



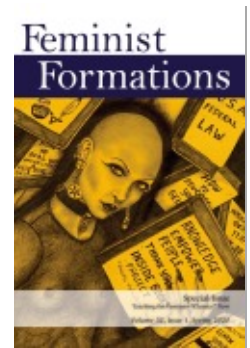
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# Teaching “Bad Feminism”: Mary Daly and the Legacy of ’70s Lesbian-Feminism

Julie Kubala

*The inquiry into teaching feminist “classics” seems apropos now, given a resurgence of anxieties about the relationships between political beliefs and sexual/gender identities, anxieties that echo those of the 1970s. Teaching texts from the seventies that make “bad feminist” claims in the midst of other powerful arguments can contribute to nuanced understandings of feminist pasts, in order to intervene in oversimplified progress or loss narratives that often characterize current representations of lesbian-feminism. Here, I revisit Mary Daly’s Gyn/Ecology, an ambitious project that calls for overthrowing patriarchy. Not surprisingly, such a far-reaching project also has foundational flaws; in particular, its essentialist conception of gender is explicitly transphobic and implicitly racist. I am calling for rethinking Gyn/Ecology not because I think we can recuperate it from its constitutive problems, but because analyzing the ways in which calls for liberation are intertwined with fundamental exclusions can provide insight into current feminist debates over such issues as combating sexual violence and the resurgence of trans-exclusionary feminism. Gyn/Ecology is an ambitious book; I want to encourage students to learn from the mistakes of earlier radical claims while not giving up on the possibilities of radicalism altogether.*

**Keywords:** Daly, Mary / feminist classics / Gyn/Ecology / pedagogy / racism / seventies lesbian-feminism / transphobia

[F]or it is in the painful process of this translation [of anger into action] that we identify who are our allies with whom we have grave difficulties, and who are our genuine enemies.

—Audre Lorde 1984, 127

The inquiry into teaching feminist “classics” seems particularly apropos at this cultural moment, given the resurgence of anxieties about the relationships between political beliefs and sexual/gender identities, anxieties that echo and rearticulate those of the 1970s. Then, debates often centered around gatekeeping strategies of the political identity “feminist,” and lesbianism as feminism’s “magical sign,” whereas current conversations wonder whether the identity “lesbian” is automatically transphobic and/or racist (King 1986). We can look to texts entitled “Do I Have to Give Up Lesbian History to Participate in Queer Culture?,” “For Many Young Queer Women, *Lesbian* Offers a Fraught Inheritance,” or *The Disappearing L: Erasure of Lesbian Spaces and Culture* to see that the very question of identity categories themselves provoke apprehension (Wilson 2018; Cauterucci 2016; Morris 2017). These fears tell us something about how we understand the seventies and its relationship to the present. To teach seventies lesbian-feminism risks reinforcing one-sided narratives of progress or loss: either the seventies is seen as a time of racist, transphobic lesbian-feminists from whom we have evolved to be more intersectional, or as a space of politically engaged activists from whom we have fallen away into academic nitpicking and overly theoretical conversations (Hemmings 2011, 3–4).<sup>1</sup> In the classroom, we are more likely to encounter the progress narrative; students have learned, often from social media, that earlier feminist movements centered white, cis women, and now we are moving toward ever greater inclusivity. As Finn Enke (2018, 10) argues,

In less than one generation, the “second wave” became aka “white feminism” and “trans-exclusionary feminism,” and now, *1970s feminists* is often used as a shorthand genealogy of today’s racist and trans-exclusionary feminists (TERFs). How did “1970s feminism” enter collective memory as the exclusionary thing, distinct from the experiences, labor, and critiques by feminists of color, trans and queer people of the same era? And why . . . are stories of exclusion and abjection so magnetic?

Stories of exclusion are magnetic, in part, because they set up a foundation for a progress narrative; we can see ourselves as more antiracist and trans-inclusive than the repudiated past. I am arguing for teaching 1970s feminist history because I feel it is important to convey the power and problems of earlier feminist movements. I hope that understanding how these “feminist formations” arose and become solidified can provide guidance for us as we navigate their current instantiations in, say, anti-violence movements and the resurgence of trans-exclusionary feminism.

The call for papers for this special issue poses the crucial question: “What about texts that were, for instance, once widely taught but have been relegated to the pedagogical margins, perhaps because of a sense that they perform or make visible various forms of ‘bad feminism’: essentialism; identity politics; an inadequate attention to intersectionality; an investment in ‘out-dated’ conceptions

