body always threaten to overpower the capacity to reason. It is assumed that sexual relations necessarily cloud judgement. Physical intimacy between teacher and student must mean that any semblance of level-headedness and objectivity are irretrievably lost. It is the old story of the need for reason to overcome and rule passion (and the sheer anxiety that this is not possible) that Gallop is questioning. Gallop's own experience tells her that this need not be the case and that sexual intimacy may, indeed, enhance and deepen the learning process.

The Socratic tradition does indeed acknowledge the potentially powerful sexual tension between teacher and student. Plato's dialogues are brimful of male homosexual eroticism as Socrates, the adored teacher, enthralls his prize pupils. But it is well worth remembering that in the Platonic dialogues, Socrates does not succumb to the physical charms of his students. In the most noted instance, Socrates resists the physical pleasures offered by the heroic and beautiful Alcibiades. It is precisely a mark of Socrates' pedagogical prowess that he resists the lure of Alcibiades' flesh in order to lead this student to the far greater satisfactions of the life of the mind. Gallop's narrative does not even raise the possibility that this road may, ultimately, be of greater value to both teacher and student and this is a great gap which lessens the impact of the "scandalous" questions that she poses. Nonetheless, Gallop's story is a provocative, useful and timely challenge to feminism to reassess its trajectory as it becomes more enmeshed in university structures.

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Joanne Boucher

REFLECTIONS ON LESBIAN FEMINIST ACTIVISM IN THE CLASSROOM[1]

I start from the premise that teaching about lesbians can be a form of political activism. This is true whether one teaches an entire course on lesbians or integrates lesbian material into courses that do not have lesbians as a central focus. Taking a broad view, it is clear that we in Canada live within a context of heterosexual hegemony (Kinsman, 1996). Thus, any information that challenges the presumed naturalness and normalcy of heterosexuality can be seen as subversive. To teach this information in a Canadian classroom is to disrupt the status quo and as such, is to engage in political work. For the past fifteen years or so, I have worked to introduce the subject of lesbianism into university and college courses. At times, I have done this as a guest lecturer in someone else's course, at times I have taught an entire course on Lesbian Studies, and at other times, I have worked to integrate material about lesbians into the syllabus of a traditional course that I am teaching. Mostly, but not invariably, I have done this work while coming out to my students as a lesbian. In so doing, I have engaged in what Verta Taylor and Nicole Raeburn call "high-risk political activism:" "the deployment of identity for the purposes of contesting stigmatized group representations and achieving institutional change" (1995, 268).

In earlier years, I tended to make a point of coming out. Recently, however, I have become far more circumspect in giving this information to students, rethinking my earlier taken-for-granted beliefs about the importance of declaring my lesbian identity. In large part, this has been prompted by my experience that it is not becoming easier to come out to my classes. The late Kathleen Martindale wrote that when she integrated lesbian material into courses to further an antihomophobic pedagogy, "[i]t always feels like the first time to me" (1997, 153). For me, each time I come out to a new group of students, it is as if it were for the very first time. I have learned to stand behind professorial authority to demand that students read material about lesbians and listen when I address lesbian issues. I have learned to address these topics about which I feel so passionately in a way that

belies my personal stake in them. I have not yet learned, however, how to tell a group of apparently heterosexual students that I am a lesbian in a way that does not feel personally threatening.

I am not alone in my discomfort. For example, in addition to Kathleen Martindale (1992; 1997), Didi Khayatt (1996) and a number of contributors to Linda Garber's *Tilting the Tower* (1994) have addressed this and similar issues. It seems clear to me that our difficulties are an indication of how pervasive heterosexism continues to be. Although lesbian (and gay) scholars have made significant inroads in challenging heterosexism and, at least in the United States, lesbian and gay studies (also known as queer studies) has become "a minor growth industry" (Garber 1994, ix), it remains the case that in academia, the overall environment supports an unrelentingly heterosexist agenda.

