two-part IWS course; one group contained focused introductory level courses; and the last group were general IWS/Introduction to Gender Studies/Introduction to Women and Gender Studies courses.

Two of the syllabi for year long or part of a two-part IWS course listed two classes as being dedicated to teaching about women and religion. The third syllabus listed six classes as being focused on religion. All of the syllabi for the general IWS courses listed religion as a possible topic of discussion for only one class. For two of these syllabi religion was mentioned in the titles of one of the course readings assigned for that day. For the third syllabus all of the course readings for one day pertained to religion and it seemed that a guest lecturer was invited to talk to the class.

The three more specific introductory level course syllabi had a wider range in how frequently religion was listed as a focus for any given class. One of the courses was focused particularly on religion, although it should be noted that the majority of the classes focused on Western religious traditions. Another course, focused specifically on feminisms in the West, had the topic of religion as a form of resistance for almost half of the course. Finally, on the other extreme, an introductory level course on women's health had listed only one assigned reading that I know discusses religion.

It is also significant to note that of the nine syllabi mentioned above four only included religion as a discussion or reading about Islam or Muslim women. One of the syllabi specifically listed "Islamic Women and the Veil" as the only apparent discussions on religion. The frequency of Islam as the only religion formally given discussion time according to the course syllabi reaffirm the value of the case study on Muslim Women as part of this research project. Islam is clearly a significant topic within IWS discourse and looking at the course readings on Muslim women in Canada will help to further clarify what the discourse might look like.

Issues with Course Packs and Supplementary Readings

Although I had originally intended to analyze the contents of the course packs, after receiving my survey responses I no longer thought this was feasible. The vast majority of the respondents did not give the citation information for the articles in their course packs. A few mentioned that the information was given on the course syllabus, but in most cases the information given on the syllabi did not easily facilitate locating the articles. One example of the fragmented citation information for the contents of the course packs is having on the syllabus the name of the author as “C. Steenberger,” giving the title of the article, essay or chapter and pages numbers, but not specifying if the page numbers were for a textbook, a book on reserve or a course pack. This is not enough information to make it possible to locate these articles in a timely manner. Another syllabus cites a course pack article as “de Beauvoir, selection from *The Second Sex*” which is even more vague.

In some cases the respondents would answer the survey question about the course packs listing only the articles from the course pack that the respondents felt were applicable to my research. While I appreciate that the respondents most likely did this out of consideration for me, if I had had the time to analyze the course packs’ content I would have preferred to determine for myself which articles include religion. Finally, in at least one instance a professor had included their own unpublished works in their course pack, something that would be near impossible for me to locate.

Similar issues arose from the survey question about supplementary readings. The majority of the respondents seemed to ignore the question of supplementary readings and the few that did answer still seemed to avoid directly answering the question. By this I

mean, they would state that the supplementary readings were “found” readings (that is, something that they or students came across during the progression of the course) or that they change every semester, implying that they did not keep track of what supplementary readings had been used. These responses are not conducive to finding any of the supplementary readings. Therefore, the time and effort required locating and analyzing the content of the course packs and the supplementary readings made this aspect of my proposed research beyond the means of the actual research.

I will now shift from discussing the survey responses to detailing the two case studies.

Chapter Five

The Case Studies

Understanding the Case Studies

Both case studies will begin with an examination of how issues around the topic (Muslim women in Canada or same-sex marriage within liberal Christianity) were raised in the textbooks referred to in the survey responses and found through the preliminary research. Once discussions in the textbooks are thoroughly described and examined, other texts will be drawn on for the purposes of helping to expand the consideration of and knowledge about the given topic. In some cases additional readings will be recommended.

As stated in chapter three, these particular topics were chosen to be the focus of the case studies, not only because they are prevalent in IWS discourse, but also because of their inherent connections to religion. While some might argue that same-sex marriage is not a religious issue, historically and contemporarily religion has been a major factor in defining marriage. Within Canada the courts recognized the role religion played with regard to same-sex marriage when they allowed various religious groups to testify for or against the legalization of same-sex marriage.

In the instance of the case study on Muslim Women in Canada it seems even more apparent that religion would be included. However, as will be seen, the discourse around Muslim women in Canada is frequently limited to issues around veiling, which is then reduced to a monolithic symbol, removing the need to understand the religious significance of the veil to the woman wearing or choosing not to wear it.

For both case studies, the intention is to illustrate the discourse on these topics within the textbooks and offer guidance as to how one could learn more about religion in connections to these topics. Understanding and learning more about the religious

connections to these topics will give a more nuanced understanding of their complexities. Furthermore, a greater understanding of the religious particularities of Muslim women in Canada and the same-sex marriage debate might help us, liberal Westerns, to recognize some of our cultural biases and assumptions.

Case Study on Muslim Women in Canada

As seen in the earlier examination of the survey findings, issues around Muslim women and Islam in general are frequently included as topics to be discussed on IWS syllabi. By examining the discourse occurring within the textbooks, what aspects of Islam that are discussed in class may become apparent. While it is positive that at least the topic women in Islam is frequently included on the syllabi, the discourse around Muslim women may be limited in such a way as to make Islam appear monolithic and ahistorical. Looking back on Geertz's definition of religion, I was hoping to find signs that Islam and Muslim women were being treated in a manner that illustrated the cultural complexity and irreducible worldview associated with those particular identities. I will now outline what I found in the textbooks.

Of the textbooks used by the professors that responded to the survey, three of the textbooks included sections that were, in my opinion, related to issues connected to Muslim women in Canada. These three textbooks are: *Open Boundaries: A Canadian Women's Studies Reader*⁸¹ which was used by two professors, and *Exploring Gender in*

⁸¹ Barbara A. Crow and Lise Gotell, ed. *Open Boundaries: A Canadian Women's Studies Reader*. 2nd Edition. (Toronto: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005). Henceforth, *Open Boundaries* will be referred to as *Boundaries*.

*Canada: A Multi-Dimensional Approach*⁸² and *Home/Bodies: Geographies of Self, Place and Space*,⁸³ each used once. However, it is important to note that the preliminary research (examining university websites) showed that *Boundaries* was used five times, *Exploring* was used once, and *Home/Bodies* was not mentioned at all. Additionally, although none of the respondents mentioned *An Introduction to Women's Studies: Gender in a Transnational World* the preliminary research showed that this text is being used in four different IWS courses.⁸⁴ Thus, although it was not included in the survey findings, I include examining a section from *Introduction* in this case study.

A fifth text, *Women Imagine Change: A Global Anthology of Women's Resistance From 600 B.C.E. to Present*, does not discuss Muslim women in Canada, but does include a section titled "Fatima Mernissi (1941-) and Ghada Samman (1942-): Islam and Feminism: Changing Interpretations".⁸⁵ According to the survey responses *Women* was used for one course and according to the preliminary research it was not used at all. The "Islam and Feminism" section of *Women* contains an introduction written by Natania Meeker, one of the editors, and excerpts of Mernissi and Samman's writings. The introduction touches on themes I found running throughout the other articles and raises issues about the treatment of Muslim women within Women's Studies. I will use a

⁸² Beverly Matthews and Lori Beaman. *Exploring Gender in Canada: A Multi-Dimensional Approach*. (Toronto: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007). Henceforth, *Exploring Gender in Canada* will be referred to as *Exploring*.

⁸³ Wendy Schissel, ed. *Home/Bodies: Geographies of Self, Place and Space*. (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006).

⁸⁴ Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, ed. *An Introduction to Women's Studies: Gender in a Transnational World*, 2nd Edition. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2006). Henceforth, *An Introduction to Women's Studies* will be referred to as *Introduction*.

⁸⁵ Eugenia Delamotte, Natania Meeker and Jean O'Barr, ed. *Women Imagine Change: A Global Anthology of Women's Resistance From 600 B.C.E. to Present* (New York: Routledge, 1997): 79-87. From this point *Women Imagine Change* will be referred to as *Women*.

discussion of the introduction of this section in *Women* to mark a shift from the examining of course texts to suggesting alternative directions.

I specified above that I am drawing on sections that in my opinion relate to issues around Muslim women in Canada because, although these sections clearly discuss issues around Islam or Muslim women, they do not always clearly discuss Muslim women in Canada. *Home/Bodies*, which was one of the least used of the texts examined, contained the most explicit chapter on Muslim women in Canada of all of the textbooks. This chapter in *Home/Bodies*, “Who am I and Where Do I Belong? Sites of Struggle in Crafting and Negotiating Female Muslim Identities in Canada”, is written by Tabassum Ruby⁸⁶, on whom I will be drawing in the suggested readings section of this case study. The section in *Exploring* focuses specifically on Muslim women in Canada, although, as will be seen, in a more limited fashion than Ruby’s chapter.