of sex, or an attachment to genitalia as the embodiment of either sex or gender” (*Feminist Formations* 2018). I would extend this question to include the corollary: what are the losses of relegating some texts to the margins? What are the dangers of sanitizing this history? Perhaps the more interesting question might be: how do we teach these texts? The kind of reparative history that characterizes the work of Enke and others is crucial; obviously, we must teach transfolx/feminists of color from this time period, but what do we do with those we cannot utilize to contribute to a more sanguine past? To investigate this question, I analyze Mary Daly’s *Gyn/Ecology*, which becomes representative, often negatively, of “70s lesbian-feminism.” Even before the book was published, Daly was a controversial figure; this text sedimented her stature as both a brilliant religious scholar and wordsmith and raised ongoing questions (even at the time) about her commitment to a kind of feminist purity that is explicitly transphobic and implicitly racist, as the public critique by Audre Lorde (and others) attests. Dismissing such a text not only erases its power, but also works to sanitize feminist history, allowing for the continuation of similar white/western/cis dominations. I am calling for revisiting *Gyn/Ecology* not because I think we can recuperate it from what I see as its constitutive problems and certainly not because I want to use Daly as an “object lesson,” as someone we should define ourselves against. Rather, we can learn the power of radical calls for social change, highlighting the necessity for creative world-making and expanding our notions of the possible. Simply seeing such texts as examples of bad feminism that must be jettisoned in order to purify the movement seems dangerous because it consolidates oversimplified notions of earlier movements, a narrative that firmly places racism/transphobia in the past, thereby reading TERFs as anachronistic and racism as continually “getting better,” absolving us of doing the crucial and difficult work of continually analyzing oppressive practices within feminist movements.

### **Not Your Mama’s Feminism?:**

#### **Generational Divides and Narratives of Progress and Loss**

Teaching *Gyn/Ecology* in historical context allows us to recognize both the power and problems of the seventies; we can move away from narratives of either progress or loss to acknowledge both/and. I am inspired to write this piece by recent trans scholarship that highlights seventies thinkers like Mary Daly and Valerie Solanas, a focus that neither ignores deep problems nor dismisses these theorists out of hand (see Chace 2019; Enke 2018; Chu 2018). In “On Liking Women: The Society for Cutting Up Men Is a Rather Fabulous Name for a Transsexual Book Club,” Andrea Long Chu works to reclaim the power of the SCUM manifesto, pointing to the ways in which Solanas continues to be an inspirational and deeply exciting writer, despite (or because of . . .) the ways her work participates in these “bad feminist” narratives, such as essentialism. Daly and Solanas have several points of agreement: they use humor to

poke fun at entrenched patriarchal narratives, and their texts are alive with energy and creativity. Moreover, both employ a narrative of reversal, claiming that patriarchy's worst offence is attributing negative characteristics of men to women, stealing women's good qualities to keep for themselves. As Daly (1978, 79) argues, "Patriarchy is the religion of reversals." Or, from the "SCUM manifesto": "Being an incomplete female, the male spends his life attempting to complete himself, to become female. He attempts to do this . . . by claiming as his own all female characteristics—emotional strength and independence, (forcefulness, dynamism, decisiveness, coolness . . . —and by projecting onto women all male traits—vanity, frivolity, triviality, weakness, etc." (Solanas 1970, 514–15). Daly (1978, 5) observes, "Thus manipulated, women become eager for acceptance as docile tokens mouthing male texts, employing technology for male ends, accepting male fabrications as the true texture of reality." Here, we can see the power of earlier texts in terms of their bold anti-oppressive claims, which allow us to push back against the depth of sexist narratives, while at the same time these generalized distinctions between male/female and masculine/feminine provoke the "bad feminist" accusations, assuming an oppositional distinction that homogenizes either category, not only reinforcing the binary, but also marginalizing such issues as race and class.<sup>2</sup>

Teaching these texts allows students to move beyond the trivialization of such thinkers, leaving them wondering how to navigate contradictory feelings of excitement and disavowal. Lena Wilson (2018) notes that "there is an important difference between disagreeing with certain aspects of lesbian/feminist history and feeling ashamed of lesbian history writ large." Daly and Solanas both become figures of ridicule in part so that we can distance ourselves from them and therefore feel better about ourselves. We can disassociate ourselves from racism and transphobia through placing these problems firmly in the past, with the accompanying notion that things are "getting better": "feminism excluded trans women in the past, is learning to include trans women now, and will center trans women in the future" (Chu 2018). This story reiterates the narrative around race, that seventies feminism was homogenously white and has become increasingly inclusive, ignoring both the foundational work of women of color as well as the critiques of white dominations that are coterminous with "second-wave" feminism itself. We must think about how dominant formations repeatedly become white without further marginalizing the important work of women of color and active conversations between antiracist white women occurring at the time. For instance, in "Double Jeopardy," published in *Sisterhood Is Powerful* and *The Black Woman* (both 1970), Frances Beal calls out the racism of dominant feminism, a critique amplified by such texts as the Combahee River Collective Statement, 1977. There is often a "common-sense" assumption that white seventies feminists did not know that race mattered, further contributing to the erasure of feminists of color from the movement. As Janet Jakobsen (1998, 93) notes, "It is not that white feminists simply forgot about or did not

take diversity into account. Rather, it is the means of responding to diversity and understanding alliance that is at issue.” We might characterize white feminist texts, such as *Sisterhood Is Powerful* or *Gyn/Ecology*, as recognizing that racial difference matters, but subordinating that difference to the primacy of gender and the need for a unified understanding of gender identity. In other words, we might question the means of inclusion. As teachers, then, we are responsible for providing fuller context for these movements, to complicate simplistic generational divides through allowing for ambivalence. Highlighting the resonance of these problems with current ones can then provide a space for us to think/feel more carefully about how white and cis supremacy persist, in spite of decades of critique of simplistic understandings of “woman” as the subject of feminism.