Increasingly, I am inclined to agree with Khayatt (1996) who, in critically examining reasons to come out as a lesbian, found that they are not persuasive. As Khayatt argues, one need not always "put one's body on the line" (1996, 22) either to teach a progressive perspective about lesbians, or to be recognized as sensitive to the concerns of lesbian (or gay, or bisexual, or transgendered) students. Indeed, it is not even necessary that one "be a lesbian" [2] to address these issues in the classroom. In some ways, it might even be easier and more effective for someone who is not a lesbian, or not perceived to be a lesbian, to take up these issues. Such a person would not likely be seen to have a personal stake in addressing lesbian issues, and the appearance of objectivity remains highly prized in academia.

Students and the Significance of Lesbian Studies

I am convinced that courses need to routinely integrate a progressive analysis of lesbians and lesbian issues.[3] This is a strategy that may allow lesbian students to learn about themselves in their courses, making the course relevant to their own lives. It is also a practice that implicitly encourages all students to confront heterosexist assumptions. To exclude such transgressive material is to perpetuate the silences which surround lesbianism, and reinforce the idea that only heterosexuals are normal and worthy of focus. Nevertheless, from my experiences at seven different institutions of higher learning, it is still the rare teacher who fundamentally challenges heterosexist assumptions in core curriculum courses. Certainly, there are a number of us in Canada who engage in this work, but in the greater scheme of things, our numbers are minuscule. In places where I have taught, I have observed that most students can easily graduate from university, even with top marks, without having had their heterosexist assumptions challenged. On the other hand, when a student is able to take a course in Lesbian Studies, she (or he) gets the message that the university thinks lesbians are important. For many students, this is a novel and transgressive idea. Even when they do not enroll in such a course, students who notice its existence may be led to confront heterosexist assumptions. For lesbians, being able to take Lesbian Studies allows them to do their own research on lesbians without fear of being told their work is irrelevant. I still see too many lesbians who spend their university years challenging the heterosexism not just of other students, but of teachers as well. When a student feels she is always on guard against lesbophobia, it is difficult to reap the full benefit of what an education is supposed to be. Offering students a progressive perspective on lesbians, then, is something that can benefit lesbian students in immediate ways, but it is also something that can benefit all students. In my experience, talking about lesbians in the classroom can be a powerful corrective to the heterosexist bias of the university.

My Early Attempts at Teaching About Lesbians

I have had varying levels of success in working to find ways to teach about lesbians. I began in the 1980s, when I gave numerous guest lectures about lesbians in undergraduate university classes. I prepared my lectures with the expectation of facing a mostly hostile, heterosexual audience, and this was, in fact, what I usually got. I spent a fair amount of time in those lectures dispelling myths, and explaining why it is important to talk

about lesbians, but I had no illusions that my one lecture was likely to change lesbophobes into lesbian rights activists. My real goal was to empower the lesbians who were there. When, as sometimes happened, a lesbian would come up to me after the class to thank me for what I said, I felt that it had been worth it.

At the same time that I was doing this, I was a teaching assistant in Sociology. In addition to teaching from a feminist perspective, I usually came out to my class and talked a little bit about lesbianism in my lectures. I found that when I did this I got teaching evaluations saying that I was intolerant and focused too much on lesbians. Recently, I was talking to one of my former students about this period (a gay man), and he told me that he learned a lot from me about lesbian and gay issues. He told me that at the time, no one else was teaching about these issues in a way that was not homophobic, and the fact that I did made it okay for him to pursue his own interest in gay studies. Nevertheless, he told me that the other students used to whisper in shocked and/or disgusted tones about me being "a dyke." It seems that for every lesbian or gay man that I reached in the 1980s by coming out in the classroom and making an issue of lesbianism, I made a multitude of enemies. The students made their displeasure clear at the end of the year by giving me negative evaluations.

I learned from my experiences of heterosexual resistance to hearing about lesbians. After I stopped being a teaching assistant, I taught the occasional Sociology course on my own, at universities where I did not know anyone very well. Away from the relatively safe environment of my supportive friends, I did not come out. I placed a tiny bit of lesbian content in one course taught to a group of mature students, but in another course, which I taught to a group of mostly young jocks, I could not bring myself to say the "L" word at all, let alone identify myself. It was too scary. As it was, the jocks ended up giving me the most negative course evaluations that I've ever had, because I talked too much about the feminist movement (it was a course on social movements).