Both *Exploring* and *Introduction* mainly limited their examinations of Muslim women to issues around hijab. I will first outline the discussion in *Exploring* and then move on to the discussion in *Introduction*. *Exploring* was one of the few texts examined that included a chapter on religion. The introduction of the chapter states:

This chapter explores both the gendered nature of religious institutions and the ways in which women and men live out gendered lives in their religious practice. It examines five issues that illustrate the possibility for change in gender-religion intersections: the emergence of Wicca, the development of new religious movements, the use of religion to combat violence against women, *the wearing of the hijab*, and polygamy as religious practice.⁸⁷

A little more than half of this chapter is given to the exploration of religious (exclusively Christian) institutions from a gendered perspective. The small (less than one full page) section on “The Hijab: Symbol of Gender Scripts?” is the only section in the chapter that

⁸⁶ *Home/Bodies*, 27-45.

⁸⁷ *Exploring*, 265. Emphasis added.

touches on issues in Islam.⁸⁸ In this three paragraph section on hijab the authors (Matthews and Beaman) are striving to complicate the conception that the hijab, defined as “the headscarf or veil,” is solely a “religious/cultural symbol.”⁸⁹

The authors of *Exploring* appear to draw only on Homa Hoodfar’s research on young hijab-wearing Muslim Canadian women’s interpretation of what the hijab means; Matthews and Beaman did not include any other interpretations of Islamic dress for women or other research on this topic. Hoodfar’s research, while illustrating a very refined understanding of the complexities of life for Muslim women in Canada, is in no way meant to be an all-inclusive representation of what the hijab means to all Muslim women in Canada, or of what it is like being a Muslim woman in Canada. Although Matthews and Beaman’s section on hijab does not offer a great amount of detail, they do attempt to put forth “the importance of considering both the global and the local meanings of symbolic religious practices and symbols” (p.276). Additionally, the hijab is described as a “religious/cultural symbol” and is not reduced to being an all-negative or positive aspect of Islam for women. Therefore, despite the limited space given to issues around Muslim women, the authors have done a somewhat adequate job of pointing towards some of the complexities around the hijab. However, looking back on the multifaceted understanding of religion as a worldview reliant on values, ethics, symbols, ritual, and mythology, this particular examination of Muslim women is very focused on the symbol-laden hijab and neglects to examine any other aspects of Islam.

⁸⁸ Although the section within this chapter focusing on polygamy could have included discussion on Islam’s arguable support of polygamy, it focused exclusively on break-away Mormon sects such as those living in Bountiful, British Columbia.

⁸⁹ *Exploring*, 276.

Cynthia Enloe's article "Nationalism and Masculinity" in *Introduction* also discusses Muslim veiling practices, although exclusively with regard to nationalistic uses of the veil.⁹⁰ Enloe's discussion of the veil is limited to a section titled "Nationalism and the Veil" which is a little more than one page long. While Enloe is not concerned with issues facing Muslim women in Canada, her reading does focus on nationalist approaches to enforcing or forcibly removing the veil in countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Turkey and Malaysia, and the role European colonialism has played in understanding the meaning of veiling. I feel this connects to Muslim women in Canada because much of the literature on Muslim Women in Canada is focused on the issues facing/around immigrant Muslim women.

It is quite clear that Enloe's intention with "Nationalism and the Veil" is to give a snapshot of the complexities of the veil with regard to nationalist identities, and while it does this beautifully, it does so to the detriment of understanding the veil as an aspect of women's religiosity. It is certainly true that "no practice has been more heatedly debated among nationalists than the veil"⁹¹ and that Western countries attempting to shape the meaning of the veil have done little but fuel the flames of this debate. Additionally, it is a positive sign that Enloe acknowledges and asserts the differences within the pro-/anti-veiling movements depending on the country/nation. However, Enloe only mentions the significance of the veil as far back in history as Western colonial endeavors. The historical and religious development of the hijab is missing from her analysis. Instead Enloe concentrates on the gender dynamics in play with regard to nationalist

⁹⁰ *Introducing*, 222-228. Originally published as Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990): 45-46, 52-59.

⁹¹ *Introduction*, 223.

debates about veiling. She states: “What is striking about these past and present arguments over whether a veiled woman is strengthening her nation or betraying it is that they are so important to men in their communities.”⁹² She later elucidates five understandings of nationalistic significance placed on women by men:

...[M]en in many communities appear to assign such ideological weight to the outward attire and sexual purity of women in the community because they see women as 1) the community’s – or the nation’s – most valuable *possessions*; 2) the principal *vehicles* for transmitting the whole nations’ values from one generation to the next; 3) *bearers* of the community’s future generations – crudely, nationalist wombs; 4) the members of the community most *vulnerable* to defilement and exploitation by oppressive alien rulers; and 5) most susceptible to *assimilation* and co-option by insidious outsiders.⁹³

While this is an accurate illustration of many of the nationalist debates around the hijab, its religious and cultural significance further complicate interpretations of the veil.⁹⁴

The articles in *Exploring* and *Introduction* do their part to show some of the significance of the hijab/veil, but they both fall short, confining discussion concerning Muslim women to discussions on the veil. Beyond the fact that variations on the veil are not discussed, the hijab comes to stand in for all the different debates around Muslim women. The veil becomes reduced to a monolithic representation or symbol for Muslim women, national pride, modesty and the level of modernization, to the degree that the hijab is never *just* a head covering or *just* a sign of one’s faith.

Home/Bodies, unlike the other textbooks, is not a traditional introductory level textbook in the sense that it does not attempt to cover a range of topics, but instead is focused on a very particular theme; in this case the focus is on the concept of home.

Ruby’s chapter, “Who Am I and Where Do I Belong? Sites of Struggle in Crafting and

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 224. Original emphasis.

⁹⁴ An example of the complexities of the hijab going beyond nationalist identity can be found in Mark MacKinnon, “Traditional head scarf unveils new rifts in Turkey: A political clash over the familiar head covering masks a power struggle between the elite and the emerging middle class” in *The Globe and Mail*. Monday, July 21st, 2008: A8.

Negotiating Female Muslim Identities in Canada,” in *Home/Bodies* looks at Canadian immigrant Muslim women sense of identity and conception of “home.” Although Ruby’s focus is not centered on the hijab, she takes the hijab into account, using it as a means for defining the participants in the three focus groups on which her research is based. One group contained only participants who used the hijab, one contained only participants who did not use the hijab, and the third group was mixed. Topics discussed in the chapter in relation to the focus groups include, but are not limited to, negative stereotyping of Muslims as “terrorists” and “extremists,” media representations of Muslims (particularly Muslim women), the aftermath of the events of September 11th, the personal advantages gained from immigrating to Canada, and the construction of identity (particularly in relation of “home” and what is taught in school).

Just as I am concerned with monolithic constructions of religion within women’s studies, so too were some of Ruby’s participants concerned with homogenizing images and “inaccurate and/or partial information”⁹⁵ about Muslim women and Islam expressed in educational settings. Specifically, Ruby states:

As Educators, professors play an important role in shaping students’ views. Providing inaccurate and/or partial information causes damage to the students. On the one hand, the non-Muslim students learn stereotypical ideas about Islam and Muslims. On the other hand, Muslim students experience racism in the classrooms...⁹⁶

The kind of damage discussed in this excerpt can be understood as an aspect of the hidden curriculum and as perpetuating knowledgeable ignorance within the classroom.

The use of *Home/Bodies*, and Ruby’s chapter within this text, are exceptional in many ways. In the first place, *Home/Bodies* was used as a textbook in only one IWS course according to the survey findings. Secondly, as mentioned above, *Home/Bodies* is

⁹⁵ *Home/bodies*, p. 43.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

not a traditional IWS textbook, nor is the course it is used for a general introductory survey course. Thirdly, Ruby's chapter is the only chapter in *Home/Bodies* that discusses religion in any meaningful way. Keeping that in mind, Ruby does an excellent job of portraying how Islam shapes her participants' (that is, immigrant Muslim women in Canada) identities and their worldview.