In critiques of seventies lesbian-feminism, transphobia and racism are often equated, in often oversimplified and problematic ways. While cis and white-normative understandings are deeply intersectional, it is important to analyze them both together and separately to intervene in the ways in which one “difference” can displace another. Mary Daly is explicitly transphobic, accusing transwomen of being predators who cannibalize cis women to further the patriarchal project of reversal. Her racism and imperialism are less overt; she does not want to exclude women of color, but frequently assumes a white feminist subject, and her inclusion of transnational women reiterates colonial practices of victimization and homogenization. Setting these up as parallel trajectories fails to recognize that these are not mutually exclusive categories; transwomen of color have always been subjected to more intense discrimination than white trans women, even if the women who are called out particularly during this period of time are white (Sandy Stone, Angela Douglas, and Beth Elliott, for instance). In fact, these fundamental splits, here over gender, necessarily marginalize other issues of oppression, such as race and class. Enke argues for the importance of noting these intersections; in their discussion of the controversy over Beth Elliott’s participation in the West Coast Lesbian Conference of 1973, they note that it overshadowed all other debates, such as the work done by the Black caucus to register their presence (Enke 2018, 17). In this instance, Elliott, who was one of the central founders of the conference, had been invited to perform, but then some attendees were infuriated and demanded that she leave the stage. The centering of attention on (the exclusion of) Elliott and, by extension, transwomen in general, illuminates how these conflicts privilege certain oppositions over others, displacing issues of, in this case, racism.

These historical examples can help students understand how various iterations of “difference” become equalized, both then and now. While the progress narrative that sees the eighties as the decade of difference often emphasizes race, it is important to think about how race intersects with gender/sexuality (Hemmings 2011, 43). Sexuality becomes central in the seventies in part because the response to earlier feminist homophobia sets up the foundation for the lesbian-feminist attachment in ways that contribute to the marginalization

of other oppressions, especially race. For instance, feminist organizations like NOW explicitly moved to distance feminism from lesbianism in the late sixties, provoking a backlash most often narrated through the Lavender Menace action of 1970, where members of Radicalesbians stormed the stage at the Second Congress to Unite Women to read *The Woman-Identified Woman*, with its famous opening line, “A lesbian is the rage of all women, condensed to the point of explosion” (Radicalesbians 1973, 240). What started out as a formative split between lesbian and heterosexual became displaced onto a notion of lesbian-feminist sexuality as opposed to male-identified sexuality. Given this politicization of sexuality, any term that participates in the gender binary becomes suspect, accused of reinforcing male dominance and female subordination. This politicization then focuses on gender as singular at the expense of more expansive understandings, despite widespread critique of the whiteness of this notion. In this context, radical feminism becomes increasingly transphobic, foreclosing possibilities for alliance with transwomen’s critique of masculinity, due to fears of male contamination.<sup>3</sup> The suturing of lesbian and feminist, then, highlights sexuality as the foundational qualification for proper feminist subjectivity, reinforcing the central focus on gender/sex in a way that necessarily renders other hierarchies, such as race and class, secondary.

It is important for students to understand these more complex histories, both to intervene in the progress narrative and because these kinds of exclusions persist in current conversations. In contrast to progress narratives, Enke and Jakobsen note how movements that are more diverse and complex can become narrowed over time, as parameters over what counts as “feminist” or “woman” become tightened throughout the seventies. Rather than simply moving to the other side of the loss narrative, these critics emphasize the unevenness of historical formations; they neither move inexorably forward nor backward. Alice Echols (1989, 9) also crucially splits up the seventies, arguing that the radicalism of earlier feminist movements (1968–1973) declines; she contrasts an activist formation in the early seventies to what she calls “cultural feminism” in the latter half of the decade. While her text conveys a deep sense of loss at the decline of activism, therefore fitting partially into the loss narrative that Hemmings critiques, her intervention into homogenizing the seventies as a decade seems important here. Echols describes cultural feminism, as personified by Daly, as characterized by a withdrawal from deeply sedimented patriarchal social structures in order to create/decipher what a “woman’s” or “feminist” way of life might look like (252–56). It is in this move to “separate” from patriarchy that transphobia becomes increasingly incorporated into lesbian-feminist formations, through a language of maleness as polluting the purity of woman’s space. Furthermore, it is separatism that is continually identified as one of the central elements of white domination of lesbian-feminism. Thinkers, from the Combahee River Collective on, call out separatism for the intensity of its commitment to reading gender at the expense of race and class, a move that

only makes sense for women who are not oppressed in these other ways. Other theorists of color often subvert dominant historiographies altogether; Chela Sandoval (2000), for instance, argues that feminist histories often highlight white formations, noting that shifting the lens to focus on texts by women of color complicate such taxonomies. Moving away from overly one-sided narratives of progress and loss, then, can allow us to see the seventies as contentious rather than homogenous; looking at the arguments themselves can help us think through their reiterations and continuities.