In short, these experiences with trying to incorporate lesbian content into regular courses were fairly negative. Although I traded on the precarious classroom authority that my position as professor confers,[4] I found that putting into practice my beliefs about the importance of teaching about lesbians was easier said than done. I found that either I came out and talked about lesbians whether students liked it or not and got bad evaluations for doing so, or I stayed in the closet and felt dishonest.

I thought it would be different when I was given the chance to co-teach a not-for-credit interest course on Lesbian and Gay Studies. There were no heterosexual students, and I thought that I would be able to do some real education about lesbian issues. Yet it turned out to be a frustrating experience, because we spent more time talking about gay men. It was difficult to impress upon my co-teacher (a gay man) and the (mostly male) students the significance of being female, or that lesbians are something other than the female version of gay men. It was also disheartening to know that the gay man with whom I taught the course - a tenured faculty member - agreed with the college that there was no need to introduce it into the regular curriculum, so that students could get credit for taking it.

So, when I was offered the chance to teach Lesbian Studies at Concordia University's Simone de Beauvoir Institute, I was ecstatic. The course got on the curriculum because of the intensive lobbying done by lesbian students. They had meetings with the curriculum committee, they placed posters around campus and circulated petitions, and wrote several articles in the student newspaper (the process is documented in LSCC 1990; see also Gammon 1992). When the Institute finally agreed to offer the course, it was filled long before registration was closed.

Teaching Lesbian Studies (I)

For me, it was incredibly exciting and empowering to teach this course, but I also felt a tremendous responsibility. I was given 13 class meetings in which to correct the enormous gaps in the educational system. I chose to structure the course as an introduction to Lesbian Studies, with consideration of a wide range of issues but, due to time constraints, not an exhaustive review. I

planned the curriculum with lesbians in mind, in much the same way, I think, that many Women's Studies teachers teach their courses for women. We focused on studying and discussing the issues I thought to be most significant in terms of creating the conditions for and shaping contemporary lesbian existence. Above all, I worked to alleviate the alienation felt by so many lesbian students who find that their own life experiences are typically not reflected and considered worthy of non-voyeuristic focus in a classroom.

The first time the course was offered, in January 1990, I had 26 students. They were mostly in their early 20s, although a few were in their 30s. At the very beginning of the course, as students introduced themselves, they spontaneously identified themselves in terms of their sexual identities. There were two heterosexual men in the class, one of whom attended with his girlfriend. Including the girlfriend, there were seven heterosexual women. There was one bisexual woman and the rest of the students were lesbian. As well, there was usually at least one lesbian auditor, and sometimes more than one. This meant that, including the regular auditor, there were 16 self-identified lesbian students out of 26.

Despite my best efforts, there were tensions in that classroom. At least three of the heterosexual women appeared uncomfortable with the obvious lesbian presence and they said little in class. Other heterosexual women, however, seemed to find the course a very positive experience. Two in particular regularly contributed to class discussions. As for the two men, I gather from what lesbian students later told me that they felt intimidated by the lesbians. One in particular barely said anything during the whole course. There was tension in terms of the lesbian/heterosexual split, but this was also a classroom in which the lone bisexual woman felt afraid to speak up (as she told me privately).

There was also tension among the lesbians. Some of them had been involved in the struggle to have the course offered and/or had been waiting a long time for the course. Already politicized, they were unafraid to strongly assert themselves in class. This group tended to vigorously offer their opinions and views, and implicitly challenge others to contradict them. Other lesbians, however, were intimidated by the opinionated and outspoken lesbians, and hesitated to disagree with them for fear of appearing ignorant. There was never open hostility in class but a few times I sensed an undercurrent. I often found it difficult to mediate between all the different interests in class.

Could I have done things differently to more successfully mediate between the competing interests in that classroom? In thinking about this, I am persuaded that there was little I could have done. First, this was a course about lesbians, offered for the first time ever, and taught from a lesbian and feminist perspective. As such, it was an inherently political course. To have a course with such an unrelenting focus on lesbians is to challenge the heterosexist bias of the university. It would be surprising if students who are comfortable with and/or accustomed to this normative bias did not find the course material unsettling.