A final passage I would like to discuss before transitioning to suggestions for the textbooks is Sedef Arat-Koc's article "Hot Potato: Imperial Wars or Benevolent Interventions? Reflections on 'Global Feminism' Post September 11th" found in *Boundaries*.⁹⁷ It is worthy of attention that *Boundaries* is one of the most used IWS textbooks in Canada, yet it did not include any articles overtly about Islam or Muslim women. Arat-Koc's article, as the title suggested, is focused on challenging and questioning assumptions made by "the West" and "global feminists," particularly since September 11th, about those living in the "Third World" and Muslim societies.⁹⁸ One such challenge posed by Arat-Koc is about veiled Afghan women being used as a symbol for justifying the war on Iraq or as a representation of "Muslim culture." The crux of Arat-Koc's argument is that so-called "global feminism" needs to question assumptions or common knowledge about those living in the "Third World."

"Hot Potato" points to the problems with making particularly startling aspects of a culture represent cultures that are diverse and evolving. Examples given by Arat-Koc include infibulation being understood as representing "African culture" and the hijab,

⁹⁷ Sedef Arat-Koc, "Hot Potato: Imperial Wars or Benevolent Interventions? Reflections on "Global Feminism" Post September 11th" *Boundaries*: 126-134. This reading is an abridged copy of a previously published paper.

⁹⁸ Note the use of quotation marks in this paragraph not only denotes the language used by Arat-Koc, but also complex and debatable terms.

burqa, naqib or veil being used to represent “Muslim culture.” As though she is giving an example of knowledgeable ignorance, Arat-Koc states that these symbols get used in such a way as to “replac[e] any need to learn the reality and diversity of women’s lives...”⁹⁹ It is frequently assumed that once one knows about these particular aspects of Africa or Islam, one does not need to know anymore. Arat-Koc takes a further issue with these monolithic cultural stand-ins, drawing out comparisons of the treatment of Islam with the treatment of Christianity.

...“Islam” – depicted as an unchanging monolith, hardly different from its fundamentalist interpretations – becomes *the* cause of women’s oppression in “Muslim societies,” always and everywhere. Most find this approach rather unproblematic even though they would find references to equally reductionist monolithic conceptions of “Christianity” and “Christian societies” totally absurd...”¹⁰⁰

The sad irony about “Hot Potato” is that while it is pushing for feminism to be “more engaged,” those who are teaching this text may not know enough about Muslim women to teach others at a “more engaged” level. It is difficult enough to be critical of that which one thinks one “knows,” without adding the complexity of learning more about what one thinks one already knows. That is not to say that I think striving to be “more engaged” is futile, but that I think at an introductory level more information should be given to illustrate the reality behind common topics which are knowledgeably ignored.

The introduction to “Islam and Feminism: Changing Interpretations” in *Women* offers a good transition from the textbooks to suggested readings on women in Islam. The introduction briefly discusses some of the contradictory positions taken on understanding Muslim women’s lives, mainly a perspective rooted in the Quran and interpretations of early Islam compared to very geographically and historically specific

⁹⁹ *Boundaries*, 128.

¹⁰⁰ *Boundaries*, 129.

moments in more recent history. Additionally, the “woman question” is discussed as being made increasingly complex in much of the Muslim world in part because of the colonial practices of the West.

Like Arat-Koc’s article, the editors of *Women* encourage the readers to learn more about the differences among Muslim societies and to move beyond “abstract notions of ‘Islam’ or ‘the Muslim world.’”¹⁰¹ As Meeker states:

Scholarship on Muslim women too often concentrates on their religious beliefs, veiling, and female genital mutilation (usually in that order) as if such practices were necessarily central to an understanding of all women’s lives in all Muslim societies. In fact, “the Muslim world” encompasses an amazing array of populations and nations and includes a significant number of the inhabitants of such area of the world as the Philippines, Yugoslavia, Indonesia, and East Africa as well as the Middle East and India.¹⁰²

The issues Meeker raised with this type of scholarship can be understood as a limited understanding of what religion is in relation to Muslim women. By concentrating on “religious belief, veiling, and female genital mutilation” scholars are attempting to reduce Islam to a few overly generalized characteristics. What impressed me the most about this introduction is that the editors not only state some of the common problems with scholarship on Muslim women, they also use writings by specific Muslim women in order to attempt to correct these problems. On this note I will now move on to discuss themes raised in the textbooks and suggestions as to what a more knowledgeable discussion of Muslim women in Canada could look like.

Themes Raised in the Textbooks

Despite the fact that many of the sections discussed above acknowledge the complexity and difficulty of examining the veil, only Ruby’s chapter, and the section in

¹⁰¹ *Women*, 79.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 80.

Exploring to a lesser extent, illustrates an understanding of the veil from Muslim women's perspectives. Additionally, none of the sections offered background information on the history or religious significance of the veil. Failing to give information such as what parts of the Quran are used to support the use of the hijab, the historical development of and cultural variations on veiling practices inadvertently help to perpetuate knowledgeable ignorance and the conception that a veiled woman represents all Muslim cultures.

By and large the majority of attempts to understand Muslim women within the textbooks were limited to the hijab and to the issues facing, and perspectives of, non-Western and immigrant female Muslim populations. While Ruby's chapter did an excellent job of highlighting concerns of immigrant Muslim women in Canada, there is a common assumption that Muslim women immigrate to Canada (not that Ruby is perpetuating this idea) and that they are generally not born and raised in Canada. Given that a lot of the literature written within the Canadian context on Muslim women focuses especially on the immigrant population, this helps to secure the image of Muslim Canadians as immigrants.¹⁰³ While immigrant and Canadian born Muslim women do face some similar issues, they do not face all the same issues.

¹⁰³ Shahnaz Khan, as well as Ruby, writes almost exclusively on issues around Muslim women immigrants in Canada. Some of Khan's works include "Muslim Women: Negotiations in the Third Space" *Signs* 23/1 (Winter 1998): 463-493; *Muslim Women: Crafting a North American Identity* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2000); and *Aversion and Desire: Negotiating Muslim Female Identity in the Diaspora* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2002).

Suggested Directions

I have found a few texts that illustrate what I believe the knowledgeable inclusion of religion could look like when discussing Muslim women in Canada. I have drawn on these particular readings because they clearly introduce and illustrate the complexities of religion, bringing to the foreground various aspects of religion as mentioned in Geertz's definition. The first article, also by Ruby, is "Listening to the voices of hijab,"¹⁰⁴ which offers much more religious and cultural background than "Who Am I." Because both "Listening" and "Who Am I" are based on the same research, they both have a strong focus on the immigrant female Muslim population in Canada. However, where "Who Am I" is focused on the participants' personal perspectives on their identity and "home," "Listening" seems more concerned with offering the reader a solid understanding of the cultural and religious background, particularly of the hijab. It is the fact that so much more detail is given in "Listening" that has led me to suggest it as an example of what the knowledgeable inclusion of religion could look like.

A second article is Sheila McDonough and Homa Hoodfar's "Muslim Women in Canada: From Ethnic Groups to Religious Community."¹⁰⁵ The article does a superb job of illustrating the various layers of life, history and religion for Muslims, and particularly Muslim women, in Canada. "Muslim Women in Canada" offers a brief history of Islam as well as Muslim immigration to Canada. Various websites and a detailed list of references, in addition to multimedia resources and brief biographies of Canadian Muslim

¹⁰⁴ Tabassum F. Ruby, "Listening to the voices of hijab" *Women's Studies International Forum* 29 (2006): 54-66. This article is based on the same focus-group research as "Who Am I and Where Do I Belong?"

¹⁰⁵ Sheila McDonough and Homa Hoodfar. "Muslims in Canada: From Ethnic Groups to Religious Community" *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada*. ed. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak. (Toronto: Pearson Longman, 2005): 133-153.

artists, gives the reader ample suggestions for locating further information on Muslims in Canada. Furthermore, I particularly like that “Muslim Women in Canada” is not limited to the current immigrant population.

Prior to publishing “Muslims in Canada” Hoodfar and McDonough also worked with Sajida Sultana Alvi to edit *The Muslim Veil in North America: Issues and Debates*.¹⁰⁶ *The Muslim Veil* is an ideal reader for someone who is looking for a variety of perspectives on the veil, as well as historical and religious background, particularly in relation to the Canadian context. Additionally, *The Muslim Veil* is the only text that I have found in which the editors assert that they are concerned more with dealing with the needs of Muslim women, than with responding to the European-Western perspective/stereotypes. Specifically, the editors state in the introduction:

...[W]e hope that the present volume will not only be informative to the general interested public, especially in Europe and North American, and to university students, but that above all, it will respond to the needs of young women and others in the Muslim world who are curious about dress code controversies among Diaspora Muslims.¹⁰⁷

The push for this text to be not only for non-Islamic people, but more importantly for Muslim people, is part of the reason why I feel it exemplifies a knowledgeable discussion about Islam within North America.