### Mary Daly and the Revolutionary Subject of Feminism

In the context of increasing lesbian-feminist separatism (and its critiques), *Gyn/Ecology* emerges as a powerful call for women to unearth them/ourselves from the layers of lies that comprise patriarchy to creatively return to the source of “our” power and knowledge.<sup>4</sup> The process involves an “exorcism” of internalized patriarchal ways: “our seeing through patriarchy is at the same time learning to see the Background, our stolen integrity/energy/be-ing” (Daly 1978, 20). Daly calls for reclaiming women as subjects, in the face of the multifaceted strategies of objectification that work to render women objects/Other (see Korte 2000, 94). She emphasizes the importance of language as part of the obfuscating nature of patriarchy, working to connect explicit violence against women to the myths that naturalize it. The language of uncovering, of needing to move through lies to find the truth, provides both the power of the text and contributes to its sense that, in order to be authentic, one must abide by her vision. For example, in her review of the text, Joanna Russ notes “*Gyn/Ecology* . . . is terrifying because of its bad manners . . . [it] rips through the thin veils of accommodations under which we all shelter” (1979, 68). The no-holds-barred, no-fucks-to-give tone of the book is incredibly inspirational, since she centers the text on (her version of) women to decenter male dominance, relying on shock value to convey the widespread nature of patriarchal violence. The tone of the book, then, can be quite powerful for students; the trick here, though, is how to navigate the inspirational tone with its problematic oppositional structure, which flattens complexities and, somewhat surprisingly in a text that emphasizes the necessity of creativity, narrows possibilities.

Analyzing Daly can help students understand the “logic” of transphobia, the persistence of claims that undergird it, and its connection to racism. The politics of reversal that characterize both Solanas and Daly forms the basis for transphobia; if a theory depends on the notion that men have stolen women’s power, that all things good about males are really about females, then it makes sense that trans women would be perceived as threatening predators. By reiterating a notion of Female/male opposition as fundamental, she necessarily marginalizes other relations of domination. As Amber Katherine (2000, 288) notes, “Like other white radical feminists at the time, Daly thought



the only logical response to the denial that patriarchy existed was to insist that racial and cultural differences were epiphenomenal.” The ways in which exclusionary politics are frequently connected to defensiveness, as a response to the continual trivialization of sexism as real and valid, seems an important point to continue to emphasize in current social justice conversations. Here, I analyze her framing of a revolutionary feminist subject, to look at the kinds of exclusions that universalizing may, at times paradoxically, incur. We can teach the problems of defensive oppositional frameworks and the ways in which a commitment to “Woman” is both transphobic and racist and may work against making the very connections between language and/as violence that she so powerfully calls for.

While racism and colonialism are epiphenomenal, they are also explicit in Daly’s defense of biological gender. Tellingly, it is her critique of “transsexuals” and the universalization of an opposition between male and female that is directly connected to race. In her admittedly brief discussion, she claims,

The phenomenon of the drag queen dramatically demonstrates such boundary violation. Like whites playing “Black face,” he incorporates the oppressed role without being incorporated in it. In the phenomenon of transsexualism, the incorporation/confusion is deeper. . . . The surgeons and hormone therapists of the transsexual kingdom, in their efforts to give birth, can be said to produce female persons. They cannot produce women. (1978, 67–68)

Here, the fact that race is used as the basis of an analogy illustrates the ways in which subjectivity is assumed to be white in the book. If we acknowledge the possibility that these drag queens or transsexuals might themselves be Black, or people of color, then the point about Black face would make no sense, reinforcing whiteness as the default subjectivity. The argument from analogy is always problematic, in that it points to the ways in which women and, in this case, Black people, are always seen as separate categories, categories which might parallel but will never intersect. Also, while white people used Black face as a source of humor and humiliation, transwomen do not generally transition out of hostility toward women, but rather quite the opposite (Chu 2018; Chace 2019).<sup>5</sup> Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, the quote shows how oppositional structures of gender and race are often used to cross-buttress each other: “male” and “female” become stabilized as separate categories based on the presumed immutability of race.<sup>6</sup> In fact, in her footnote to this section, Daly notes that the reason that transsexuals cannot be women is that they “cannot menstruate; they lack clitorises; they cannot give birth; they require continual hormone fixes; they are without female history and Background” (1978, 432–33). Although the last two mention social elements, the emphasis on the biological here is illustrative, especially in a text that critiques defining women based on their genitalia and is deeply skeptical of Western science and medicine. Her arguments here once again demonstrate the difficulty of her ambitious project; it becomes impossible

to theorize “woman” outside the confines of the already-existing patriarchal, biologized understandings.

Much of the more careful argument that resonates with current conversations in feminist classrooms centers on the question of being socialized as a woman, with the corresponding claim that transwomen have not suffered from this oppression. If one were to allow that there were constituent differences among women, however, such as differences of race and class, then it would be impossible to argue that these differences are somehow fixed. We could also argue that feminist transwomen have felt the oppression of patriarchy and enforced masculinity in unique and illustrative ways. Certainly, not all cis-women are raised with the same ideas of what it means to be a woman, and certainly, we do not all conform to the images we are raised to be. One can accept the argument that these socialization processes are deep and multiple without assuming that that provides the grounds for some shared experiences/responses to these experiences. Lest one think that this is an anachronistic reading of this debate, consider the press release by Olivia records, responding to the demand that they should fire Sandy Stone, a transwoman sound engineer:

In evaluating whom we will trust . . . our focus as political lesbians is on what her actions are now. If she is a person who comes from privilege, has she renounced that which is oppressive in her privilege, and is she sharing with other women that which is useful? Is she aware of her own oppression? Is she open to struggle around class, race, and other aspects of lesbian feminist politics? These were our yardsticks in deciding whether or not to work with a woman who grew up with male privilege. We felt that Sandy met those same criteria we apply to any woman. (Olivia 1977, in Enke 2018)

This quote illustrates how having a more complex understanding of gender, in its fundamentally intersectional mode, also allows for trans-inclusive policies and rationales, in ways that we, and our students, could still benefit from considering.

