DOES THE CATEGORY OF WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE LIMIT FEMINIST THEOLOGY?

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INTRODUCTION: WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE[1] AND ITS LIMITS

> I am a student of theology, I am also a woman. Perhaps it strikes you as curious that I put these two assertions beside each other, as if to imply that one's sexual identity has some bearing on his theological views. I myself would have rejected such an idea when I first begin my theological studies. But now, thirteen years later, I am no longer as certain as I once was that, when theologians speak of "man," they are using the word in its generic sense. It is, after all, a well-known fact that theology has been written almost exclusively by men. This alone should put us on guard, especially since contemporary theologians constantly remind us that one of man's strongest temptations is to identify his own limited perspective with universal truth.[2]

In this opening to her essay, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," written in 1960, Valerie Saiving articulates the problem many women in religious scholarship were experiencing. For most of the twentieth century, the particular experience of the privileged -- primarily the men who had access to the academy and the pulpit -- was universalized as the human experience to be used in developing theological constructions. Women, who had mainly been relegated to the private sphere, were either neglected or expected to identify with this male theology. Their experiences had been viewed as secondary and otherly, as Simone de Beauvoir relates in *The Second Sex*.[3] As a result, they were not allowed to "name" their own, unique experiences in theology.[4] "Because women's stories have not been told," Carol Christ writes in her essay "Spiritual Quest and Women's Experience," "women's experiences have not shaped the spoken language of

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[1] The category of experience is one that is often discussed in the theological world currently. To give a clear definition of its use would take up a paper in itself. Therefore, this paper will be limited to the discussion of women's experience and its claims on theological constructions.

[2] Saiving, Valerie. "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," in *Womanspirit Rising* (New York:Harper and Row, 1979), 25-42.

[3] Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex* (New York: Knopf, 1953) In this work, de Beauvoir asks the question, what is a woman? Her response results in the discussion of the theoretical notion of women as absolute other and its accompanying description of patriarchal culture as a reflection of that notion.

[4] Graff, Anne O'Hara, "The Struggle to Name Women's Experience: Assessment and Implications for Theological Construction," *Horizons* (2, no 2 Fall 1993), 216. In this article Graff discusses the desire many women had to name, or express, their experiences, how these experiences had been named for them, and what these experiences meant in terms of the theologies currently existing.

cultural myths and sacred stories."[5] Saiving's article introduced the theological community to the omission of women's experience and served as a challenge to the long-standing male-dominated practices within religion.

Although her challenge was initially ignored, in the late 1960s women began to build on her call to name women's experience by further developing this criticism of the universalizing of particular experiences. Mary Daly, whose first book *The Church and the Second Sex*[6] was written shortly after the second Vatican council ruled that women could not be ordained in 1968, harshly criticized the Christian tradition and its language and imagery for God. To Daly, the use of male imagery, including terms such as "Lord", "King", and "Father," as well as the use of purely male pronouns, allowed for the virtual deification of men. "If God in 'his' heaven is a father ruling 'his' people, then it is in the 'nature' of things and according to divine plan and the order of the universe to be male dominated."[7]

Other theologians chose to offer criticism of traditional theology by attempting to name women's experience and to rediscover the female. Biblical scholars, such as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, in *In Memory of Her*[8], and Letty Russell, in *A Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*[9], mined the Bible for positive images of women. Others, such as Carol Christ in "Why Women need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological, and Political Reflections,"[10] and Naomi Goldenberg, in *The Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions*[11], rejected Christianity altogether and instead sought to revive the Mother Goddess, advocating the use of female images for God and the

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5 Christ, Carol, "Spiritual Quest and Women's Experience," in *Womanspirit Rising* (New York:Harper and Row, 1979), 230.

6 Daly, Mary, *The Church and the Second Sex* (New York : Harper & Row, 1975)

7 Daly, Mary, "After the Death of God the Father," in *Womanspirit Rising* (New York:Harper and Row, 1979), 54.

8 Fiorenza, Elisabeth Schüssler, *In Memory of Her* (New York : Crossroad, 1984).

9 Russell, Letty, *A Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia : Westminster Press, 1985).

10 Christ, Carol, "Why Women need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological, and Political Reflections," in *Womanspirit Rising* (New York:Harper and Row, 1979), 273-286.

11 Goldenberg, Naomi, *The Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979).

"acknowledgement of the legitimacy of female power as a beneficent and independent power."[12]

This critical work led to the formation of the powerful movement known as feminist theology. As a movement, feminist theology encompasses many different fields of study and addresses a varied list of grievances.[13] However, it has been largely concerned with the criticism of patriarchal theological frameworks. And serving as the foundation of this criticism has been the exploration and revival of women's experience.

According to Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, in a roundtable discussion entitled "The Influence of Feminist Theory on my Theological Work," the criticism offered by feminist theologians has been instrumental in challenging "our conceptions of rationality itself by pointing out the 'false universality' of Western philosophical discourse."[14] For feminist theologians, this 'false universality' was used by men to absolutize their particular experience. In their criticism, feminist theologians replaced this 'false universality' with an emphasis on the particular, unique experiences of women. These particular, unique experiences serve as the "*source for theological reflection* and the *norm for evaluating* the adequacy of any theological framework."[15]

Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s much feminist theological work utilized the category of women's experience as a *source for reflection* by offering women's experience as the starting point for new theological constructions. It also used women's experience as the *norm for evaluating* the "abstraction and universality of experience,"[16] by articulating its exclusion from theological constructions. As Anne

12 "Why Women need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological, and Political Reflections," 277.

13 For an overview of the movement of feminist theology, see Ann Loades, *Feminist Theology: A Reader*, (Louisville, Ky. : Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow, ed. *Womanspirit Rising*, and Mary Catherine Hilkert, "Feminist theology: A Review of Literature," in *Theological Studies* 56, no. 2 (June 1995): 327-353.

14 Fiorenza, Francis Schüssler. "The Influence of Feminist Theory on my Theological Work" *Journal of Studies in Feminist Religion* (7 no 1 Spring 1991): 95. This roundtable discussion also includes commentary on feminist theology by the theologians John B. Cobb Jr., Peter C. Hogdson, Gordon D. Kaufman, Wayne Proudfoot, Mark Kline Taylor, David Tracy and Vincent L. Wimbush.

15 Davaney, Sheila Greeve. "The Limits of the Appeal to Women's Experience," in *Shaping New Visions* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987), 32.

16 "The Struggle to Name Women's Experience: Assessment and Implications for Theological Construction," 216.

O'Hara Graff articulates in her article "The Struggle to Name Women's Experience," feminist theology was "directed toward naming ideological and institutional distortions, and recovering women's contributions and experience where they have been buried from view."[17]

However, in the mid 1980s the work of many feminist theologians began to explore more complex levels of women's experience and to criticize the then current definitions of women's experience. Many white middle-class western feminist theologians found themselves charged with universalizing their own, privileged experience as *the* woman's experience. Critics argued that feminist theologians were not considering the factors of race, class, social standing and economic position.

Also, with the increasing presence of postmodern thought in theology[18] in the 1990's, feminist theologians have been criticized for their ontological and absolutist claims. Such claims are varied, ranging from the idea that women possess an absolute essence to the assertion that women have a truer (than men) access to reality and to God. For a postmodern thinker, however, all experiences are relativized according to location, tradition and paradigmatic beliefs. Therefore, they have begun to challenge feminist theologians, asking, how can one say that women's experience is transhistorical and free of social and cultural conditioning?

This gives rise to the fundamental question of this thesis: does the category of women's experience limit feminist theology? In light of the criticisms of feminist theologians, how can an appeal to women's experience provide any sense of unity among women? How can women that have such different experiences hope to understand each other and work together in a common movement? And, if one accepts the relative, historical nature of all experience, as many postmodern scholars do, how can one claim that women's experience is universal? Finally, even if one accepts women's experience as a good source for theological constructions, how can one define either women or

[17] "The Struggle to Name Women's Experience: Assessment and Implications for Theological Construction," 217.