Second, I do not believe I could have worked more efficiently to create a classroom environment comfortable for everyone because the self-identified lesbians outnumbered other students. Unlike the case in the typical classroom situation, where a lesbian presence tends to go unremarked, creating the assumption that everyone is heterosexual, the dominant lesbian presence in my classroom was, at least for those of us there, an unprecedented situation. Lesbians, who are used to being outnumbered in the classroom, found themselves in the majority. Heterosexuals who are used to being in the majority found themselves and their experiences rendered marginal. The particular mix of students in that classroom provided the ingredients for a highly charged situation. At the time, the best I could do was work to ensure that all students knew that I valued their comments, and work to encourage students to interact in a respectful manner.

Teaching Lesbian Studies (II)

It was very different the second time I taught the course because I had a very different mix of students. Of the 17 students in this class, seven identified as lesbians, seven as heterosexual women, two as heterosexual men and one as a gay man. With this mix of students, the dynamics were

very different since the lesbians were outnumbered, but also because few of the lesbians seemed politicized about their identity. Indeed, one of the lesbians was in the process of coming out and appeared to find the course an empowering learning experience. Unlike the case with my first experience of teaching the course, all students seemed to be genuinely interested in learning about Lesbian Studies. I did not sense that students enrolled mainly to make a political statement, as I had sensed was the case for several students my first time around.

It is important that Lesbian Studies not be regarded as "for lesbians only," as Charlotte Bunch (1987) argued in a slightly different context more than twenty years ago. If there is to be real social change, lesbians need non-lesbians as allies. Everyone needs to be given the opportunity to learn about the realities of lesbian existence, about the consequences of the interplay of heterosexism and patriarchy. Without this opportunity, destructive myths will continue to inform action, heterosexism will continue to go unchallenged, and lesbians will continue to be understood, as Camille Roy says, as "a community of female sexual perverts [that] resembles nobody" (1993, 10).

This second experience of teaching Lesbian Studies was without question the most rewarding for me. I had a classroom in which no group clearly dominated another, and everyone respected the diverse views and social locations of other students. My perceptions of student reactions were borne out at the end, as students anonymously evaluated the course. For example, one student wrote: "I learned so much in this course and it will stay with me my whole life because so much applied to me as opposed to so many of my other courses where I learn nothing about myself as an individual." Another student stated emphatically that: "I believe this course is very important to *everyone* and should be offered again," and this comment was echoed in several other evaluations. I do not believe I transformed a group of quiescent students into radical activists, but I do believe that I taught students to recognize and challenge the heterosexism they encounter in their everyday lives. If only lesbian feminist activism in the classroom could always be so easy and so successful.

Teaching Lesbian Studies (III)

By 1994, when I taught my Lesbian Studies course a third time, the Simone de Beauvoir Institute was in the process of making the course a permanent part of the curriculum. No longer would students need to continually agitate for it, and no longer would the course be considered a special (read: esoteric) interest course. Moreover, several Women's Studies instructors were by that point routinely incorporating lesbian material into their courses, which meant that students who majored in Women's Studies were exposed on a regular basis to discussions about lesbians.

This situation had not lessened the demand for my Lesbian Studies course. Indeed, this class was my largest, with 30 students, including one self-identified heterosexual man, 11 heterosexual women, 13 lesbians, and six bisexual women (including an auditor). As the course progressed, classroom dynamics were affected by the vast differences between students in terms of awareness of lesbian issues and/or familiarity with Lesbian Studies (differences not always related to how students identified their sexualities).

Not all students in this class had previously taken Women's Studies courses, which meant that seriously discussing lesbians in class was as novel an experience for them as it had been for most of my students in previous courses. These students comprised two-thirds of this class, and generally evaluated the course as interesting, enlightening and thought-provoking. Ten students, however, found the course disappointing. Whether heterosexual, lesbian or bisexual, these students had previously been exposed to Lesbian Studies and consequently found the course covering ground they had mostly been over already. Unlike the majority of students, this group did not feel challenged by course material; they felt bored and they felt cheated of the opportunity to further their critical understanding of a topic in which they were passionately interested.

The dynamics in this classroom, then, primarily revolved around the disparity in knowledge bases. And this created the situation I had encountered the first time I taught the course: the more knowledgeable students dominated class

discussions, while the less knowledgeable sat silently in fear of betraying their ignorance. As a student in the latter group commented, "I felt like they (other students) were at this superadvanced level and that I could not honestly contribute [to discussions] without making a fool of myself."