Careful engagement with Daly’s text can help us think with students about how possibilities for alliances are often missed or foreclosed. Daly’s critique of male-defined femininity could provide the basis for alliances with transwomen and other femmes, an almost too-obvious alliance that repeatedly fails, through her insistence on an oppositional framework that universalizes, albeit unevenly. While much of the text depends on a fundamental opposition between Fe-male and male, she also spends a great deal of time talking about “token women” and “fake feminists” in ways that might complicate any simple oppositional structure. In fact, it seems that less than universalizing the subject “woman,” she universalizes the notion of maleness as predatory and violent. Her commitment to an oppositional structure posits one of only two subject positions: oppressor or victim; Daly’s commitment to seeing transwomen as oppressive makes it impossible for her to see violence against them, because in her mind, they are always violators. Alexandra Chace (2019, 67) argues that Daly is unable to

recognize such connections because of the constant desire for feminist cleansing, the fear that some inherent maleness will leak out of transwomen and pollute pure feminism, especially since we must be constantly on guard to recognize our own male identification. They go further to note that the replacement narrative itself shows the difficulty in differentiating between trans and cis women; if there were clear differences, we would not need such an intense commitment to separation. Because of the fear of pollution, transwomen must necessarily be read as grotesque monsters; in order to be sure cis-feminists are properly disgusted, Daly (and others) emphasizes spectacular Otherness. Hemmings (2011, 219) agrees: “The horror itself is enough to justify a lack of empathy, since it marks an other already beyond the pale. . . . The use of horror to mark an absolute distinction between feminists and transsexuals also positions transsexuals as aggressors, actively seeking to undermine feminism.” This move is particularly interesting in a text that is often critical of notions of purity; in fact, in her discussion of various iterations of misogynist violence, she outlines a pattern that links all these instances together: the first element in the pattern is “an obsession with purity” (131).

Daly’s use of horror and shock as part of her commitment to radical critique not only characterizes her description of transsexuals, but also her examples of misogynist violence. The critiques by women of color, such as Audre Lorde and Uma Narayan, often point to the “othering” that adheres to these graphic depictions especially since women in transnational contexts are described only as victims, rather than as subjects. In response to claims that white-dominated feminism generalizes from the position of white women to include all women, Narayan (1997, 45) points out that this text universalizes through providing cross-cultural examples of the practices of violence against women, highlighting spectacular bodily violence. Narayan argues further that Daly universalizes this oppression both transnationally and temporally, as if all cultures are the same, and as if non-Western cultures are timelessly traditional (47). These examples, then, often use difference to support universalizing—see, all women do suffer from patriarchy—without any analysis of the fact that these oppressive structures may function with very different logics, histories, and so on, and that colonization may be as important as misogyny in any analysis of such issues. Lorde (1983, 103) agrees, criticizing the use of women of color only to prove the ubiquity of patriarchy, without any acknowledgment that “other” cultures might also provide mythic figures/goddesses that one can use as sources of power: “Mary, I ask that you be aware of how this serves the destructive forces of racism and separation between women—the assumption that the herstory and myth of white women is the legitimate and sole herstory and myth of all women to call upon for power and background, and that non-white women and our herstories are noteworthy only as decorations, or examples of female victimization.” Likewise, AnaLouise Keating (2000, 378–79) argues, “Ironically, Daly’s primary focus on women’s commonality can be more exclusionary than she intends

for it compels readers to undergo a restrictive process of normalization. . . . In short, Daly's universalism interpellates readers into a single subject position." While most current feminist theorists would not argue for universalizing, the idea of a commonality of womanness, even while it may be transinclusive, is still ubiquitous. Moreover, in our classrooms, we still repeatedly encounter the problem of how to explore transnational issues of gender justice without the imperialism that so often accompanies such conversations. It is useful in this context to think about how the methods of inclusion can be as problematic as direct exclusions.

Mary Daly provides an emblematic case here because Audre Lorde published "An Open Letter to Mary Daly" directly challenging these racist exclusions while also recognizing *Gyn/Ecology's* important contributions (1983). Her critique is offered in the spirit of friendship, noting that she often refuses to engage with white women's racism, given her repeated experience of white women's refusal to listen, a pattern that persists in current "white feminism." She situates her critique in terms of conversation, a conversation that Lorde sees as one-sided, publishing the letter publicly after Daly did not respond to the original.<sup>7</sup> Daly is certainly aware of accusations of racism/imperialism; her defensiveness once again illustrates missed opportunities for alliance. In fact, she responds defensively within the text itself: "Those who claim to see racism and/or imperialism in my indictment of these atrocities can do so only by blinding themselves to the fact that the oppression of women knows no ethnic, national, or religious bounds" (1978, 111). Or, "Haggard criticism should enable women who have been intimidated by labels of 'racism' to become sisters to these women of Africa. . . . It is truly *racist* to keep silent in the face of these atrocities" (172). It is obvious that she is aware of the critique of ignoring/subordinating difference, but she doubles down on it, because of her insistence on the primacy of patriarchy over white supremacy and colonialism. For instance, her critique of J. Marion Sims's use of captive women to experiment on could allow for an understanding of his sexism (and other medical practices) as fundamentally racist. Or, her analysis of the misogyny of Nazi medical experimentation could open space for an understanding of oppression as interlocking, not hierarchical. However, she explicitly refuses such an intersectional analysis, because, as Narayan (1997, 58) argues, "She believes her aversion to patriarchy immunizes her to every form of participation in problematic aspects of Western culture." Her refusal here is connected to the intensity of her commitment to fighting misogyny; she sees any intersectional understanding as watering down, rather than strengthening, an analysis of patriarchy.