[18] for a more detailed description of postmodern thought see chapter 2.

experience?

All these questions raised are pressing and must be fully explored in order for feminist theology to recover from the attacks it has received. However, a full exploration of each question, which would require volumes to articulate, is not feasible in this thesis. Instead, my thesis will focus on finding and developing some ways in which to initiate a discussion on the topic of women's experience: both reviewing the category of women's experience and suggesting reformulations that will enable it to be better utilized in feminists' theological frameworks.

First, then, I will examine the problem of women's experience in further detail, reviewing how it has been formulated in the works of many important theologians, and its limits, as articulated by black feminist theorists, black feminist theologians, Mujerista theologians, and postmodern theologians. Second, and more importantly, I will attempt new ways in which to view experience by uniting the fields of feminist theology and postmodernism. Looking both to the work of theologian Sheila Greeve Davaney and several postmodern feminist theorist-philosophers, I will describe "women's experience" as historical, relative, and socially bound. In doing this, I will address the problems of diversity and nihilism and offer suggestions for the future of the category in the hopes of providing at least some answers to the questions posed in this introduction.

PART ONE: THE PROBLEM OF "WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE"

In order to understand the current role of women's experience in feminist theology, it is necessary to recognize the rich and important history of its use. Because the definitions of past feminists play such an essential part in theological frameworks that utilize women's experience, they must be identified and taken seriously by anyone attempting to reformulate women's experience. For these reasons, the next two chapters address the history of the claims surrounding women's experience.

1: Developing the Historical Use of Women's Experience

The category of women's experience, as a source for theological frameworks, has manifested itself in a variety of ways within feminist theology. As mentioned in the introduction, many feminist theologians have contributed to the development of women's experience. However, it is possible to articulate a few major themes within the movement by analyzing the works of Valerie Saiving, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Mary Daly.

Saiving, in "The Human Situation: A Feminine View", addresses the issue of biology by developing the distinction between men and women's experience as being tied to the cultural traditions surrounding biological functions. Calling these bio-cultural differences, she discusses child growth, connection with one's mother, and one's sexual functioning. Ruether, in *Sexism and God-Talk* and "A Method of Correlation" analyzes women's unique experience as emerging from critical consciousness and liberation. This critical consciousness, when applied to religion, "makes the sociology of theological knowledge visible"[19] allowing women to use their experience to criticize patriarchal religion and its absolutist claims. Finally, Daly, in *Gyn/Ecology* and *Pure Lust* discusses the need to reject patriarchy and replace it with a woman-centered consciousness. This woman-centered consciousness, which is completely removed from male-dominated society, involves the complete alteration of the mind to a new, non-patriarchal way of thinking.

I. Valerie Saiving

As suggested in the introduction, Valerie Saiving's article "The Human Situation: A Feminine View" is commonly accepted as the ground-breaking article for women's experience in feminist theology. Using the theological constructions of sin and love, with specific reference to Anders Nygen and Reinhold Niebuhr, Saiving proposes the first criticism of male theologians' universalizing of their own particular experience.

[19] Ruether, Rosemary Radford, *Sexism and God-Talk* (Boston:Beacon Press, 1983)

Moreover, she offers an interpretation of women's experience, drawing on the work of anthropologists Margaret Meade and Ruth Benedict, that emphasizes the innate bio-cultural differences between men and women.

For Saiving, "The human condition [experience], according to many contemporary theologians, is universally characterized by anxiety, for while man is a creature, subject to the limitations of all finite existence, he is different from other creatures because he is free."[20] This freedom leads to anxiety, however, as man realizes his limitations. Sin is the attempt, by humans, to elevate and separate themselves, in order to overcome this anxiety. Sin is over-individualism and the placing of one's own concern ultimately ahead of all others. In contrast, love is "completely self-giving, taking no thought for its own interests but seeking only the good of the other."[21]

In Saiving's opinion, this theological construction of sin and love is grounded in the modern era called the "masculine age par excellence"[22] and is based on the experience of men. Women participate in a different set of sin and love experiences that are dictated by essential "bio-cultural" differences.[23]

These differences begin at an early age, when male and female children must first differentiate themselves from the person closest to them; their mother. For girls, this differentiation is not drastic because "the little girl learns that, although she must grow up (become a separate person), she will grow up to be a woman, like her mother, and have babies of her own; she will, in a broad sense, merely take her mother's place."[24] This realization allows her to remain connected with her mother. And, unlike the boy who realizes he will never be like his mother and becomes separate and independent, the

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20 "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," 100.

21 "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," 101.

22 "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," 107. Saiving defines it as such because it has been an age where the male aspects of human nature have been "emphasized, encouraged, and set free." Citing examples of laissez faire economics, scientific exploration, and the public life of politics, she includes in this age the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries.

23 Saiving terms these as "bio-cultural" because they involve both biology, as foundational, and cultural, as influential, in the shaping of experiences.

24 "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," 103.

little girl's realization allows her to attain womanhood quite naturally. With no separation, all the girl must do is wait for her body to mature and her role as mother to be fulfilled. This first difference, occurring in the formative years, distinguishes the active male, who must seek his separate identity, from the passive female, who merely waits for her identity to arrive. Although these biological differences between men and women are further conditioned and altered by the cultural beliefs of a society, they exist as the substratum or core of human's structure.

In light of this experience, it is perfectly reasonable, according to Saiving, for men to identify with classical interpretations of sin as separation and anxiety and love as self-giving altruism. However, it does not fit with the experience of women. In addition to her experience of connection as a young child, when a female matures and becomes a mother, she offers self-transcending love to her child. She gives completely of herself to nurture and care for her child. Unlike the man, she does not distance herself from others. Instead, she develops strong connections with the world.

Therefore, in contrast to a man, a woman's sin is giving too much of herself to others. There is a point when self-giving is excessive to the point of being detrimental. For, if a woman gives too much of herself and not enough to herself, "she can become merely an emptiness, almost a zero, without value to herself, to her fellow men, or, perhaps, even to God."[25] This sin can cause women to be utterly dependent on men and leave them with an underdeveloped, negated self.

II. Rosemary Radford Ruether

In her work, Saiving identifies biology as having a fundamental role in shaping women's experience. To her, only theological frameworks of sin and grace that address this biology and its important impact on the female situation can be valid. Rosemary Radford Ruether agrees with Saiving's emphasis on experience, however, she views it as being shaped in communities by history, tradition, the hermeneutical circle and the critical consciousness of women who have struggled to name their own experience and

25 "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," 108.

criticize the patriarchy.

According to Ruether, experience, which includes "experience of the divine, experience of oneself, and experience of the community and the world, in an interacting dialectic,"[26] serves as the starting and ending point of the hermeneutical circle. This circle follows the path of a revelatory experience (one which transcends ordinary, fragmented consciousness), from its initial acceptance, to its translation into a symbol for a community, to its function as the foundation for a tradition. As a major part of this circle, experience enables communities to evaluate their traditions, providing a way in which to either reject or renew the traditions. If the symbols of the tradition do not mesh with current experience of the holy, of the community or of life, these symbols can no longer function as normative.