The last text I would like to recommend before I conclude with a more general list of suggested readings is Shahnaz Khan’s *Muslim Women: Crafting a North American Identity*.¹⁰⁸ The text focuses on how sixteen women negotiate their Muslim upbringing with being immigrants in Canada. Coming from a country or community where Islam is

¹⁰⁶ Sajida Sultana Alvi, Homa Hoodfar and Sheila McDonough. *The Muslim Veil in North America: Issues and Debates* (Toronto: Women’s Press, 2003).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., xv.

¹⁰⁸ Shahnaz Khan, *Muslim Women: Crafting a North American Identity* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2000).

hegemonic, to Canada, where Islam is a minority among religions, clearly poses a challenge to one's Muslim identity. Khan thoughtfully illustrates, in case study format, how sixteen women have dealt with, and continue to deal with, this challenge. This text helps to show the diversity within the Muslim Diaspora community in Canada, and does not rely on the veil as a sign of that diversity.

The list below is of additional suggested readings on Muslim women, frequently with a Canadian focus. I chose not to discuss the below suggested readings in as great detail as those mentioned above because, while they do offer valuable information, they do not offer as clear and detailed introductions to women in Islam as those readings detailed above.

- Khan, Shahnaz. "Muslim Women: Negotiations in the Third Space" in *Signs*. 23/1 (Winter 1998): 463 – 493. (Immigrant Muslim women in Canada)
- Clarke, L. "Two Muslim Women in North America" in *Women and Religious Traditions*. Leona M. Anderson & Pamela Dickey Young, eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. (Case Study about a Immigrant Muslim woman in Canada and an African-American Muslim woman)
- Mojab, Shahrzad. "'Muslim' Women and 'Western' Feminists: The Debate on Particulars and Universals" in *Monthly Reviews* 50/7 (Dec. 1998): 19-29. (Challenges Western feminist stereotypes around gender relations in Iran)
- Zine, Jasmin. "Honour and Identity: An Ethnographic Account of Muslim Girls in a Canadian Islamic School" in *Topia: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies*. 19 (Spring 2008): 32- 61.
- Lakhani, Safia. "Sporting the Veil: Representations of Asmahan Mansour in the

Canadian Media” in *Topia: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies*. 19 (Spring 2008): 32-61. (An examination of how English-language newspapers reported on a young Muslim Canadian girl being banned from playing football)

Case Study on Same-Sex Marriage

Same-sex marriage was and still is a hot topic in the media, particularly with respect to conservative Christian responses to the legalization and requested approval of same-sex marriage.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, within Women's Studies it is not uncommon to find readings about same-sex marriage, particularly in those texts published before Bill C-38 (the Bill supporting the right to same-sex marriage) was passed.¹¹⁰ Although one might question the role of religion within the same-sex marriage debate, various religious groups have felt that this debate directly affects them. Geertz's definition of religion helps to explain why religious groups would feel that legally permitting same-sex marriage directly affects them. If the conception one holds is that opposite-sex sexual relations, particularly those occurring in marriage, are part of the "general order of existence" then legally acknowledging and permitting same-sex unions challenges that sense of order.¹¹¹ The Canadian legal system agreed that allowing the right to same-sex marriage affected the religious groups, as they allowed churches such as the Roman Catholic Church and United Church of Canada to argue in court how allowing the right to same-sex marriage would affect them and their congregations.

It should be noted that different churches espouse an opposition to same-sex marriage for different reasons. The focus of the Roman Catholic Church's opposition to same-sex marriage is based in the belief that same-sex relations go against the "natural order" created and defined by God. According to the natural order of the world,

¹⁰⁹ As recently as July 15th *The Globe and Mail* printed articles about the debates around same-sex marriage among Anglican bishops. Fred Hiltz, "What God Hath Joined Together..." in *The Globe and Mail*, July 15th, 2008.

¹¹⁰ For a complete copy and the legislative history of Bill C-38, see http://www.parl.gc.ca/common/bills_ls.asp?Parl=38&Ses=1&ls=c38

¹¹¹ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 90.

procreation is one of the reasons marriage exists, and therefore marriage must contain one man and one woman. Hence, supporting and acknowledging same-sex marriage and relations is to go against God's creation and nature. Protestant churches generally take a more biblical stance, citing the Bible as proof of God's opposition to same-sex relations. Some biblical passage frequently used to illustrate God's opposition to same-sex marriage and homosexuality are Genesis 19:1-13, Leviticus 18:22, 1 Corinthians 6:8-10, and Romans 1: 24-27.¹¹² Whether or not these passages are taken as God literally condemning homosexuality or interpreted as statements of how the world is or should be varies depending on the church and the individual Christian.

What is important to take away from this is that although there are various churches that share an opposition to same-sex marriage, they have come to that opposition in widely different ways. There are nuanced differences in the religious arguments for and against same-sex marriage, which are repeatedly overlooked in the very black and white perception that conservative Christians are against and liberal Christians support same-sex marriage. Additionally, those who support same-sex marriage may also come to that stance for very different reasons. An example here can be drawn from the supposedly universal Christian ideas that "God is Love" and that Jesus preached tolerance and acceptance, frequently noted by liberal Christians, who may support (or at least not see the need to heatedly refute) same-sex relations.

¹¹² This grouping of biblical passages was developed out of looking at a couple websites. Given the nature of the websites I would otherwise not recommend them to the reader. <http://www.bible.ca/s-homo=sin.htm> and http://nosamesexmarriage.com/marriage/bible_verses.php retrieved on December 11, 2008.

The Textbooks

In this case study I draw on discussions of same-sex marriage from four sections in three text books: a brief section titled “A Case Study: Same-Sex Marriage” in *Exploring Gender in Canada*¹¹³, “Susan B. Boyd and Claire F. L. Young’s “‘From Same Sex to No Sex?’: Trends Towards Recognition of (Same-Sex) Relationships in Canada” in *Open Boundaries*¹¹⁴, and Joanne Cohen’s “Identity, Community, and Same-sex Marriage”¹¹⁵ and Beverly Smith’s “Equal Marriage for Same-Sex Couples” both in *Feminisms and Womanisms*.¹¹⁶ As mentioned in the previous case study, *Exploring* was used once according to the survey and preliminary research, and *Boundaries* was used twice according to the survey and five times according to the preliminary research. According to the preliminary research, *Feminisms* was used twice, but was listed in the survey responses once.

While one could argue that same-sex marriage was not given much space in the texts, there were distinct themes that came out of the four articles. All of the articles discuss same-sex marriage within a Canadian context. Only the section in *Exploring* was written after Bill C-38 was passed in the summer of 2005. The three articles that were written before Bill C-38 was passed attempt to deal with the idea of same-sex marriage

¹¹³ Beverly Matthews and Lori Beaman, *Exploring Gender in Canada: A Multi-Dimensional Approach* (Toronto: Pearson Prentice-Hall, 2007): 253-4.

¹¹⁴ Susan B. Boyd and Claire F. L. Young, “‘From Same-Sex to No Sex?’: Trends towards Recognition of (Same-Sex) Relationships in Canada” *Open Boundaries: A Canadian Women’s Reader*. ed. Barbara A. Crow and Lise Gotell. 2nd Edition. (Toronto: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005): 217-29.

¹¹⁵ Joanne Cohen, “Identity, Community and Same-Sex Marriage” *Feminisms and Womanisms: A Women’s Studies Reader*. ed. Althea Prince and Susan Silva-Wayne. (Toronto: Women’s Press, 2004): 481-8.

¹¹⁶ Beverly Smith, “Equal Marriage for Same-Sex Couples” *Feminisms and Womanisms*: 489-92.

supporting the tradition of marriage. Two of the articles, “From Same-sex to No Sex?” in *Boundaries* and “Identity, Community, and Same-sex Marriage” in *Feminisms and Womanisms*, portray an ambivalence about same-sex marriage and its potential for supporting traditional (and arguably problematic) forms of marriage.