The commitment to exclusion, to an oppositional structure of revolutionary subjectivity comes from the literal life-or-death stakes that Daly locates as the purpose of the book. Daly sees separatism as *the* strategy that is necessary to save the world: "This is an extremist book, written in a situation of extremity, written on the edge of a culture that is killing itself and all of sentient life"

(1978, 17). Elsewhere, she argues for fighting against those “neco-apocalyptic nobodies who are running/ruining the world” (1996, 84). In other words, the text is written to reverse a decline, a reaction that also tends to call for a universal subject “woman”—a renewed subject that can, somehow, preserve “us” from this death. This heightened sense of the apocalyptic nature of the times utilizes a biopolitical logic of purity, a logic that, as Michel Foucault (2003) argues, depends on a fundamental distinction between those who must live and those who must die. Biopower depends on this break, a break he sees as biological, which requires that in order for the flourishing of life on one side, the other side must be eliminated. In fact, Daly uses the term “biophilia,” which she associates with women’s essence and power; women are life-giving as opposed to necrophiliac men. Foucault’s concept of biopower is developed in the lectures from 1976, a scant two years before *Gyn/Ecology*. An important difference here is that Foucault sees those who occupy the making live side of biopower as those who are in power (like Nazis), whereas for Daly, it is the oppressed, women, who can work against the death drive she associates with maleness. Adrienne Rich (1979) also notes that this text, in its quest for “genuine social transformation,” calls on us to “exorcise the internal demons that hold us in a state of ‘robotitude,’ the submission to a maintenance level of ‘only not dying,’ which also resonates with the language of biopower and its extension into the concept of “bare life” (Agamben 1998). While Daly would probably not appreciate the parallel here, I do think that the concept of biopower helps us understand how the fundamental split that she outlines, the split between Fe-male and Male, proliferates into other distinctions. Not only does she distinguish between real women and “token” women, but she argues further, “it becomes clear that there are women, including some who would describe themselves as ‘feminists,’ with whom I do not feel enough identification to warrant the pronoun *we*” (1978, 25). She also distinguishes between real lesbians and those who are “driven . . . into heterosexist ‘gay pride’ protests promoted by and for men, into butch-femme matings modeled on matrimony, into aping the genital fixations of porn peddlars, pimps, priests” (21). In other words, the only way to be a proper feminist is to be a lesbian-feminist, and the only way to be a proper lesbian-feminist is to be a separatist. I bring up biopolitics because I think it is important to understand that, for Daly, these distinctions are crucially important; it is the sense of urgency of this theorizing that provides the intensity of commitment to maintaining these oppositions.

## Learning from the Seventies

If it takes head-on collisions, let's do it:  
this polite timidity is killing us.

—Cherríe Moraga 1983, 32

Why, then, am I arguing that we should teach this text, given many of its offensive claims and implications? Since current feminist struggles, such as those over misogyny and violence, often echo struggles for gender justice in the seventies, more careful engagement with these texts might help us navigate some familiar pitfalls, such as highlighting gender at the expense of other oppressions and separating individual violence from systemic oppression. Daly has such an ambitious project, to delve into the depth with which our language and selves have been colonized by patriarchy and to re-excavate and create something wholly, radically new. It is partly this boldness that makes it important; *Gyn/Ecology* is nothing if not a head-on collision that allows us to explore some of the most significant problems in feminist theorizing, both then and now. It is also an inspirational text, teaching us how to think against dominant culture narratives, without necessarily having to come to the conclusions that she does. These sorts of considerations inspire me to rethink this work; I would like to intervene in the disassociation that allows us to think that we know better, and therefore smugly neither seriously engage with earlier work nor consider our own exclusionary practices. At times, it seems that part of our desire to rid ourselves of the embarrassing past of lesbian-feminism may be attributed to our desire to rid ourselves of our own embarrassing racist/transphobic pasts. Rather than distancing ourselves from Daly's unapologetic out-there-ness, our students would benefit from identifying each claim, understanding the implications and epistemologies that they are based on. We can learn from these histories in order to breathe life into current inflammatory topics as well as their often unacknowledged racisms: lesbian versus queer, the resurgence of "gender critical feminists" with their explicit transexclusionary arguments, and strategies for addressing misogynist violence.