Feminist theology, for Ruether, is an important example of this pragmatic test of tradition through experience. Its particular call to women's experience offers a way in which to expose the patriarchal nature of classical theological traditions. By developing the voices and stories of women who have been oppressed and left silent for so long, feminist theology and the call to women's experience "explodes as a critical force, exposing classical theology, including its codified traditions, as based on *male* experience rather than on universal human experience. *Feminist theology makes the sociology of theological knowledge visible*, no longer hidden behind mystifications of objectified divine and universal authority."[27]

In defining women's experience, Ruether, unlike Saiving, does not appeal to all of women's experience. Instead, she focuses on the liberating experiences of women who have been involved in the process of conversion; conversion from oppression to liberation and conversion from male universality to human particularity. Although these conversion experiences differ from culture to culture, overall the oppression of the patriarchy provides enough commonality among women to be able to speak of the

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[26] *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology.*

[27] *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, 13. The italics are mine.

common experience of liberation and critical consciousness. This liberation and critical consciousness allows women to stand outside of their patriarchal tradition and critique the classical interpretations of who and what they are. It also serves as the critical tool that challenges the hermeneutical circle.

Women, by virtue of their experience of oppression and silence, offer a "fundamental principle of judgment" to the patriarchal tradition. This judgment ultimately points to the promotion and affirmation of their own full humanity and is involved in uncovering authentic layers of truth. Women are involved in rediscovering glimmers of truth that "touch on a deeper bedrock of authentic Being." [28] By their work, women are experiencing the divine, because "what does promote the full humanity of women is of the Holy, does reflect true relation to the divine, is the true nature of things, is the authentic message of redemption and the mission of redemptive community."[29]

III. Mary Daly

Among the three theologians discussed in this chapter, Mary Daly and her idea about the nature of women's experience as being involved with a women-centered consciousness, is by far the most radical. Although Saiving's and Ruether's view of women's experience are strongly grounded in a female-consciousness, Daly advances this idea to a new level. For Daly, **true** women's experience must completely break from the patriarchal tradition. Patriarchy has proven itself to be the root of all evil, orchestrated by all men to dominate women. It cannot be salvaged and therefore must be rejected if women are to survive. To do this, women must separate themselves from any "elementary thinking" related to the male tradition. Using the imagery of a demonic possession, Daly suggests women must exorcise patriarchy from their bodies and minds.[30] This exorcism involves the rejection of all patriarchal trappings, including religion and much language. Christianity, with its male images of God and the Trinity and its

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[28] *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology,* 18.

[29] Ruether, Rosemary Radford, "A Method of Correlation," in *Feminist Interpretations of the Bible* (Philadelphia:Westminster Press, 1985): 115.

[30] Daly, Mary, *Gyn/Ecology* (Boston:Beacon Press, 1978), 2.

suppression of the Goddess figure, and much language, with its meanings firmly grounded in mysogony, are purely patriarchal expressions.

Women who embrace a women-centered consciousness must also reject any other women who hold on, even partially, to patriarchy and who renounce separatism. For, as Daly writes, "without the internal burning away of false selves, which is radical separatism, and which requires clear analysis, women in all-female gatherings and communities uncritically fall into the role of mirroring male-ordered society."[31]

This separatism leads to the promotion of a unique female-centered consciousness. As Sheila Greeve Davaney argues, Daly's idea of consciousness differs from others because it focuses purely on the struggle to eliminate patriarchy as being one battled in the mind. Instead of linking women's experience and critical consciousness to "an awareness to the public struggle against institutions and structures,"[32] Daly concentrates on developing it as a state of mind. According to Daly, consciousness is a way of thinking and involves the revolutionizing of attitudes.

This revolutionizing occurs through the rediscovery of old meanings and the creation of new meanings for words to name women's experience. It also occurs through the "unforgetting" of the Elemental, first principles. This process of unforgetting allows women to remember themselves, who they are, where they came from and where the fundamental source of everything truly lies. It also allows women to transcend patriarchal falsehoods and access the true reality of their universe.

2: Analyzing the Claims of Feminist Theology

The definitions of women's experience offered by Valerie Saiving, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Mary Daly draw from different sources; from biology to liberation to a women-centered consciousness. Yet all three make similar claims about the universality of women's experience and its access to true reality. All three recognize diversity, but still

[31] Daly, Mary, *Pure Lust* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 143.

[32] "Limits of the Appeal to Women's Experience," 39.

ultimately point to a fundamental grounding of women's experience that suggests commonality among women. And all three claim that women's experience involves an absolute relation to the way things really are.

First, in terms of universalizing women's experience, Saiving, Ruether and Daly take their definitions of the experience to be used in feminist theological frameworks and make them absolute, grounded in some sort of fundamental truth. As Davaney suggests, these three theologians believe that "feminist experience and consciousness yield a more accurate reading of reality, including the nature and purposes of what might be termed the 'divine'.'[33]

For Saiving, the unique biology of women and their resulting experiences serve as the core of women's substratum. For Ruether, the experience of oppression under patriarchy and the liberation of gaining a critical consciousness both allow women to participate in the restoration of authentic humanity and the rediscovering of "glimmers of truth". Finally, for Daly, the unique essence of women and their turn to a women-centered consciousness, provides women with a direct access to the First Principles and elemental truths of the universe.

Secondly, due to this grounding in absolute truth, Saiving, Ruether and Daly claim to provide a way in which to unite women. To do this, they assert that their respective definition of women's experience is, in some way, absolute, thereby experienced by all "authentic" women. Whether it be biology, liberation or women-centered consciousness, each theologians' interpretation of women's experience offers a commonality that links women together and allows women to form feminist communities.

These claims of universality and commonality evident either implicitly, as is the case with Saiving, or explicitly, as is the case with Ruether and Daly, have received criticism from the feminist community. In particular, this criticism has taken the form of two different accusations: exclusion and essentialism.[34]

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[33] "The Limits of the Appeal to Women's Experience," 42.

[34] The categorization of these criticisms is taken from Patrice Diquinzio's article "Exclusion and Essentialism in Feminist Theory: The Problem of Mothering," in *Hypatia* (8 no 3 Summer 1993).

I. Exclusion[35]

For many non-white, non-heterosexual, non-western European, or non-middle class feminist theologians, the appeal to commonality, particularly couched in Ruether's and Daly's terms and not so much in Saiving's, is exclusive.[36] American Black women, lesbians, and Third World women have all raised this issue of exclusion, stating that when making this claim of commonality, white women have often only identified their own particular experiences, assuming that these experiences are true for all women. In this way, they have deemed their experiences to be universal and the norm from which everything else should be judged. Black feminist theorist bell hooks [sic] identified this problem in her 1984 work *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Describing the marginalization of black women within the movement, she observes that the "white women who dominate feminist discourse today rarely question whether or not their perspective on women's reality is true to the lived experience of women as a collective group."[37]

The results of this universalizing of women's experience, although many, have all led to the exclusion of the diverse experiences of such women as Blacks, Latin Americans, homosexuals, or Asians. As Barbara Omolade puts it, white feminists, "by confining their theories to their own particular history and culture . . . have denied the history and culture of women of color and have objectively excluded them from equal participation in the women's movement."[38] White women have excluded the diverse experiences of women by failing to understand that in addition to gender, race and class also play important roles in women's lives. For many women, their experiences as black, Latin American or lower class for example are inextricably tied to their gender as women. One

[35] For further reading on this topic, see *God's Fierce Whimsy*.

[36] I make this qualification because the concept of women's experience as being biologically based that Saiving discusses in her article has not been under attack by non-white feminist theologians as much as Ruether or Daly's definitions of women's experience. In fact, the main criticism of Saiving biological position will be addressed in the section on postmodern women's criticisms.

[37] hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory:From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 3.

[38] "Exclusion and Essentialism in Feminist Theory: The Problem of Mothering," 5. This quote is taken originally from Barbara Omolade "Black women and feminism," in *The Future of Difference* (New Brunswck:Rutgers University, 1987).

cannot separate these important experiences, nor can one place them in a hierarchical framework, claiming gender has more importance than race or class.[39] Because of this, bell hooks writes, "they [white feminists] reflect the deviant tendency in western patriarchal minds to mystify woman's reality by insisting that gender is the sole determinant of women's fate."[40] Similar criticisms for a Mujerista's perspective have been offered by Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, a Latin American theologian who has been an important leader in the Mujerist[41] movement.

