first PhD in Women's Studies in Canada) concerns women's friendships with women. Katherine Side's dissertation, combining theory and empirical work, celebrates the power and value of women's friendships with women, and also is clear-sighted about the social and economic realities that shape expectations about what these relationships can and should offer us.

The three papers in the cluster on "Conflict and Community Building in Women's Studies" reflect something of the range of interests and "situations" of students in our programme. They were presented first in June 1997 at the annual Canadian Women's Studies Association meeting in St. John's, Newfoundland, as a student-generated panel. Later, in November 1997, they were delivered at York University as part of the Programme Seminar Series organized for students in our programme. A fourth paper presented at both sessions was not available for publication at this time. As current Director (Jane Couchman) and former Director (Rusty Shteir) of the Graduate Programme in Women's Studies at York University, we applaud the three very thoughtful and provocative essays that follow for the contributions they make to feminist knowledge-production and our on-going conversations.

Ann B. Shteir and Jane Couchman

COMMUNICATION ACROSS DIFFERENCE: CONFLICT AND COMMUNITY BUILDING IN WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAMMES

Considering the place of conflict and the possibility of community building in the context of Women's Studies, I felt compelled to rethink the very terms foregrounded by my title: "conflict" and "community building." They do not have to be put in oppositional relationship, as conflict is inevitably part of community building. Neither does "community" always have to be valorized in a positive way, for - as the philosopher Lorraine Code reminds us - "the good and helpful aspects of human lives, as much as their evils derive from interdependence" (86). It seems rather that the place assigned to conflict in the process of community building depends on how we define community, or more specifically, what we mean by community in the institutional, disciplinary, ideological, social, and political contexts of Women's Studies. Instead of a totalizing narrative of compulsory sisterhood, our sense of community may stem from various, sometimes conflicting, positionings and alliances as feminists in the academy, practitioners of a specific feminist methodology, members of the same association, students in a particular programme, or even participants in a given seminar. In other words, joining Women's Studies, we encounter multiple possibilities of community building, and this precisely is the main reason why most of us come to the programme.

One possible sense of community in Women's Studies is that of an epistemic community bound by an overriding commitment to challenge dominant paradigms of knowledge from the perspective of embodied subjectivities. This, to me, means that a decision to enter Women's Studies translates into a conscious choice of location from which to practice knowledge-production. It is a *chosen* bond, and therefore, in my argument, I want to shift emphasis from the question of the institutional need and viability of community in Women's Studies to the problem of individual and collective *will* for community.

Since epistemic choices are informed by ethical considerations, I look at community building from the vantage point of ethics. I would like to retain maximum flexibility for the concept of community, so as to allow for constant crossing and redrawing of the boundaries different communities draw around themselves. Actually, it is better to speak of "provisional boundaries" and "imagined communities" since, in my understanding, community is more effectively viewed as a process rather than a product. It is a form of relationality that has to be constantly negotiated and renegotiated. Like feminism itself, community is a discursive construct shaped by our different experiences of gender, race, sex, class, culture, and consciousness. I think that in order to foster communitarian relationships in Women's

Studies, we must tap *models of relationality* supplied by contemporary feminist ethics, such as Seyla Benhabib's model of communicative interaction, or various constructions of relatedness based on the concept of "second personhood" or friendship (Annette Baier; Janice Raymond; Lorraine Code).

Seyla Benhabib situates the epistemic and ethical gendered subject in the context of community, while insisting upon "the discursive power of individuals to challenge such situatedness in the name of universalist principles, future identities and as yet undiscovered communities" (1992:8). Unlike most postmodernist critics, she does not reject generality and universality while stressing the importance of situatedness. Rather, she suggests a post-Enlightenment model of "interactive universalism" that is contextually sensitive, not legislative, and cognizant of gender differences. Influenced by Jurgen Habermas, she attempts to forge a link between the Enlightenment and feminism. She substitutes the "ethical orientation of justice and rights," characteristic of the Enlightenment, by "the ethical orientation of care and responsibility," inherent in feminist philosophy (1992:149). To that effect, she offers a modified version of communicative or discourse ethics which de-emphasizes "the standpoint of the generalized other" while reinforcing "the standpoint of the concrete other" (1986:340). Derived from Kantian moral theory, the standpoint of the generalized other requires us to view "each and every individual as a rational being entitled to the same rights and duties we would want to ascribe to ourselves" (ibid.). By contrast, the standpoint of the concrete other refers to "an individual with a concrete history, identity, and affective-emotional constitution" (1986:341).