More significant in relation to this present research is how these articles deal with religious debate around same-sex marriage; each article approaches religion in drastically different ways. “A Case Study: Same-sex Marriage” in *Exploring* includes religion quite vaguely. The section does not mention any specific religions or denominations, but makes it clear that some “religious groups” are opposed to same-sex marriage. Beaman and Mathews state:

Marriage, argued some groups (predominately but not exclusively religious groups), was and should be exclusively reserved for one man and one woman. Part of this argument included the idea that only men and women can procreate, which, it was argued, was central to the notion of marriage.¹¹⁷

The idea that marriages is intended mainly for procreation particular to certain Christian groups, such as Roman Catholics; however, the authors seem to have gone out of their way to avoid “pointing the finger” at any specific religions. It is also made pointedly clear in *Exploring* that religious clergy are in no way obligated or forced to perform same-sex marriage rites. Although Beaman and Mathews try very hard to avoid specific religions, it seems that the authors are talking about conservative Christian traditions more than other religious groups.

In a similar, but more extreme fashion, Susan B. Boyd and Claire F. L. Young’s article “From Same-sex to No Sex?” avoids mentioning religion at all. This twelve-page article mainly discusses same-sex marriage as somewhat problematic in relation to a

¹¹⁷ *Exploring*, 254

feminist anti-marriage perspective, as well as the economic and political factors involved in legalizing same-sex marriage in Canada. It seems that Boyd and Young have gone out of their way to avoid religion, although their reason for doing so is unclear. Given that Boyd and Young are attempting to illustrate how supporting same-sex marriage can be difficult for those feminists who are anti-marriage, it seems that they do not feel there is a strong (or any) connection between feminist perspectives and religion. However, as I have stated, religion is a significant factor in many women's lives. Excluding religion from discussions within women's studies does not stop that from being the case.

Looking back on the discussion of identity politics, Boyd and Young's article can be interpreted as upholding the identity politics of what it means to be a "good feminist." Keeping in mind the anti-religious tendencies of the so-called second wave of feminism, one would not need to draw on religion to illustrate a discomfort or opposition with the traditional structure of marriage. In fact, a strong feminist analysis, working from this framework, would not include religion, as including religion might be interpreted as challenging the feminism behind the analysis.

The two articles in *Feminisms and Womanisms* were by far the most transparent about the role of religion within the same-sex marriage debate. "Identity, Community, and Same-Sex Marriage" focuses exclusively on same-sex marriage within the religious Jewish community. By the time Joanne Cohen had written this article, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) had openly endorsed same-sex marriage, but the Canadian government had not yet approved Bill C-38. CCAR is a group of US Reform rabbis; that is they are among the most liberal Jewish movements. Although

Cohen appears to support the right for same-sex couples to have the choice whether or not to get married, she also shows some ambivalence and hesitancy around CCAR's endorsement of same-sex marriage. Some of her concerns center on the fact that CCAR did not challenge the traditional/biblical oppositions of same-sex coupling, that no measures were put in place to dissolve a Jewish same-sex marriage¹¹⁸, and that CCAR does not have the authority (or at least has very limited authority) over most Jews¹¹⁹. Much of these concerns stem from a nuanced understanding of the subtle, but significant variations within Judaism.

Beverly Smith's "Equal Marriage for Same-Sex Couples" is the text that she prepared as testimony in Edmonton at a traveling set of hearings on marriage organized by the parliament's Justice and Human Rights Committee.¹²⁰ Although Smith asserts that the right to (same-sex) marriage "is not about religion," she sees religious (Christian) opposition to same-sex marriage significant enough that she attempts to counter-argue using very Protestant language, that is she uses the bible to support her stance. One example of this is that unlike Beaman and Matthews' counter-arguments around the procreative (and therefore opposite sex) necessity of marriage, Smith attempts to center her counter-arguments on the idea of personal interpretations of the bible and Jesus' supposed endorsement of love. In this sense, Smith seems unaware of the various

¹¹⁸ Jewish laws have very clear proceedings for dissolving opposite-sex marriages.

¹¹⁹ Unlike some Christian groups, such as Roman Catholics, Judaism does not have a formal hierarchy, which all Jews are supposed to follow. Given that CCAR is a group of US Reform rabbis, they would most likely have little or no authority over more conservative movements in Judaism.

¹²⁰ While these hearings clearly took place before Bill C-38 was passed only the date (April 2nd) and not the year of Smith's testimony was given. The textbook in which Smith's testimony was found was published in 2004.

worldviews within Christianity. She does not illustrate a broad understanding of the different conservative Christian arguments against same-sex marriage.

Additionally, Smith's testimony asserts that allowing same-sex couples the right to marry would help support the tradition of marriage. She very clearly states, "They [same-sex couples wishing to get married] are not rejecting tradition. They are endorsing it."¹²¹ Unlike Boyd, Young and Cohen, Smith does not appear to be concerned with or bothered by what type of tradition marriage is and same-sex marriage possibly supporting that tradition. All in all, Smith's testimony reads more like a sermon for Canadian liberal Christian tolerance than an academic paper supporting the right to same-sex marriage.

Suggested Directions

As stated above there were certain themes that came out in reading these four articles on same-sex marriage, mainly those of same-sex marriage supporting the tradition of marriage and the relationship between same-sex marriage and religion. I will now move on to suggest some texts which could help expand one's understanding of the liberal Canadian Christian perspectives (particularly, but not exclusively the official perspective of the United Church of Canada) on same-sex marriage. This will include texts that outline the Western history of marriage.

In 2005, the United Church of Canada published a twelve-page document titled "Marriage: A United Church of Canada Understanding."¹²² This document clearly outlines that the United Church supports same-sex marriage and that "the 38th General

¹²¹ *Feminisms and Womanisms*, 491.

¹²² I located this document by googling the title and printing off the PDF that resulted. No specific websites were associated with the document; however it was cited in a bibliography composed by Pamela Dickey Young.

Council – the highest decision-making body of The United Church of Canada – decided in 2003 to ask the federal government to recognize same-sex marriage...¹²³ “Marriage” offers a clear and concise understanding of this particular Church’s perspective of same-sex marriage.

Pamela Dickey Young, a professor at Queen’s University and minister of the United Church, has written extensively on the topic of same-sex marriage in Canada. “Same-sex relationships, religious traditions, marriage and the law” was written prior to the passing of Bill C-38.¹²⁴ This article does an excellent job of illustrating the history of marriage and the development of the connection between religion and marriage in the west. It also outlines how western religions have approached issues of sexuality, particularly homosexuality. Given that “Same-sex relationships...” was written before the passing of Bill C-38, it encourages the idea that legally granting the right to same-sex marriage would not oblige any religious institutions to marry same-sex couples (this was included in the *Civil Marriage Act*, thus it was a concern to some).

Dickey Young wrote “Same-sex marriage and the Christian churches in Canada,” which focuses on arguments made by various churches in Canada for and against same-sex marriage, after the passing of Bill C-38.¹²⁵ This article is highly significant in how it outlines which churches went to the courts to support or contest the legal right to same-sex marriage. While I will go on to suggest a few more readings on this topic, I find that

¹²³ “Marriage: A United Church of Canada Understanding”, The United Church of Canada, 2005: 2.

¹²⁴ Pamela Dickey Young, “Same-sex relationships, religious traditions, marriage and the law” *Studies in Religion* 29/4 (2000): 465-80.

¹²⁵ Pamela Dickey Young, “Same-sex marriage and the Christian churches in Canada” *Studies in Religion* 35/1 (2006): 3-23.

Dickey Young's articles are the most related to the intended topic of this case study, given that she generally remains within a Canadian liberal Christian context.

Anthony F. LoPresti's article "Christianity" in *Sex & Religion*¹²⁶ is useful in helping understand the complexity of Christian sexual mores, which are interconnected with Christian perspectives on same-sex marriage. Knowing the history of how homosexuality has been treated and understood within Christianity is central in understanding why particular Christian groups, as well as the Canadian public, in general, may or may not support same-sex marriage, as a right or even as a concept.

Another invaluable resource on this topic is Marvin M. Ellison's *Same-Sex Marriage?: A Christian Ethical Analysis*.¹²⁷ Although Ellison is focused specifically on the American context, this text remains useful in the Canadian context as well. In *Same-Sex Marriage* Ellison deals with sweeping assumptions made by "public policy advocates and social activists" about Christianity being generally opposed to same-sex marriage.¹²⁸ He also works to expand the understanding of the same-sex marriage debate to include issues around how Christianity has historically dealt with sexism in "traditional" marriage and Christianity's understanding and treatment of LBGT people. Like many of the articles from the textbooks examined above, Ellison problematizes the assumption that everyone would want the right to get married (just as Boyd, Young and Cohen expressed ambivalence around marriage).