Daly's directness and deep critique of clichéd language is one aspect of *Gyn/Ecology* that can be liberating in the classroom. Traci West (2012, 114–15) points to a language of politeness that often avoids the tough work of understanding racism: "Separate silos allow us to avoid the raw, bruising conflict that might erupt if we directly engaged our differences with one another as it did when Black lesbian feminist Audre Lorde published her open letter to Mary Daly." We are so afraid of conflict in the classroom, of being caught out in our unconscious biases, that we soften the message, distance ourselves from radical claims, empty seventies feminism of its controversial elements, but also its rich conversations and conflicts, in order to sanitize and simplify our presentation

of feminist pasts. The call for direct, honest conversation that was not heeded (enough anyway) in the seventies still exists today; many (though not all!) of us white feminists have learned better than to say some of these things but shy away from direct confrontations that might lead to painful growth, perhaps especially in the classroom. We may have sanitized our language, but that does not allow for these crucial and painful conversations to take place, so that the same arguments about racism within white-dominated feminist movements happen with predictable regularity. For example, most of us are quite comfortable invoking the language of “intersectionality,” but at times that invocation stands in for doing the hard work of interrogating the extent to which gender is a racialized category (see Nash 2010).

The question of the status of language is important in Daly’s work as well as in current arguments: while language may be a significant site of anti-oppressive struggle, new words are not going to provide the magic solution to patriarchy or white dominations within lesbian-feminism. Daly’s desire to rework language involves de-mystifying it; she wants to unearth the sexism in many of our common-sense words to help us recognize the intensity and ubiquity of misogyny, even in putatively neutral terms. While recent articles often romanticize the term “queer” as the more fluid, hip answer to the stodgy, earnest whiteness of “lesbian,” these invocations of queer still highlight it as a sexual identity formation, downplaying the political dimensions. While these debates often take place on social media, it is important for us, as teachers, to address them, since that is where most students are getting their earliest, formative information about feminism. As Cathy Cohen (1997) reminded us over twenty years ago in “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens,” “queer” has not solved the problem of racism within feminist and LGBT organizing. She argues that while “queer” began as an anti-identitarian critique of normativity in all its forms, it slipped into a familiar oppositional framework targeting heterosexuality, rather than the violence of normativities. This oppositional framework once again becomes singular, marginalizing race and class in its understanding of domination. Her call for alliance to be made on the basis of shared relations to power rather than shared identities is crucial, but as we can see from these earlier articles, “queer” keeps remaining stuck as a (sexual) identity category rather than a political one, which diminishes its ability to provide a new, complex political subject position that can really address the imbrication of sex, gender, race, and class. Analyzing Daly’s work, then, can show us both the power and limits of a focus on language; while we can see how words embody oppressive structures, creating new ones does not automatically solve the problem of exclusionary relations.

When we analyze *Gyn/Ecology* in the classroom, we can see how transexclusionary claims are fundamentally intertwined with racism, often through a protectionist narrative that universalizes “woman” through shared possibilities of victimization. C. Riley Snorton (2018) argues that the stabilization of gender always depends on race; it is important to look at this history as we think about

the racial implications of transphobia. For instance, “gender-critical” feminists, those who return to a biological basis of womanhood, see themselves as victims; they are oppressed because many journals will not publish articles that use transexclusionary rhetoric, compelling them to rely on the polarizing space of social media. In this way, they replicate the binary sense that if they are victims, then transwomen must be oppressors; transexclusionary policies will protect them, and by extension all women, from violence. These arguments often reiterate the oppositional narratives of Daly and other seventies radical feminists, seeing transwomen as wily predators, thieves, and rapists, echoing not only feminist claims, but also popular culture images of trans people as serial killers (see Chace 2019). The argument once again conceptualizes the subject “woman” as universalized through shared victim status. Utilizing the language of “predator,” however, is not only transphobic; it is also racist. Highlighting sexist violence at the expense of any other problem can work to invoke racist fears of violent men of color, even when these subject positions are putatively “unraced.” It is illustrative, in at least one example, that one site of critique is maintaining gender-segregated prisons. For example, Allen, et al. (2018) argue that “One sex-segregated space that women are particularly concerned about preserving is female prisons. There is increasing pressure for trans women to be housed in the female estate, and yet there are real concerns about doing so.” They claim that since transwomen are more likely than other inmates to be incarcerated for sex offenses, and sex offenses usually target ciswomen, transwomen are more likely to commit violence against ciswomen. In this argument, we see that the very real concern of prison as violent toward women (and everyone else) gets displaced onto transpeople as agents rather than victims. This argument both reiterates the need for prisons, and sees the violence as perpetuated by those who are most often victims of state violence. To not recognize state violence against transwomen, especially transwomen of color, especially transwomen of color who are sexworkers, in this context is a really violent oversight, and given the amount of information available, must be deliberate. Moreover, to ignore the racial implications of calling for prisons, as if they were not part and parcel of racist violence, and as if the patriarchal state actually protects women, seems equally telling. The protectionist narrative that invokes the language of safety from violence as the primary reason for maintaining the sanctity of “opposite” genders, then, often invokes racialized language and fears in order to strengthen its position.