Many white feminists have thereby excluded diverse experiences by assigning them a secondary role within the movement. Due to this, non-white women who do not share the experiences of white feminists and desire to recognize their own unique experiences feel they are not authentic and false in some way. As Davaney writes, "the implication [of commonality] is that perspectives that do not recognize this commonality or assign it a perephial status are misguided, if not distorted and false like patriarchal visions."[42] This marginalization is particularly strong in Daly's account of authentic women-centered consciousness. As discussed in chapter one, to Daly any feminists who choose to emphasize diversity as opposed to commonality are in some way "mirroring male society," thereby helping to perpetuate it.

This feeling of exclusion is addressed by many non-white theorists in their work. In "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," black writer Audre Lorde laments the white feminist theorist and theologian's lack of discussion concerning difference and the varied experiences that women have. In this lament she identifies the exclusion of difference in feminist theory to be merely a maintaining of the exclusion that patriarchy perpetuated. And to this she asks, "what does it mean when the tools of a

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[39] For an interesting discussion of the relationship between race, gender and class in women's history, see *Visible Women* (Chicago: Urbana Press, 1993).

[40] *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 14.

[41] For an overview of the Mujerist movement see the article "Defining our Proyecto Historico" Mujerista Strategies for liberation," in *Journal of Feminist Studies of Religion* (9 no 1-2 Spring-Fall 1993), 17 (12).

[42] "The Limits of The Appeal to Women's Experience," 33.

racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy?"[43] As she continues this essay, which was given at the Second Sex Conference on October 29, 1979, Lorde argues for the necessity of embracing difference if women are to accomplish anything through the feminist movement. "For difference must not be merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can speak like a dialectic."[44]

More evidence of the exclusion of diverse experiences has been the failure of white women to try to understand different women's experiences. Mary Daly has been particularly targeted for this in Audre Lorde's "An Open Letter to Mary Daly."[45] In this letter, Lorde questions Daly in her failure to include goddess images beyond those of the white, western-european, judeao-christian tradition in her work *Gyn/Ecology*. "Why doesn't Mary deal with Afrekete as an example?" Lorde asks. "Where was Afrekete, Yemanje, Oyo and Mawulisa? Where are the warrior-goddesses of the Vodun, the Dohemian Amazons and the warrior-women of Dan?"[46]

Lorde continues this criticism by identifying how Daly only dealt with non-european women as "victims and preyers upon each other."[47] Quotations from black women were only used in the context of Daly's section on african genital mutilation. Moreover, Lorde questions whether Daly has ever actually read the work of black women, or if she merely "hunt[ed] through only to find words that would legitimize her chapter on genital mutilation in the eyes of other black women?"[48]

Finally, Lorde returns this to the initial issue of universalizing white experience as she pleads:

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[43] Lorde, Audre "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *This Bridge Called My Back:Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table, 1981), 99.

[44]"The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," 99.

[45] Lorde, Audre "An Open Letter to Mary Daly," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table, 1981) .

[46]"An Open Letter to Mary Daly," 94.

[47]"An Open Letter to Mary Daly," 94.

[48]"An Open Letter to Mary Daly," 96.

> 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. I ask that you be aware of the effect that this dismissal has upon the community of black women, and how it devalues your own words.[49]

This plea is also a good summary of the exclusion argument. To many women of color, white feminists, who have argued their particular experience as absolute and universal, are undermining the integrity of the entire feminist theological movement. Their assumptions have left women of difference on the outside, marginalized and only acknowledged when it serves the purpose of the white feminist. This serious attack on the category of women's experience is not the only one being leveled against feminist theologians. In addition to this, many postmodernists have strongly criticized the idea of essentialism.

II. Essentialism

In addition to the charge of exclusion, many feminists, most particularly postmodernists, offer criticism to those who champion the essential essence of women and her experience. Although these postmodern feminists do propose many of the same criticisms to the definitions of women's experience suggested by Saiving, Ruether and Daly, such as a rejection of the appeal to commonality and to a universal experience, their critiques are developed from different arguments and drawn from different premises than those who criticize due to exclusion. Postmodern feminists argue on a theoretical level, attacking women's experience for its ontological and essential claims and its attempts to foundationalize experience.

According to postmodern feminists[50], Truth(with a capital"T") claims cannot be made. These claims, which attempt to represent "the way things really are," are false because they fail to consider the way in which all values, opinions and beliefs are shaped

[49]"An Open Letter to Mary Daly," 96.

[50] As a movement and way of thinking, postmodernism encompasses a variety of definitions and ideas about truth, reality, and universality. Therefore, this section will limit itself to the postmodernism articulated by Sheila Greeve Davaney in "The Limits of the Appeal to Women's Experience."

by social and historical factors. Instead, only truth (with a lower case "t") claims which recognize that all humans and ideas of reality are human constructs, created by history and sociology, can be made. Arguing from a postmodern historicist viewpoint, Davaney asserts that "human beings, male and female alike, are culturally- and socially-defined beings who exist, act and know within a network of historically-constructed linguistic and symbolic meanings and values."[51] These networks are local, based in particular communities, and varied due to location and background.

Implicit in this assertion of networks is the idea that there can be no truth beyond history or particular communities. Because of the purely historical nature of everything, truth claims that exist outside of history are not valid. There can be no way in which to appeal to some metanarrative or foundation that Truly exists. All things are laden with the values that have been created by social communities and history.

Because of this, many postmodern thinkers take on the project of critically assessing claims that have been asserted as absolute and universal by analyzing the ways in which culture, tradition and the values of a community have influenced the claims and demonstrating the cultural and historical biases they possess. Postmodern feminists apply this tool of critical thinking to the claims of universal and common experience.

One of the most significant ways in which postmodern feminists have felt it necessary to critically assess women's experience is in their objection to essentialism. Simply put, essentialism "refers to the existence of fixed characteristics, given attributes,and ahistorical functions that limit the possibilities of change and social reorganization."[52] According to postmodern feminists, the claims of essentialism must be analyzed in two key ways. First, the concept of "woman" must be unpacked. What is woman? Is there some essential nature to woman or is woman primarily a product of social and historical structures? Secondly, the role of women's experience must be examined and assessed. To what does women's experience point? Does it provide a way

[51] "The Limits of the Appeal to Women's Experience," 45.

[52] Grosz, Elizabeth "Sexual Difference and the Problem of Essentialism," in *the essential difference* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 84.

to access some foundational experience, some absolute truth or is it only a reflection of the values that specific communities maintain?

In terms of the first concept, postmodern feminists have difficulty with the claim by many feminist theologians, particularly Saiving and Daly, that women possess some essential nature. Those advocating an essential nature argue for the celebration of being "female" and of having a distinct essence due to this femaleness. This essential nature draws heavily from the biology of women. Describing those who make this claim as cultural feminists, Linda Alcoff, in her article "Cultural Feminism Versus Poststructuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory" identifies their key point to be that "our [women] specifically female anatomy is the primary constituent of our identity and the source of our female essence."[53]

Valerie Saiving reflects this argument in her definition of women's experience through her explanation of the bio-cultural differences between men and women. These differences, although partly grounded in cultural influences, focus on biology through the developing females identification with her mother, the passivity of sexual acts, and the motherhood role.

Daly, too argues for the essential nature of women in her work *Gyn/Ecology*. Although her appeal to biology is somewhat less obvious, she does nevertheless use gender-specific biological functions to assert her unique women-centered consciousness. Reflecting on motherhood, Daly writes that female energy "flows from our [women's] life-affirming, life-creating biological condition."[54] Describing this as biophilic, Daly asserts that man's inability to bear children leads him to "dominate and control that which is vitally necessary to them: the life energy of women." [55]

However, Saiving and Daly do not stop their argument at the biological level. The idea of an essential, completely female nature for women transcends the biological

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[53] Alcoff, Linda "Cultural Feminism Versus Poststructuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," in *Signs* (13 no 3 Spring 1988), 410.