¹²⁶ Anthony F. LoPresti, "Christianity" *Sex & Religion*. ed. Christel Manning and Phil Zuckerman. (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005): 117-41.

¹²⁷ Marvin M. Ellison, *Same-Sex Marriage?: A Christian Ethical Analysis* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2004).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

Finally, only as an example of what I would not like to see repeated in any classroom, is *Divorcing Marriage: Unveiling the Dangers in Canada's New Social Experiment*, edited by Daniel Cere and Douglas Farrow.¹²⁹ At face value this text seems to fit the bill of what I might recommend, particularly given that it is based in a Canadian context, focuses on a Christian perspective and was released by a reputable publishing company. However, the text reads like a series of sermons on the moral corruption and degradation of “healthy” (meaning nuclear) families if same-sex marriage continues. Additionally, statistics which would have been used by authors of the textbooks examined above to trouble “traditional” marriage are used in *Divorcing Marriage* to uphold traditional marriage and refute the right to same-sex marriage. For example, issues around single-parent households are used to represent what could go wrong with same-sex marriages. The intention of *Divorcing Marriage* is first and foremost to uphold, while deflecting criticism of, traditional conceptions of marriage and family.

In concluding this case study I would like to once again point out that the articles in the textbooks dealt with religion in relation to same-sex marriage in vastly different ways, from including religion to avoiding religion completely. Given the media's focus on churches that oppose same-sex marriage, I have looked at more liberal Christian perspectives on same-sex marriage in an attempt to show the reality of this debate.

¹²⁹ Daniel Cere & Douglas Farrow, ed. *Divorcing Marriage: Unveiling the Dangers in Canada's New Social Experiment*. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004).

Additionally, I have put forth suggested readings, which point to the on-going complexity of the same-sex marriage debate in Canada.

Chapter Six

The Conclusion

An Overview of the Research

I began this research striving to understand how religion fits into Women's Studies, if religion was being excluded or included, if it was being treated positively or negatively, in what ways religion might be present in current Women's Studies discourse, and how could religion be more knowledgeably included. Now that the thesis is drawing to an end, I find that I have to attempt to concisely answer these broad questions. I was not able to look at all of Women's Studies in Canada. A project that attempted to encompass an examination of all levels of Women's Studies courses was well beyond the means of this present project. Therefore, I chose to limit this research to introductory level Women's Studies courses within Canada, in part because doing so allowed this research to be manageable and in part because of the value of looking at the introductory level in particular. Ideally, courses at the introductory level give students a basic sense of what topics are significant to the discipline as a whole, thus if religion is significant to Women's Studies, it should be included at this level.

Although I am certain that it would be a positive addition to this research to look at the enacted and experienced curriculum of IWS, this present project was limited to the planned curriculum. The planned curriculum includes written curriculum, that is the syllabi and course readings, which are more conducive to examine than the enacted and experienced curriculum. While I would have liked to include analysis of the supplementary and course pack readings, doing so proved impossible.

In defining my theoretical basis I brought together theories that I understand as shaping inclusion/exclusion of religion within IWS. Epistemologies of ignorance, in particular, helps to capture my understanding of what is occurring. Theories of

difference and inclusion/exclusion help to shape how I feel religion is treated within Women's Studies, but it does not draw out the particular issues as well as epistemologies of ignorance. Through epistemologies of ignorance the omission of religion can be understood as more than an oversight, but as a kind of ignorance, wittingly or unwittingly occurring within Women's Studies.

The surveys, sent to professors teaching IWS, were mainly intended as a means for collected the written curriculum, however the responses also gave some insight into how the professors interpreted my research interest and certain common practices within Women's Studies. Although the survey questions only required short answers, the majority of the responses were long, personal and explanatory.

In order to uncover who was teaching IWS, I had to examine university websites. While attempting to find contact information for the professors I also noted if the websites listed IWS textbooks. This lead to the development of two lists of textbooks, those mentioned by the professors in their survey responses and those found on the university websites. Both sets of textbooks were examined for their knowledgeable inclusion of religion and both were drawn on in the case study portion of the research.

The case studies not only draw out the particular discourse around two fairly common topics within Women's Studies (Muslim women in Canada and the same-sex marriage debate in Canada), they also manage to illustrate what might be missing and offer suggestions about where to find the missing parts of the discussion. Additionally, the case studies work to draw together the theories raised in chapter two with the findings discussed in chapter four. The case studies illustrate the theories of inclusion/exclusion and epistemologies of ignorance being put into practice through examination of the

textbooks. Additionally, by suggesting readings to resolve the gap left in the textbooks, I hope that the case studies offer a work as a point of transitioning; that is of others noticing the gap in the discourse and choosing to take steps to expand their knowledge of religion.

Answering the Big Questions

So then, is religion being excluded or included in IWS? I began this research because I noted how religion was being excluded in my Women's Studies courses and I felt a definite lack in the overall discourse around religion throughout my examination. Dealing with the introductory level, while being a good location for gaining a sense for the overall field of Women's Studies, also had limitations. Professors have a very limited time to discuss a wide variety of topics and must carefully pick and chose which topics they will discuss. Lack of knowledge about religion on the part of the professor might sway them against including religion in their courses. This does not justify a lack of discourse around religion though, as ideally a professor would strive to learn about a topic if they recognized its significance.

Is religion being treated positively or negatively within IWS? Despite the fact that I posed this question, I find it overly binary. Although I feel that religion could and should be treated more positively within Women's Studies, or at least recognized as holding some positively qualities, there are ways that religion is being included that could be interpreted as both positive and negative. The main example I am drawing on here is the treatment of Islam and particularly Muslim women within IWS. Both the syllabi and the textbooks showed that issues around Muslim women, especially veiling practices, are

frequently included. However, the fact that issues around Muslim women so frequently gets reduced to veiling practices not only limits an understanding of the complexities of Islam, but also makes veiling into a monolithic symbol of what it means to be a Muslim woman.

How is religion present in the discourse? The main ways that I noted religion being present in the texts and syllabi was through discourse on Muslim women and Christianity. Although other religions were infrequently mentioned, when religion was notably present it was usually in the form of religion being Christianity or “other” religion being Islam. Because I was limited to the textbooks, I cannot be certain that professors were not including additional discourse on religion in course packs or supplementary readings.

How could religion be more knowledgeably included? My cliché response to this question is through more education. Becoming aware that there might be something lacking from the discourse is the first step. Deciding to learn more about what one recognizes is lacking is the second. As stated earlier, I am hoping that by giving some suggested reading in the case studies that the reader will decide to learn more about religion and how religion belongs within Women’s Studies. Perhaps religion is included more frequently in the form of higher-level courses specifically geared towards women and religion. Looking at additional levels of Women’s Studies courses could be a possible addition to this research in the future.

Ending with More Beginnings

This thesis is a work in progress. As I am attempting to conclude this chapter of the research I am thinking of additional ways to continue examining the treatment of religion within women's studies. My attempts to illustrate what is occurring in the discourse and what we, academics within Women's Studies, can do to resolve the religion blindness occurring is only one small part.

It is my hope that after reading the above thesis my reasons for doing this particular thesis project has remained apparent. Women's Studies, as an academic discipline, takes pride in its strong focus on women's lives and its interdisciplinarity; however, the aversion for religion curbs both of these defining aspects of Women's Studies. In the sciences, in order to have a strong understanding of one field of science, such as biology, it is important to have a basic understanding of the other sciences, such as physics and chemistry. However, an interdisciplinary field such as women's studies attempts to prosper without a basic understanding of religion, something that is ingrained in human cultures. Perhaps a general movement to understanding religion in broader terms, such as that of Geertz's definition, could help women's studies as a whole move beyond an understanding of religion as mainly a detriment to women. Religion is a fluid contemporary cultural artifact; it is a lens that colours how one perceives and exists within the world. Moving beyond understanding religion as simply a description of faith or an aspect of society that restricts women is central if religion is going to be taken seriously as a subject within women's studies.

I came to this project through my love for Women's Studies and Religious Studies. I felt a disconnect happening between the two fields and I wanted to do my part

to draw them together. In examining the syllabi and textbooks, I hoped to illustrate to the reader that this disconnect is not simply something I suspected, but something that is occurring. Additionally, and in some respects more importantly, looking at the discourse occurring within the textbooks offered a snapshot of the greater discourse on religion occurring within the classrooms. While I was interested in whether religion was being included and how frequently religion was being discussed, the quality of the discussions around religion is just as important. When we can see that four of nine syllabi that outwardly include religion only mention religion with regard to Muslim women or, very specifically, Islamic veiling practices, we should wonder why Muslim women and not Christian or Hindu women? Why veiling and not women's rates for attending mosques or other aspects of Islamic life?