While TERFs may be on the fringe of dominant feminist formations, Chace (2019, 5) argues that their arguments bleed into more mainstream movements. In their discussions of #MeToo, for instance, Black students/students of color often worry about how the #Beliebewomen narrative might reinscribe racialized understandings of which women are to be believed and at what costs to which men. Thinking with Daly helps us with the long-standing knotty problem of how we theorize the role of misogyny and sexist violence without universalizing binary



gender structures. Such questions also illustrate the difficulty of navigating the relationship between interpersonal and structural violence, a challenge that persists from seventies feminist movements, especially in the invocation of the “personal is the political.” Daly wants to shock readers by exposing the ubiquity of spectacular violence against women; similarly, #MeToo rose to prominence in the context of spectacular instances of sexual violence and harassment. Both Daly and #MeToo promote the politics of awareness, the idea that “breaking the silence” about the widespread nature of such problems will work to end violence, through the notion that recognizing the problem is a necessary impetus for solving it. While that may be true, the politics of awareness elides the tricky question of how to connect interpersonal and systemic violence, and more directly, how to work against structural oppression. Similarly, within #MeToo, it seems that the strategy for fighting violence is to fire/incarcerate specific individuals, which does not seem likely to make anyone safe. This specific strategy, additionally, provokes concern about the racial framework of the movement; to suggest that punishing individuals will solve social problems supports a carceral logic that is fundamentally racist. As opposed to those gender-critical feminists who see themselves as carrying out this legacy, Daly and other seventies radical feminists did not see the state as benignly neutral; they did not appeal to the state as the source of protection or criminalization as a source of safety. It is important for students to learn that suggestions for alternatives, whether we agree with the specifics or not, are long-standing.

Daly’s text is arguably crucial for us to understand the intensity and widespread nature of sexism; her arguments about combatting it are less compelling. On the other hand, while we may be wary of some of the specific ways in which she wants to remake the world, I do want to emphasize the need for deep, radical change and encourage students to creatively imagine possibilities. Relatedly, in a move away from universalizing binary gender through shared experiences of victimization, Chace (2019, 39) suggests we theorize gender identification through the language of emotional attachment; hatred of women can bind men together. The move to see misogyny as that which provides an affective pull toward toxic masculinity importantly allows for non-essentialist understandings of gender identity and violence. In #MeToo, we could think about the importance of this framework to work for alliances with transwomen, rather than to continually separate cis and trans women’s experiences of misogyny. In the context of violence, for instance, we might think about the endemic violence/murder of transwomen of color/Black transwomen as providing insights into other incidents of sexual violence and harassment. Instead of pitting transwomen against ciswomen, or reading transwomen as diluting the misogynist violence ciswomen face, we can form alliances that work to provide more comprehensive solutions to structural violence. Through highlighting connections between various kinds of misogyny, we can think about how to contest these problems without reinforcing racialized and individualizing criminalization narratives.

Perhaps the most useful point of engaging with Daly and seventies lesbian-feminism is their commitment to changing the world, to remaking it through a radical feminist lens. What makes Mary Daly so interesting is that she is arguing for fighting violence through feminist reclamations of language and power. The whole point of “otherworlding” is to reconceptualize the world from a feminist point of view, which requires separating from the world as it is, or at least defamiliarizing ourselves from the common-sense ways in which various oppressions structure our lives. She, and other radical feminists, want to remake the world, to end patriarchal frameworks. Through teaching such texts, then, we can think with students about how, historically, feminist theorists have envisioned alternatives to the depths of patriarchy and gender binaries that structure our lives and expand their imaginary potential to overthrow white supremacy and capitalism. We can move away from seeing the seventies as either backward or romanticized, but rather as a source of lessons and inspiration. *Gyn/Ecology* is an ambitious book; I want to encourage students to learn from the mistakes of earlier radical claims while not giving up on the possibilities of radicalism altogether.

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## Notes

1. As Hemmings (2011, 5, 162) also notes, not only do these “progress” and “loss” narratives characterize second-wave feminism, they also crystallize into decades, so that the seventies becomes shorthand for either racism/transphobia or proper activism, respectively.

2. There are also important differences; Solanas’s work is less academic, and she is less prolific, considering that Daly published eight books from 1968 to 2006 and spent her working life in academia. Moreover, these texts are a decade apart, with Solanas’s work representing early second-wave feminism (1970) while *Gyn/Ecology* was published in 1978, a difference that matters.

3. In Enke’s (2018, 17) reading of the “scandal” over transwoman Beth Elliott’s performance at the 1973 West Coast Lesbian Festival, they note that it was younger, “more radical” lesbians who led the charge to violently confront Elliott, despite widespread audience support for her presence.

4. The text is structured through three “Passages”: in the first, “Processions” she describes the role of myth in obfuscating the knowledge of patriarchal violence that she

will expose; the second, “The Sado-Ritual Syndrome: The Re-enactment of Goddess Murder,” provides a dizzying analysis of the depth and extent of male violence against women, juxtaposing female genital cutting in Africa with US gynecological practices, for instance, while the third passage, “Gyn/Ecology: Spinning New Time/Space,” tells us how to fight this violence through a new way of Be-ing.

5. Daly seems to conflate trans subjectivity with the various ways femininity is mocked and performed in masculine spaces, which can include drag, but most often occurs in ostensibly cis-heterosexual spaces.

6. There are interesting resonances with the furor over Rebecca Tuvel’s article “In Defense of Transracialism,” which reads transracialism through parallels with transgender. The resulting uproar over the publishing of the article and demand to retract it would make an interesting case of thinking through current oppositional formations about the topic, if there were more space.

7. More recent critics often engage this “debate” in the context of thinking about Daly’s work, pointing also to the controversy over the truthfulness of Lorde’s claim that Daly did not engage with her. After Lorde’s death, Daly’s response was found in her papers, although her response was not nearly as detailed or substantial as the original letter. Controversy over Lorde’s reason for not acknowledging Daly’s response aside, the broader critique of racism seems quite important and still applicable to current conflicts (West 2012, 115).

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