[54] "Cultural Feminism Versus Poststructuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," 408.

[55] "Cultural Feminism Versus Poststructuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," 408.

distinctions that exist between men and women. By appealing to the "female," such feminists place women's experience completely in the realm of gender. The ultimate rallying point for women and the most important source of their identity is their gender. The female essence strikes at the core of what it means to be female and of what types of abilities this femaleness provides women. For Daly, as identified by Davaney, this idea of essence provides women "with innate, adequate, and true knowledge of Be-ing."[56] For Saiving, it gives women a unique way, different from men, in which to experience sin and grace.

Postmodern feminists vehemently reject this idea of an essential nature and strive to dispel the claims that it makes. First, by relying so heavily on biology, postmodern feminists contend that essentialism can easily lead to biological reductionism, where women are reduced to their biological functions. This reduction ignores women who do not experience these things and begs the question; is a women that does not have children a women included in the category of women's experience?

Elizabeth Grusz defines this biological reductionism in essentialism as biologism. According to her, biologism is:

> an attempt to limit women's social and psychological capacities according to biologically established limits . . . . Insofar as biology is assumed to constitute an unalterable bedrock of identity the attribution of biologistic characteristics amounts to a permanent form of social containment for women.[57]

Furthermore, the assertion that women have some essential nature has been further criticized because it posits women's essence as innate and her gendered experience as ultimately transcendent of history, culture and location. This essence suggests gender is an element of women that exists prior to any social construction of identity. In this way, gender "participates in the reification of [the female] identity," implying that the "identity 'woman' is always a function of . . . gender and thus the women's situations or experiences are essentially the same in all social, cultural and

[56] "The Limits of the Appeal to Women's Experience," 42.

[57] "Sexual Difference and the Problem of Essentialism," 85.

historical contexts."[58]

In connection with this, postmodern feminists contend that the construction of an essential nature reinvokes the fundamental mechanism of oppressive power, "forc[ing] the individual back on herself and tying her to her own identity in a constraining way."[59] In this way, women become "trapped" in the identity that has been defined for them. By their very celebration of a unique female essence, many feminists are continuing to support the patriarchal model of distinction and separation due to gender.

Finally, an essential essence also necessitates a universal concept of "woman". It appeals to a foundation that must be inherently true for all women and claims that women's essence is the Truth (with a capital T). In her article, "Exclusion and Essentialism in Feminist Theory: The Problem of Mothering," Patrice DiQuinzio criticizes this assertion of a universal woman, suggesting that

> Feminist theory must abandon the project of giving a universally valid account of the social construction of gender and a universal history of patriarchy and turn to particularized experiences, some of which will not feature gender as a significant explanatory concept.[60]

In addition to the issues of gender and biology, postmodern feminists criticize many feminist theologians, including Saiving, Ruether and Daly, for their claims that women's experience is ontologically valid. Saiving, Ruether and Daly all claim that women's experience has access to truth and the "way things really are". To them, naming and utilizing women's experience firmly grounds feminist theology in **true** reality. Moreover, in connection with this access to true reality, Saiving, Ruether and Daly all suggest that women's experience is absolute and a priori and inherent, existing before any socialization or history.

In terms of Ruether and Daly[61], both of their definitions of women's experiences

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58 "Exclusion and Essentialism in Feminist Theory: The Problem of Mothering," 6.

59 "Cultural Feminism Versus Poststructuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," 415.

60 "Exclusion and Essentialism in Feminist Theory: The Problem of Mothering," 8.

61 Saiving's position on women's experience is different in this respect. Although she does claim it involves the truth, her vision of women's experience stands as one other position, different, but no more valid than men's experience.

"claim a validity for feminist interpretations of reality which they refuse to grant to the visions of patriarchal males (and perhaps non-feminist women), which they label false, distorted and perverted."[62] However, Ruether's definition of women's experience differs from the essentialism of Daly. She denies the essential nature of women due to biology or gender, instead advocating the importance of socialization and community. But, even though Ruether denies this biological essentialism, she still promotes the unique privilege of women and their access to Truth. To her, the privileged position of women may not be due to some superior attributes, but it is due to a particular location in the historical struggle to end oppression. Women, due to their struggle to end oppression, are involved in uncovering authentic layers of Truth. "Their "location in the historical struggles generates knowledge both of historical processes and of the nature and purposes of the God or God/ess who participates in the struggles for liberation and empowerment."[63]

Sheila Greeve Davaney specifically addresses these issues of ontological validity, focusing her article "The Limits of the Appeal to Women's Experience" on raising questions about these ontological claims and offering new postmodern solutions to women's experience. Responding to Ruether's claims of privileged location, Davaney suggests they represent "a failure to carry through the insights of the historicism that informs so much of her work."[64] Although Ruether does emphasize the social nature of women, writes Davaney, she fails to recognize the social nature of their experience. Instead, she grants women's experiences of oppression and liberation a privileged position, one that is ultimately absolute.

To Davaney, ideas of truth are wrapped up in particular social and historical perceptual models. How one perceives the world affects how truths are formulated. In the same way, women's experience is involved in these processes. Just as one can have no world beyond interpretation, one can have have no experience beyond one's

62 "The Limits of the Appeal to Women's Experience," 42.

63 "The Limits of the Appeal to Women's Experience," 42.

64 "The Limits of the Appeal to Women's Experience," 43.

perceptions and interpretations of reality. There is no value-free vantage point from which one can view reality and there is no fundamental, essential experience that one has prior to perception. For these reason, experience, in itself, must be historicized. It must be viewed as a social product, one that is relative, ambiguous and challengeable.[65]

Joan Scott, in her article "Experience" offers her own explanation of the historicizing of women's experience. According to her, historicizing experience allows us to view experience as "that about which knowledge is produced."[66] Because, in this view, experience does not become the origin of an explanation or the authoritative evidence, grounding what is known, it enables scholars to utilize experience in a more critical way.[67]

In addition to this historicizing of women's experience, Davaney argues that there must be a turn to particular experiences. Agreeing with those who criticized the category of women's experience for its exclusion, she rejects the idea of starting with a foundation of commonality. For her, commonality and solidarity cannot be assumed, they must be viewed as historical projects yet to be achieved.[68] Instead, particular, local experiences must be explored. These experiences identify the ways in which humans are socially defined. Furthermore, by recognizing the social and communal nature of all experiences, one can understand how they demonstrate "our systems of values, reflections of fundamental judgments and commitments."[69]

The recognition of the relative nature of experience, through both the historicizing of experience and an appreciation of the value-ladened perceptions of reality, places the issue of women's experience on the pragmatic level. Instead of determining who can claim divine authority, this allows communities to deal with the issue in terms of concrete and practical consequences. These pragmatic, practical norms necessitate the

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65 "The Limits of the Appeal to Women's Experience," 46.

66 Scott, Joan. "Experience," in *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1992): 26.

67 "Experience," 26.

68 "The Limits of the Appeal to Women's Experience," 46.

69 "The Limits of the Appeal to Women's Experience," 46.

involvement of communities, working towards the evaluation of experience in terms of the values embraced and attempting to redefine truth.

In her view of women's experience as historical and socially constructed, Davaney acknowledges the important contributions scholars such as Ruether and Daly have made. But, she also recognizes their pitfalls. Her definition represents a purely postmodern, historicist expression of women's experience.

This postmodern critique of women's experience brings us to the end of the first section. The definitions of women's experience given by Valerie Saiving, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Mary Daly have offered insight into the nature of the claims of women's experience as a category for theological constructions. And the criticisms of these claims, in terms of exclusion and essentialism, have further enhanced this insight, offering a more complex study of the claims.