All too often research within women's studies points to problems in the world but offers few suggestions as to how to resolve those problems. I did not want to repeat this practice. The case studies therefore worked to both illustrate the particular discourse occurring in the textbooks around Muslim women and the same-sex marriage debate, and to offer additional readings on those topics in order to possibly lead to a correction of the lacking discourse.

This research is not conclusive nor has it reached its maximum potential. One could interpret this project as a starting point for countless other projects, such as examining the treatment of other disciplines within Women's Studies, or interviewing professors and/or students on how they feel religion was treated or examining theoretically why particular omissions from Women's Studies tend to remain. Theories around identity politics and difference, as well as epistemologies of ignorance, and

concepts such as hidden curriculum, have worked to frame my approach to the omission of religion within women's studies. I am certain that there are other theories that could enhance this research in ways that I have not yet conceived. In any case, I do not think of this project as an end in itself, but as a point of introduction.

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Appendix A –The Letter to the Professors

My name is Leah McKeen. I am a student at Mount Saint Vincent University (Halifax, NS) in the Joint Master's of Art in Women's and Gender Studies Programme. I am contacting you in hopes that you will answer some basic questions about your course texts and syllabus for your Introductory Women's Studies course. This information will be used for my Master's thesis, in which I am examining if and how religion is included in Introductory Women's Studies courses across Canada and what Women's Studies' discourse looks like when religion is knowledgeably included. Although, there is little to no harm in your involvement with my research, the only personal benefit to you is simply the knowledge that you have assisted me in my research. Choosing to participating or not in this research project will not affect your professional standing at your, or any other academic, institution.

~~I will be sending a summary of my thesis results once it is complete~~A summary of the results of this research project will be sent to individual participants, only if requested. Out of respect for your privacy, I will not be including any names (of participants or institutions) or contact information of any of the participants in my thesis or the summary. The thesis will also not contain copies of any syllabi collected. Furthermore, my data forms containing names, e-mail addresses, or syllabi will be shredded and/or permanently deleted when my thesis research is complete.

The survey contains four questions and they should take less than 15 minutes to answer. I will be cutting off responses 6 weeks from the first time I contact you and will e-mail you up to three times in an attempt to solicit a response. If you do not respond, I

will assume that you are unable or uninterested in participating. Responding to the survey will indicate consent on your part as a participant.

If you have questions about how this study is being conducted and wish to speak with someone who is not directly involved in the study, you may contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) c/o MSVU Research and International Office, at 902-457-6350 or via e-mail at research@msvu.ca.

If you have any concerns or questions about my research or thesis topic feel free to contact me at leah.mckeen@msvu.ca or my supervisor Dr. Randi Warne at randi.warne@msvu.ca

I would appreciate your response as quickly as possible. Thank you.

Leah McKeen

Appendix B – The Letter to the Chairs

I am writing to request that you forward the enclosed/attached Letter of Introduction and survey to the instructors of your Introductory Women's Studies class. My name is Leah McKeen and I am a graduate student in the Joint Master's of Arts in Women's and Gender Studies programme at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax Nova Scotia. My thesis is on if and how religion is included as a topic of discourse in Introductory Women's Studies and what the discourse in Women's Studies looks like when religion is knowledgeably included. Please feel free to read any of the attached/enclosed information that I am requesting you to forward.

Your help in this matter is greatly appreciated.

Leah McKeen

Appendix C – The Survey

1. What textbook(s) do you use when teaching your introductory Women’s Studies course?

2. Do you use a course pack?
 - i. If so, please list the citation information for the article/essays included in the course pack.

3. Do you use any supplementary readings outside of the textbook(s) and/or course pack?
 - i. If so, please list the citation information for the supplementary readings.

4. If possible, please attach a copy of your introductory Women’s Studies course syllabus.

Appendix D – The Grading Scale

As stated in the introduction, the understanding of religion utilized in the grading scale below, as well as in the body of my thesis, is informed by the definition of “religion” given by cultural anthropologist, Clifford Geertz. In his classic text “Religion As a Cultural System,” Geertz defines religion as “(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men [sic] by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.”¹³⁰ The important thing to take away from this definition is that religion is a way of being, drawing on symbols, values, ethics, etc., which works to naturalize human assumptions about the world, thereby allowing humans to take the world for granted.

I have drawn on this definition of religion in particular because of its understanding of religion as a multifaceted, contemporary cultural artifact and because it does not necessitate a faith in any particular religion in order to understand various aspects of religion. It is important with regard to this thesis to understand that religion cannot be reduced to one or two overarching characteristics, nor can religion be removed from culture or culture from religion. It is also significant to recognize that I was not striving to locate texts that preach personal faith in religion. I examined the texts in the hopes of finding discourse suggesting knowledge about the cultural and social phenomena that go hand in hand with religion.

The significance of the distinction between religion/religious studies and religious faith/practice is of great importance in understanding my approach to grading the course

¹³⁰ Geertz, “Religion As a Cultural System,” 90.

texts, as well as my concerns around religion within women's studies. I am concerned with an "anthropological" approach, which is not concerned with judging or grading religious beliefs or understandings of God. My concerns are centered on whether or not the course texts (and by extension the IWS courses themselves) illustrate religion as a multifaceted aspect of the world we (that is all people) inhabit. This means that religion would not be reduced to one or two monolithic elements (such as the hijab in Islam or the priesthood in Roman Catholicism) nor would religion be treated as being all negative or positive. Instead I am looking for an understanding of religion that is multifaceted and complex, allowing it to be viewed and assessed from a range of perspectives.

Grading scale for IWS textbooks (grading is based on content and structure):

- A- to A+ Excellent to Superlative**
Content: Examines/discusses a variety of religions and perspectives on religion. While religion may or may not be given a section where it is discussed exclusively, such as its own chapter, it is thoroughly discussed nonetheless; for example, under the rubric of history, positions of leadership, vehicles for empowering women, gender roles, and/or issues around sexuality. The text illustrates contemporary concerns and clearly draws out the continuing significance of religion in women's lives. Examples include, but are not limited to, examinations of rituals, roles of religious leaders and laypeople, religious texts and religion within various cultures and points in history.
Structure: Topics of inquiry are clearly defined either through a table of contents or the general layout of the text. Contains an index and/or glossary.
- B to B+ Above Average to Very Good**
Content: Discusses two or more religions. Considers both positive and negative aspects of religion in society, in relation to standards that are clearly articulated.
Structure: May contain a distinct section on religion. Index lists religious terms as mainly limited to section on religion.
- C+ to B- Average to Adequate**
Content: Discusses one or two religions. Religion is limited to a few issues within society, such as women and the veil or leadership roles for women.
Structure: May contain a very limited list of important terms, with no clear definitions given or contains an index that excludes religious terms.
- C- to C Acceptable – Could Use Improvement**
Content: May discuss one particular religion in detail and neglects other religions or spiritual practices. Religion is either limited to narrowly focused discussion and/or is discussed in mainly negative terms.
Structure: Does not define any concepts involving religion. Does not contain an index and/or glossary, thereby increasing the difficulty of locating religion within the text.
- D Poor – Barely Acceptable**
Content: Religion is not outwardly visible through the names of sections of the text. However, religion may be mentioned in passing occasionally, mainly as an aspect of one's identity (i.e. noting that someone was Jewish, Islamic, Hindi or a priest or nun).
Structure: No glossary or index, or no references to religion found in

either if present.

F Unacceptable

Content: Religion or spiritual practices are not included in any way.

Structure: Index and chapters either clearly exclude religion or no index is present.

In the case of non-traditional textbooks (novels, plays, etc.) an additional grading scale was required:

- A** Author clearly illustrates religion and/or spirituality as being a significant part of the characters lives in both positive and negative ways. Religion/spirituality is treated as a part of life.
- B** Religion is discussed in passing. Religion and spirituality are peripheral aspects of the characters' lives.
- C** Characters' connect to religion mainly as a negative factor in their lives or as something that they have rejected or "grown beyond."
- D** Religion is only touched on in the context of holidays and is not described as being a factor in the characters' lives at all.
- F** Religion is not mentioned at all.