These two standpoints correspond to two different versions of community: a community of rights and entitlements versus a community of needs and solidarity. Benhabib's model of ethics involves "the utopian projection of a way of life in which respect and reciprocity reign" (1992:38). She also proposes to "shift the burden of the moral test in communicative ethics from consensus to the idea of an ongoing moral conversation" (ibid.). Liberal principles of "neutrality" are seen as individualist rather that communitarian, privileging the rule of law and justice at the expense of solidarity and friendship. According to Benhabib, a community of people practicing communicative ethics rather than legalistic discourses of rights would be able to develop the capacity for mutual understanding and for reversing perspectives that would make the continuation of open-ended moral conversations possible.

Similarly, Lorraine Code, working through Baier's "second persons" (a concept through which Baier recognizes the communal interdependence of any individual activity), arrives at a dialogic model of relationality that acknowledges the importance of affective ties and cooperation. The possibilities of such dialogue exist particularly in Women's Studies, where the practice of "second person" discourse has "the emancipatory potential to open up freer discursive spaces than those constructed and constrained by the objective, impersonal forms of address...[in] late capitalist societies" (87). Code embraces the concept of friendship as opposed to "natural," "found" sisterhood, concluding that the epistemic potential of friendship can offer creative possibilities for forming "sound, morally and politically informed alliances, in which sisterhood... is achieved, not assumed" (102).

Lorraine Code's helpful critique of liberal humanism's ethical shortcomings supplements the views expressed earlier by Seyla Benhabib. The proponents of liberalism tend to speak in favour of "individual" freedoms and rights, refusing to recognize the need for social interdependence and cooperation. Code warns that this autonomy-obsession threatens to deny the importance of any affective ties in relationships. The prototype of an autonomous, self-righteous human subject can be found in Kant, whose categorical imperative privileges abstract morality over "special" personal relationships, and universal laws over particular human needs. This kind of ethics concentrates on "self" and insists on severing the ties with "others." Thus it appears to be a major task of feminist oriented ethics to propose alternative models of moral philosophy which would promote "responsible, worthy alliances and relationships" (Code 83).

The ethical models proposed by Benhabib

and Code delineate strategies that can be incorporated as part of "the micropractices of restructuring personal, social, and political institutions and relations" (Code 87). In addition to the danger of reproducing in Women's Studies the heterosexist and racist patterns of oppression of society at large, a serious threat to communitarian ethos is reflected by two extremist stances: on the one hand, autonomy-oriented, self-promoting, and self-serving individualism; on the other hand, identitarian separatism and sectarianism. Significantly, both stances imply a monologic as opposed to dialogic model of interpersonal relations, and both clearly show that any discussion of ethics is inseparable from the question of alterity.

The importance of the attitude to alterity is also suggested by such feminists as Drucilla Cornell and Judith Butler. For Cornell, the ethical "is not a system of behavioral rules, nor a system of positive standards by which to justify disapproval of others. It is, rather, an attitude towards what is other to oneself" (Benhabib et al 78). She stresses the nonviolative character of relationality to which we must aspire, reminiscent of Helene Cixous' renunciation of mastery as the condition for the possibility of ethics. For Butler, encounter with alterity as the "constitutive outside" for the subject (formed through limiting and exclusion) becomes the condition for a potential transformation of our selves and our knowledges. She thus acknowledges the ethical challenge posed by the question of alterity, a challenge which must be met by Women's Studies, too:

> Will what appears as radically other, as pure exteriority, be that which we refuse and abject as that which is unspeakably "Other," or will it constitute that limit that actively contests what we already comprehend and already are?
>
> (Benhabib et al 143)

The "other" is figured here as the horizon of our activity as thinking and living subjects: what enables a constant shifting of the boundaries of our ethics and epistemology.