Now we must turn to the current use of the category of women's experience and once again asks ourselves; does the category of women's experience limit feminist theology? And, how can we reformulate the category to work better for us? Part Two of this thesis will discuss this issue: both by articulating the present use of women's experience as a category for women's experience and by offering ways to reformulate women's experience to meet these problems.

PART TWO: THE REFORMULATION OF WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE

Presently those using the category of women's experience have incorporated much of the criticism offered by exclusionist and essentialist arguments. Many definitions of women's experience now address the need for more diverse accounts of experience. The result has been the voicing of a myriad of women, naming their unique experience as Black, Latin American, Jewish or lesbian. White feminists, as well, have begun to address these experiences in their own work.

Many feminists have also responded to the criticism offered by postmodernists and

rejected the claim of essentialism. They recognize that they do not possess some unique essence which allows them to access reality. They furthermore accept that their position is not *the* position, as they begin to qualify their arguments and provide a more specific definition of their location, perspective and historical tradition.

By responding to the criticisms of exclusion and essentialism, some feminists strengthened the category of women's experience and its role as the basis for theological frameworks. However, in their responses, feminists further complicated the category as well. Those using the category of women's experience may have begun to address the criticisms it faces, but they have not arrived at all of the solutions. If the category of women's experience is to remain, it must be reformulated in a way that both recognizes and acts upon these concerns, offering new solutions to the problem. The next two chapters address these concerns.

3: Assessing the Present Use of Women's Experience

Celebrating the tenth anniversary of the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion,* a panel of women commented on, "what it means to do feminist scholarship in religion in the twenty-first century,"[70] by discussing the challenges faced by feminist scholars and possible solutions to these challenges. Included among these challenges were the ideas of exclusion, essentialism and uncritical approaches to women's experience.

Sheila Greeve Davaney, a participant, saw the goal of this panel as assessing "where we find ourselves at this moment, to get our bearings by examining the issues that confront us at this juncture and to explore the possible new trajectories feminist scholars in religion might take."[71] Drawing from her article "The Limits of the Appeal to Women's

[70] "Roundtable Discussion: What's in a Name? Exploring the Dimensions of What 'Feminist Studies in Religion' Means," in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* (11 no 1 Spring 1995). Included in this panel are: Miriam Peskowitz, Maria Pilar Aquino, Sheila Greeve Davaney, Nantawan B. Lewis, Emilie M. Townes and Judith Plaskow.

[71] Davaney, Sheila Greeve. "Roundtable Discussion: What's in a Name? Exploring the Dimensions of What 'Feminist Studies in Religion' Means," in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* (11 no 1 Spring 1995): 119-123.

Experience," Davaney discusses the historicizing of women and their experiences, which since the time of that article, has been implemented by many feminist scholars. Women as historical subjects, with particular experiences and emerging from distinct situations, have become the focus of much feminist theory. The idea of one, universal 'woman' "has been replaced by the multitudes of women and a common women's experience has been fractured into a plurality of historically unique, diverse and indeed contradictory forms of historical existence."[72]

According to Davaney, this turn to historicism has been quite beneficial. Because of it, many feminists have recognized and addressed difference. They have acknowledged their responsibility and accountability for the theories they present. They have focused more closely on concrete and particular women's experiences. And they have reflected more on what it means to be products of historical traditions.[73]

For all of these reasons, women's experience, as a category for theological frameworks, has met the challenges it has been offered and has projected new possibilities for feminist theology. However, Davaney warns, this historicizing of women's experience has also raised serious questions about the future of feminist theology and the category of women's experience. From these questions, Davaney develops three areas of concern.

First, due to the pluralistic, contingent and ambiguous nature of traditions, the past has been radically relativized. Feminists have "stripp[ed] its [the past's] artifacts of their normativity, denying ancient texts, persons, doctrines and practiced presumptions of authority."[74] This raises many questions. How do we define the past? And "what happens when we recognize that we are indeed traditioned but that many of us do not reside within the confines of one tradition, plural through it may be, but at the juncture of

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[72] "Roundtable Discussion: What's in a Name? Exploring the Dimensions of What 'Feminist Studies in Religion' Means," 120.

[73] "Roundtable Discussion: What's in a Name? Exploring the Dimensions of What 'Feminist Studies in Religion' Means," 120.

[74] "Roundtable Discussion: What's in a Name? Exploring the Dimensions of What 'Feminist Studies in Religion' Means," 121.

multiple, different, even sometimes contradictory, traditions?"[75]

Judith Plaskow echoes this feeling in her commentary, writing that "the dissolution of any sense of unified tradition can also undercut our ability to name the sources of our oppression. Power that is conceptualized as dispersed everywhere can also be hard to locate in any particular place."[76] In this way, the relativizing of the past has ultimately led to the rejection of any unified traditions and has further complicated the naming of oppression by women.

Davaney's second concern involving the historicizing of women's experience is its eclipsing of women's experience and of the female nature. By denying women their essence and claiming that their experience is purely particular, not reaching beyond local communities, feminists have made it difficult to speak of women's experience. Women, without commonalities, find it hard to relate to each other and share mutual interests. "Can we truly understand one another," Davaney asks, " or are we always reduced to superficial relationships of show-and-tell or contentious relationships of competing interest and power?"[77] Moreover, how do women speak to each other from one local, self-enclosed community to the next? And, why should they even bother? It seems as if the multitude of voices and the plurality of experience has led to a new tower of Babel, where women are so distinct and far removed from each other that they cannot identify with one another.

The third and final concern Davaney expresses is that historicism often encourages nihilism. Davaney poses this, asking, "Have we lost both our bases for political action and our subject matter for scholarly exploration? Are feminist studies in religion anachronistic?"[78] Not only has the past been relativized, as mentioned above, but so has

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[75]"Roundtable Discussion: What's in a Name? Exploring the Dimensions of What 'Feminist Studies in Religion' Means," 121.

[76] Plaskow, Judith. "Roundtable Discussion: What's in a Name? Exploring the Dimensions of What 'Feminist Studies in Religion' Means," in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* (11 no 1 Spring 1995).

[77] "Roundtable Discussion: What's in a Name? Exploring the Dimensions of What 'Feminist Studies in Religion' Means," 121.

[78] "Roundtable Discussion: What's in a Name? Exploring the Dimensions of What 'Feminist Studies in Religion' Means,"122.

the present and the future. Because of this, feminists have left themselves without any basis for argument. And, their rejection of the "woman" has left no subject to discuss or liberate.

Linda Alcoff pursues this argument in "Cultural Feminism Versus Poststructuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," by studying the claim that postmodernism postulates that woman is purely a fiction. This idea of fiction leads to the denial of the category of gender. For, if woman is a fictional framework, gender must be as well. This implication is particularly dangerous for Alcoff. "If gender is simply a social construct, the need and even the possibility of a feminist politics becomes problematic . . . How can we speak out against sexism as detrimental to the interests of women if the category is a fiction?"[79]

In the introduction to *Feminism / Postmodernism*, Linda Nicholson poses this dilemma in another way as she questions the feasibility of combining feminism and postmodernism.

> Most fundamentally, does not the adoption of postmodernism really entail the destruction of feminism, since does not feminism itself depend on a relatively unified notion of the social subject 'woman,' a notion postmodernism would attack?[80]

In discussing women's experience, Davaney is not alone in recognizing the benefits and problems. In her commentary, Nantawan B. Lewis addresses the issue of exclusion and women's experience.[81] According to Lewis, women's experience has begun to embrace difference. The movement of feminist theology has expanded to include the voices of womanists, mujeristas, American Indians, Asians and Asian Americans. All of these women have offered their own unique experiences to feminist theology. They have also earnestly continued to challenge any definitions for experience that deny diversity and equally valid experiences. Lewis, describing these as challenges of dewesternization

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[79]"Cultural Feminism Versus Poststructuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," 420.