Appendix E – Chart of Textbooks Based on Preliminary Research

Title of Book	Number of Times Used	Grade
<i>Age of Innocence</i> . Edith Wharton. (New York: Random House, 1943).	X	Ungraded
<i>Asian Women: Interconnection</i> . Tineke Hellwig & Sunera Thobani, eds. (Toronto: Women’s Press, 2006).	X	C+
<i>Beyond the Pale</i> by Dykewoman (?)	X	Ungraded
<i>The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls</i> . Joan Jacobs Brumberg. (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).	X	D-
<i>Bridget Jones’ Diary</i> . Helen Fielding. (New York: Viking Penguin, 1996).	X	D-
<i>Canadian Women’s Studies Reader: An Introductory Reader</i> . Amin Nuzhat et al., eds. 1st Edition. (Toronto: Inanna Publications & education Inc., 1999).	X	B+
<i>Canadian Women’s Studies Reader: An Introductory Reader</i> . Andrea Medovarski & Brenda Cranney, eds. 2nd Edition. (Toronto: Inanna Publications & Education, Inc., 2006).	XXXXXX	D-
<i>Exploring Gender in Canada: A Multi-Dimensional Approach</i> . Beverly Matthews & Lori Beaman. (Toronto: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007).	X	B-
<i>Feminisms and Womanisms: Women’s Studies Reader</i> . Althea Prince & Susan Silva-Wayne, eds. (Toronto: Women’s Press, 2004).	XX	A-
<i>Feminist Frontiers</i> . Verta Taylor et al., eds. 7th Edition. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2007).	XXX	C+
<i>Feminist Issues: Race, Class & Sexuality</i> . Nancy Mandell. ed. 4th Edition. (Toronto: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005).	XXXX	B+
<i>Feminist Theory and The Body: A Reader</i> . Janet Price & Margrit Shilrick, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1999).	X	B-
<i>Gender In Canada</i> . Adie Nelson, ed. 3rd Edition. (Toronto: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006).	X	D-
<i>Gendered Intersections: An Introduction to Women’s and Gender Studies</i> . Lesley Biggs and Pamela Downe, eds. (Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2005).	XXXXX	B-
<i>The Gendered Society Reader</i> . Michael S. Kimmel with Amy Aronson, eds. 2nd Edition. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).	XX	D
<i>Half-breed</i> . Maria Campbell. (Halifax, NS: Goodread Biographies, 1973).	X	A
<i>Harriet’s Daughter</i> . Marlene Nourbese Philip. (Toronto: Women’s Press, 1991).	XX	A-
<i>Home/Bodies: Geography of Self, Place and Space</i> . Wendy Schissel, ed. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006.	X	B-
<i>Introducing Women’s Studies: Feminist Theory and Practice</i> . Victoria Robinson & Diane Richardson, eds. 2nd Edition. (New York: New York University University Press, 1997).	X	F
<i>An Introduction to Women’s Studies: Gender in a Transnational World</i> . Inderpal Grewel & Caren Kaplan, eds. 2nd Edition. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2006).	XXXX	B
<i>Issues of Gender</i> by Friedman & Marshall (?)	X	Ungraded

<i>Jane Eyre</i> . Charlotte Bronte. (New York: AMS Press, 1973).	X	Ungraded
<i>Nickel and Dimed: On (NOT) Getting By In America</i> . Barbara Ehrenreich. (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2001).	XX	D-
<i>No Sweat: Fashion, Free Trade And the Rights of Garment Workers</i> . Andrew Ross. (New York: Penguin Books, 2003).	X	D
<i>Open Boundaries: A Canadian Women's Studies Reader</i> . Barbara A. Crow and Lise Gottell, eds. 2nd Edition. (Toronto: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005).	XXXXXX	C+
<i>The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World: Completely Revised & Updated</i> . Joni Seager. (New York: Penguin Books, 2003).	X	C-
<i>Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots: Two Plays By Monica Mojica</i> . Monica Mojica. (Toronto: Women's Press, 1991).	X	B
<i>Reading Women's Lives</i> . Mary Margaret Fonow, ed. 2nd Edition. (Needham, MA: Database Publishing Group, 1999).	X	B
<i>A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood</i> . Kim Anderson. (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2000).	X	A-
<i>The Red Tent</i> . Anita Diamant. (New York: Picador, 1997).	X	A+
<i>Tamarind Mem</i> . Anita Rau Badami. (Toronto: Viking, 1996).	X	A
<i>Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution</i> . Judy Rebick. (Toronto: Penguin, 2005).	X	D-
<i>Thinking Feminist: Key Concepts in Women's Studies</i> . Diane Richardson & Victoria Robinson, eds.. 1st Edition. (New York: Guilford Press, 1993).	X	F
<i>Turbo Chicks: Talking Young Feminisms</i> . Allyson Mitchell et al., eds. (Toronto: Sumach Press, 1991).	X	D-
<i>The Vagina Monologues: The V-day Edition</i> . Eve Ensler. (New York: Villard Books, 2001).	X	D-
<i>Ways of Seeing</i> . John Berger. (London: Penguin, 1977).	X	D
<i>Women and World Religions</i> . Denise Lardner Carmody. 2nd Edition. (Englewood Cliff, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1989).	X	B-
<i>Women's Realities, Women's Choices: An Introduction to Women's Studies</i> . The Hunter College Women's Studies Collective. 3rd Edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).	XXX	A
<i>Women's Voices, Feminist Visions: Classic and Contemporary Readings</i> . Susan M. Shaw & Janet Lee, eds. 3rd Edition. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2007).	XX	A

Appendix F – Chart of Textbooks Based on Survey

Title of Book	Number of Times Used	Grade
<i>Canadian Women's Studies: An Introductory Reader.</i> Andrea Medovarski & Brenda Cranney, eds. 2nd Edition. (Toronto: Inanna Publications and Education, Inc., 2006).	XXX(X - 1st edition?)	F
<i>The Color Purple.</i> Alice Walker. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1982).	X	A+
<i>Exploring Gender in Canada: A Multi-Dimensional Approach.</i> Beverly Matthews & Lori Beaman. (Toronto: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007).	X	B-
<i>Feminisms and Womanisms: A Women's Studies Reader.</i> ed. Althea Prince & Susan Silve-Wayne. (Toronto: Women's Press, 2004).	X	A-
<i>Feminist Frontiers.</i> Verta Taylor, Nancy Whittier, & Leila J. Rapp, eds. 7th Edition. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2007).	XXX	C+
<i>Feminist Issues: Race, Class & Sexuality.</i> Nancy Mandell, ed. (Toronto: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005).	X	A-
<i>Gender and The Social Construction of Illness.</i> Judith Lorder & Lisa Jean Moore. 2nd Edition. (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002).	X	C
<i>Gendered Intersections: An Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies.</i> Lesley Biggs & Pamela Downes, eds. (Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2005).	XXX	B-
<i>Home/Bodies: Geographies of Self, Place, and Space.</i> ed. Wendy Schissel. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006.	X	B-
<i>In Their Time: A History of Feminism in Western Society.</i> Marlene LeGates. (New York: Routledge, 2001).	X	A
<i>Open Boundaries: A Canadian Women's Studies Reader.</i> Barbara A. Crow & Lise Gotell, eds. 2nd Edition. (Toronto: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005).	XX	C
<i>Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit.</i> Jeanette Winterson. (UK: Vintage Books, 2001).	X	Watched video, but could not locate novel.
<i>Secrets and Confidences: The Complicated Truth About Women's Friendships.</i> Karen Eng. (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2004).	X	D
<i>Turbo Chicks: Talking Young Feminisms.</i> Allyson Mitchell, Lisa Bryn Rundle, & Lara Karaian, eds. (Toronto: Sumach Press, 2001).	XX	D-
<i>Women: Images and Realities: A Multicultural Anthology.</i> Amy Kesselman, Lily D. McNair & Nancy Schniedewind. (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Co., 1995).	X	F
<i>Women and World Religions.</i> Denise Lardner Carmody. 2nd Edition. (Englewood Cliff, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1989).	X	B-
<i>Women Imagine Change: A Global Anthology of Women's Resistance from 600 BCE to Present.</i> Eugenia Delamotte, Natania Meeker, & Jean O'Barr, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1997).	X	A+
<i>Women's Realities, Women's Choices: An Introduction to Women's Studies.</i> The Hunter College Women's Studies Collective. 3rd Edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).	XX	A

<i>Women's Voices, Feminist Visions: Classic and Contemporary Readings</i> . Susan M. Shaw & Janet Lee, eds.. 3rd Edition. (Boston: McGrawHill, 2007).	XX	A (would be an A+ if it had included Eastern Religions).
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