Seyla Benhabib's model of two ethical standpoints corresponding to two different versions of community - a community of rights and entitlements versus a community of needs and solidarity - is also interesting for Women's Studies in that it can be used to illustrate two possible kinds of excess. If based solely on the liberal concept of rights and duties, Women's Studies would simply duplicate the masculinist, bourgeois, universalistic models of community. Conversely, the community of needs and solidarity, in its extreme version, can degenerate into oppressive forms of essentialist feminism and sentimentalized sisterhood. The question for Women's Studies is how to enable individuals to succeed in its institutional and interpersonal context. Ideally, Women's Studies, in Benhabib's terms, should allow "the unfolding of the relation to the *concrete* other on the basis of autonomous action" (1986:342). Or, as Lorraine Code would have it, given a communal basis of mental and moral activity, Women's Studies would allow for self-realization to be achieved relationally (83).

Power differentials shouldn't be an obstacle to community building, for in a willed relationship asymmetries and complexities, or unequal power relations do not necessarily preclude friendship (Code 104), even if they make it more difficult. The non-foundational idea of community based on friendship as a chosen bond and a repeated act, together with the concept of an ongoing moral conversation, provides a framework to accommodate critique and questioning (but not guilt-tripping), competition (in the sense of excelling that enriches the whole community), and the right to dissent and disagreement (without moral censure of being "complicit"). It can also help us to avoid idealizing and sentimentalizing women by eliminating unrealistic expectations of nurture raised by claims to "sisterhood." The kind of feminist subjectivity implied by this ethical model is, to use Lorraine Code's words again, "postessentialist, specific, situated, self-critical, socially produced...yet one that can intervene in and be accountable for its positioning" (82).

What we cannot forget is that crucial to community building is the ability to anticipate possibilities that have not yet been realized and, especially, to envision "new modes of togetherness" (Benhabib 1992:153). The idea of community as

"imagined" possibilities of relatedness draws our attention to the role of imagination in transforming the status quo. After all, the spirit of communitarianism has often been associated with utopianism. The importance of imagination, which can take the form of futuristic projection, utopian dream, or collective fantasy, has been stressed in different ways by most feminist thinkers referred to in this paper. Thus, Judith Butler introduces "a notion of futurity - the 'not yet'" as the defining horizon of any movement toward transformation (Benhabib et al 143). Drucilla Cornell defines feminism as a kind of "endless challenge to the ethical imagination ... continually calling on all of us to re-imagine our forms of life" (Benhabib et al 79). Finally, Seyla Benhabib, bemoaning what she calls "a retreat from utopia within feminism" (1992:229), tries to rehabilitate the role of utopia and imagination in political and ethical thought. Such repeated emphasis on that which is not yet, but which can eventually be realized, reminds us that as feminist subjects engaged in a continuous project of community building in Women's Studies, we may need precisely the right dose of fantasy and imagination to think beyond reified or static norms and values.

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Eva C. Karpinski

"ROCK THE BOAT, DON'T TIP THE BOAT OVER:" A CLASSROOM ACTIVIST'S PERSPECTIVE ON WOMEN'S STUDIES, CONFLICT, AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

I have set for myself a rather untenable project. I have chosen to write about "classroom activists," students who agitate within the Women's Studies classroom for change in both curriculum and methodological approaches to material, and the impact of this agitation upon perceptions of conflict and community building in Women's Studies programs. As one of those students, however, I am aware of my inability to accomplish this without prejudice, and therefore make no claims to "objectivity." Nevertheless, it can be hoped that the following observations will generate some discussion and thought ... or perhaps even productive conflict.

I would like to begin by stating the obvious: Women's Studies is different from any other discipline. It is unlikely that members of Dance, Philosophy or Computer Science faculties would express interest in "conflict and community building" in relation to their respective programs. Women's Studies is one of the few faculties, however, to be based upon the various principles of idealism, engaged political analysis, and an ongoing commitment to social change. Students who enrol in Women's Studies programs generally do so because they privilege similar principles within their own academic work. These principles lead to a series of expectations of Women's Studies programs on the part of students. I would argue that the three primary expectations of students are as follows:

1) The opportunity to form political and/or academic alliances with individual like-minded students. This would constitute the formation of small scale individual collectives, or "communities," if you will.

2) An environment in which to pursue our individual research where its validity will not be called into question; instead we hope to find general support among students and faculty alike. This is a broader based definition of community, one which