[80] Nicholson, Linda, ed. *Feminism / Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

[81] Lewis, Nantawan B. "Roundtable Discussion: What's in a Name? Exploring the Dimensions of What 'Feminist Studies in Religion' Means," in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* (11 no 1 Spring 1995):

and decolonization, contends that there are currently three major approaches to the issues of diversity: binary, ethnocentric and multicultural.

According to Lewis, a binary approach attempts to show the ways in which women of color and white women are intertwined, by acknowledging "the intersection of race, class, nationality, religiosity, sexuality and gender that shapes ones existence."[82] An ethnocentric approach posits women of color as historical and theological agents, supporting the sea of voices of diverse experience by placing them at the center of religion scholarship[83] and embracing their distinctive experiences by creating new categories of understanding. A multicultural approach strives to include all voices and all differences in religious experiences, discussing all levels of racial, sexual and cultural experience.

In her descriptions of these three types, Lewis offers some praise by acknowledging that all three approaches have made significant contributions to the furthering of the feminist scholarship in religion and its dialogues concerning difference. However, all three present dangerous and detrimental problems as well. First, by focusing on a particular racial group in comparison with the dominant group, the binary approach limits the issue, viewing it in "black-and-white terms and making other experiences invisible."[84] Second, the ethnocentric approach, in categorizing these different voices, has a tendency to use groupings like *the* Asian group, the Black group, or the Latin American group. This fails to recognize the diversity of voices among all of these groups, thereby continuing to deny particular experiences. Suffering from the same tendency to group, the final approach, multicultural, fails to address the issues of conflict between different women in its desire to include all voices, fails to address the issues.

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82 "Roundtable Discussion: What's in a Name? Exploring the Dimensions of What 'Feminist Studies in Religion' Means," 125.

83 "Roundtable Discussion: What's in a Name? Exploring the Dimensions of What 'Feminist Studies in Religion' Means," 125.

84 "Roundtable Discussion: What's in a Name? Exploring the Dimensions of What 'Feminist Studies in Religion' Means," 125.

Maria C. Lugones, in her article "On the Logic of Pluralist Feminism,"[85] characterizes these failures in issues of diversity as the white feminist theorists ability to recognize the *problem of difference*, but not the difference itself. This recognition has led to the misunderstanding of what exclusion *really* represents.

Recognizing the problem of difference does not require that a white feminist actively respond. It only requires a non interactive response. This non interaction is evidenced in the ubiquitous disclaimers offered by many white feminists. As Lugones states it, "The initial claim seems to be that 'there are many ways of being, but we can still theorize about women if we acknowledge in some way or other that not everything we say is true of all women'."[86] Due to this, women argue only from their position, reasoning that what they claim may not with all women. Instead of being inclusive, this disclaimer has the opposite effect. It establishes distinct limits that place the reader either inside or outside of the discussion. Those outside of the discussion, who do not experience the things in the way the author does, are left with no way to interact with those on the inside. Toinette Eugene discusses this idea in "On 'Difference' and the Dream of Pluralist Feminism," writing that disclaimers allow white feminists to disengage; "to avoid interacting with the *other*."[87]

In "Viva la Diferencia!" Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz reflects these sentiments. For her, the non-interactive disengagement has sanctioned the phenomenon "invisible invisibility."[88] Although the problem of difference has forced white feminists to acknowledge the presence of other women, this acknowledgement is merely a "quick nod-of-the-head . . . the politically correct response one gets from those those in control when they do not want to take on seriously."[89] This acknowledgement, which Isasi-Diaz refers to as

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85 Lugones, Maria C. "On the Logic of Pluralist Feminism," in *Feminist Ethics* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas, 1991)

86 "On the Logic of Pluralist Feminism," 38.

87 Eugene, Toinette "On 'Difference' and the Dream of Pluralist Feminism," in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* (8 no 2 Fall 1995): 96.

88 Isasi-Diaz, Ada Maria "Viva la Diferencia!," in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* (8 no 2 Fall 1995)

89 "Viva la Diferencia!," 100.

"respect," does not envision difference and plurality as being positive in any way and does not take difference seriously.

The failure to take difference seriously is also expressed by Kwok Pui-Lan in her article, "Speaking from the Margins".[90] Pui-Lan does not see many white feminists utilizing other traditions in any critical way. Citing Mary Daly's and Daphne Hampton's use of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* in their books, Pui-Lan recalls one of her Afro-American students asking, "What right do they have to use Alice Walker's novel when their books do not even deal with the question of racism?"[91]

To Pui-Lan, incorporating and appropriating difference must be taken seriously. White feminists must look critically at the examples of different cultures they are implementing and ask themselves, What other factors are involved in this experience? They must also see beyond their own romantic notions of other cultures and view all members of a culture, including those oppressed by the tradition. White feminist theorists must adopt and incorporate difference using care and caution

From these accounts, it is evident that the category of women's experience is still quite problematic. The current responses by postmodernists and excluded women have not resolved the issues. Postmodernists, through their historicizing of women and their experience, have transformed the category into a plurality of experiences; fragmented, ambiguous and purely particular. Excluded women continue to claim that although some white feminists have recognized the problem of difference, very few have effectively or sufficiently responded to the different and unique experiences of women. White feminists fail to address this difference in a way that affects and conveys appreciation and respect for all women of diverse backgrounds.

It would seem that with all of this criticism being heaped upon women's experience, it would be beneficial to drop the category altogether. However, the category

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[90] Pui-Lan, Kwok "Speaking from the Margins," in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* (8 no 2 Fall 1995)

[91] Pui-Lan, Kwok "Speaking from the Margins," 103.

of women's experience continues to provide women with a way to offer their particular voices, to name their own unique ideas and to develop theological constructions that fit with their lives. By drawing upon their own lives and everyday experiences, women formulate theological constructions that address what is important to them and their communities as opposed to what is important to some generic concept of "man".

In general, experience, although not the sole basis for theological constructions, is an important and necessary category for these constructions. Theological constructions, such as myths and sacred stories are constructed to explain the world, give meaning to our lives and help us to understand what is most important to us. These constructions are heavily shaped and patrolled by our experiences, to ensure that they continue to do the work for which they were created.[92]

Experience is also important because it allows for a different perspective, facilitating ways in which to discover new meanings within life for theological constructions. According to Paul Lauritzen in "Ethics and Experience: The Case of the Curious Response,"[93] an appeal to experience offers attention to the particulars of life, giving a richer, more complex and "fitting" description of what is important. Sheila Greeve Davaney adds to this idea of experience, suggesting that without these particular attentions, theological constructions can remain generic, overly rational and purely dogmatic. Agreeing with Ruether and Daly, she contends that attempts at appealing to "value-free reason and transcendently based revelation"[94] have allowed those in power, mostly men, to define and control revelation. Appeals to experience, particularly women's experience, allow for "the relocation of critical norms"[95] from this neutral reason to the more personal and particular. This shift rejects any and all claims of

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[92] Kaufman, Gordon *In Face of Mystery* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993.

[93] Lauritzen, Paul "Ethics and Experience: The Case of the Curious Response," in *Hastings Center Report* (26 no 1, 1996). This article discusses the appeal to experience in moral arguments. In particular, Lauritzen gives a fascinating account of how a discussion of a burn victim's pain and suffering shifts the interpretive frame from a purely rational argument to one that draws attention to details otherwise overlooked. This allows for a richer analysis and a more relevant assessment.

[94] The Limits of the Appeal to Women's Experience," 45.

[95] The Limits of the Appeal to Women's Experience," 31.

absolute authority within theological frameworks.