Teaching Lesbian Studies: Four Years Apart

In comparing my experience the third time around with my first experience of teaching the course, I find that my convictions about the need for Lesbian Studies have only been strengthened. Four years earlier, I had not had any students who were accustomed to discussing lesbian issues in a classroom environment. Although some of the students in the first course in 1990 were familiar with much of the ground covered in the course, they did not object to discussing "basic" issues in class. Indeed, they had struggled long and hard for the opportunity to do so.

By 1994, more than a few students had become accustomed to doing what those first students had only dreamed of, and were dissatisfied with what they got. And I sympathized with them, just as I did with the first group of students in 1990. It is indeed unfortunate that neither I nor the Simone de Beauvoir Institute were at that point in time prepared to offer them the course they wanted. Just as it is now accepted that any university needs to have more than just one course in Women's Studies, it needs to be accepted that just one course devoted to Lesbian Studies is not enough.

Teaching to Transgress

In borrowing this title from bell hooks' book *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994), I want to signal my interest in encouraging students to critically interrogate their assumptions about sexuality (and all aspects of the society that surrounds them). I am interested in a transgressive pedagogy; I am interested in disrupting the status quo; I am interested in providing a perspective that is subversive.

I have not taught an entire course on Lesbian Studies since 1994. I now teach Sociology in a distinctly male-dominated and predominantly homophobic environment. Yet, even here I have found allies. Moreover, my experiences with teaching Lesbian Studies in a feminist and relatively lesbian-positive environment stay with me. Knowing what is possible, I find I am able, even at my new institution, to integrate lesbian issues into courses. Although it remains as scary as ever for me, I try to take every opportunity to do so (and my level of apprehension goes down considerably when I do not demand of myself that I be positioned as a lesbian).

Over the past few years, I have had few students who identify themselves as lesbians, but have been blessed with having more than a few students who are open to learning about lesbians. On a regular basis I meet with heterosexual resistance to studying about lesbians, yet I do not fear heterosexual resistance as I once did. Rather, I draw strength from knowing that I am giving my lesbian (and gay and bisexual) students an opportunity to claim an education (see Adrienne Rich, 1979) that is not fundamentally alienating in its unrelenting focus on heterosexuality as normative. For me, there is nothing about teaching quite as rewarding as knowing that I have given these students tools that they can use to challenge heterosexism and patriarchy, and inequality in general. At the same time, I draw strength from seeing heterosexual students ingest this information and awaken to the realities of heterosexual hegemony. It pleases me no end to see students, regardless of how they self-define, find it within themselves to take the scary step of challenging the heterosexism of other professors, and go beyond the classroom to speak out against heterosexist oppression.

ENDNOTES

1. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of this article for their helpful comments. As well, a special thank-you to my partner, Sophia, for her comments on this specific article and her general willingness to discuss with me what I do in the classroom and why I do it.

2. In placing quotation marks around "be a lesbian," I intend to indicate my acceptance of postmodernist critiques of essentialism. Nevertheless, I also agree with Gayatri Spivak (1990) that there are times when it can be advantageous to deploy a "strategic essentialism." See also Shane Phelan's

(1994) useful discussion about strategic essentialism.

3. In saying this, I do not want to suggest that defining what counts as "lesbian material" or "a lesbian issue" is unproblematic. Indeed, the complexity and the instability of the category "lesbian" needs to be acknowledged. Nevertheless, it is not my intention here to interrogate the category "lesbian." Many theorists have done so, and both Martindale (1997) and Phelan (1994) do so in a manner that is particularly accessible.

4. Especially before I got my PhD, but even afterwards, I have never been sure of the extent to which I will be allowed to claim professorial authority. As Susan Heald points out, professors are supposed to have authority, but "professorial authority derives from the same characteristics which determine authority in other areas: masculinity, heterosexuality, white skin, and so on" (1991, 145). As a lesbian with invisible disabilities who is also an activist and from a working class background (but I am white-skinned), I feel that I am on shaky ground. Like Heald, "my engagement with the subject 'professor' is marked by the absence of many of those things which define 'professor'" (1991, 146).

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