Finally, taking the practical argument of Joan Scott in her article, "Experience," the category of women's experience is essential and cannot be dropped because it is so embedded within our constructions. As Scott suggests:

> . . . experience is so much a part of everyday language, so imbricated in our narratives that it seems futile to argue for its expulsion. It serves as a way of talking about what happened, of establishing difference and similarity, of claiming knowledge that is "unassailable".[96]

For these reasons, women's experience, as a category, must be maintained. This is not so say that should it be offered as a monolithic category, one that should stand unchallenged and fundamentally correct. In echoing the women who have criticized the use of women's experiences in past feminist theological constructions, I believe that experience can be a dangerous category if left untouched and uncriticized. Denise Riley discusses the need for a more critical approach to women's experience, particularly definitions of gender, in *Am I That Name?,* writing that women's experience "must be looked at with an eagle eye . . . ."[97] This eagle eye approach can help to discern the factors involved in particular experience, including tradition, social location and history by critically scrutinizing experience and its claims. Feminists who utilize women's experience as a category must not grant experience absolute authority and ontological validity. Instead, they must continue to critically assess the implications and claims involved with the category.

It is with this defense of experience as a category for feminist theological frameworks, that I offer the last chapter of this thesis. This final chapter will hopefully offer some suggestions as to how to rescue the category from the quagmire in which it currently resides.

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96 "Experience," 37.

97 Riley, Denise *Am I That Name? Feminism and the Category of Women in History* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis, 1988).

4: The Future of Women's Experience

Having reviewed both the past and present use of the category of women's experience, it is now possible to return to the critical question of the thesis: does the category of women's experience limit feminist theology? There are two answers to this question. First, yes, the category of women's experience has historically limited feminist theology by failing to understand all of the implications of its use. This has been evidenced in the problems of exclusion and essentialism articulated in the first section of this thesis. Furthermore, it will continue to limit feminist theology, if it is not constantly, critically assessed.

However, this question can also be answered no. This category does not limit feminist theology to the extent that it should be dropped. It is a necessary and beneficial category that should be maintained and can be reformulated for future use. In responding to the second answer, this chapter will offer some possible directions in which the category of women's experience should proceed.

First, feminist theologians must continue to recognize the complex, multi-layered nature of women's experience. As feminists in the past have stated, women's experience is not merely an issue of gender that can be separated in terms of the categories of men and women. Rather, women's experience is inextricably tied to class, race, ethnic background, social locations and traditional values. This is not to say, as many postmodernists maintain, that we should reject all appeals to women. There are experiences, due to biology, that are shared among all women. It is true that women have similar physical structures and sexual functions that influence how they react and respond. However, these issues of biology must be placed within the context of the other categories of experience. In this way, women's experience maintains a multitude of links.

These links complicate the issue of women's experience. As Beverly Smith states: "Women don't lead their lives like, 'Well, this part is race, and this is class, and this part

has to do with women's identities,' so it's confusing."[98] However, this complexity is necessary and should be embraced. Feminist theologians must accept that feminist theology, in order to fit with all experiences, is a messy prospect. And it is only through this messiness, where countless levels of experience exist, often connected in complex ways, that theologians can discover the rich, multi-textured layers of different voices and different understandings.[99]

But, how can feminists engage in this messy prospect? Davaney suggests that feminists must "continue to develop forms of historical analysis that will allow us to trace the complexities of the past."[100] These analyses will enable feminists to gain a broader, more comprehensive view of the past and will help them to "resist essentialist, ambiguous and singular readings of traditions."[101]

Another way in which to embrace the complexity of feminist theory is through the rejection of labels. Although, for practical purposes, it is easiest to assign labels to various experiences, grouping women who have those experience together, labels are ultimately detrimental. These labels limit women, binding them to a particular definition. Just as all women do not experience the same things, all black women or Asian women do not either. Merely shifting the distinction from gender to race does not properly address the problem. Instead, feminists must look to the connections and ties between the two categories. There is no simple way in which to name our experiences. We must describe them instead of attempting to categorize them.

This idea of complex levels of experience leads directly to the next issue and raises the question; Doesn't this emphasis on distinct, pluralistic, complex, and relative

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98 Quoted in Spelman, Elizabeth V. *Inessential Women: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988): 133.

99 For a better understanding of these complex levels, see Barbara V. Spelman's *Inessential Woman*. In particular, see Chapter 6, "Women: The One and the Many".

100 "Roundtable Discussion: What's in a Name? Exploring the Dimensions of What 'Feminist Studies in Religion' Means," 122. In her contribution to this discussion, Davaney also mentions the complexity of women's experience as being caused by the fact that women are multi-traditioned, shaped by plural contexts and strands of historical processes.

101 "Roundtable Discussion: What's in a Name? Exploring the Dimensions of What 'Feminist Studies in Religion' Means," 122.

experiences force a loss of meaning? Accepting the postmodern rejection of absolutes and foundations has left some feminists out on a dangerous limb. To combat this, feminists need to explore notions of women as agents for moral action. As Davaney suggests in the previously-cited panel discussion, feminists need to resist the tendency either to accept the over conditioned, purely environmentally constructed postmodern response or to embrace the autonomous, ahistorical essentialist response. To do this, feminists must recognize their ability to "forge identities and visions for which we are responsible and which bear the hope of fashioning alliances and solidarities created for a more just world."[102] Davaney recognizes this as an act of commitment. For her, solidarity among women may not have been reached yet, but it is a project, that through commitments can be reached in the future.

This idea of agency is also developed in the concept of positionality. According to Linda Alcoff, in her delineation of both her own and Teresa de Lauretis' arguments, positionality is a twofold idea that involves both the recognition of 'women' as a set of relations, practices and habits constantly in flux and the promotion of this particular position as the location in which to engage in political action and radical change.[103] In this way, the concept of positionality, through its emphasis on the historical, fluid nature of women and their experience, rescues feminist theory from claims of essentialism. Additionally, and more importantly, it offers a grounding for a feminist argument through the positing of one's position as the place in which moral and political action is achieved.

A woman's position within a current society allows her a perspective from which to view the world. This different perspective provides the leverage from which to effect change on a given society. This is especially true in terms of theology. As Marjorie Suchocki suggests, many women's "sociological position on the boundary of a male-dominated tradition has given them a perspective that clearly shows the androcentric and

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[102] "Roundtable Discussion: What's in a Name? Exploring the Dimensions of What 'Feminist Studies in Religion' Means," 122.

[103] "Cultural Feminism Versus Poststructuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory" The third section of this article discusses the concept of postionality, particularly drawing on Teresa de Lauretis and her work, *Alice Doesn't* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

cultural biases of traditional notions of God . . . ."[104] And, because of this unique perspective as outsiders, women can contribute to the "changing of the world's religions and the ways in which they function in women's lives."[105]

In returning this discussion to diversity, I see these acts of agency and commitment for moral change and justice as being involved with conversations and dialogue across traditions. Unlike narratives, which involve one person "reporting" their story to others[106], conversations necessitate a commitment to interaction between participants, requiring that white feminists not only hear what women of difference are saying about their own experiences but that they listen and respond. Katie G. Cannon affirms this, writing that "When two parties, people, races, nations, etc., are dialoguing they respect whatever their intellect, spirit, culture and traditions tell them is sound in each other, with an attitude of openness for growth and change . . . The open-flowing energy between the two removes alienation."[107]

By engaging in conversations, women actively seek to learn about others' experiences, thereby appreciating and celebrating the importance of difference. This appreciation leads to a reorientation of life as being seen in the context of others instead of merely envisioning oneself as self-enclosed and self-referential. According to Davaney, this reorientation involves open and flexible boundaries, where women recognize that they are "multitraditioned, shaped by plural contexts and strands of historical

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[104] Suchocki, Marjorie Hewitt "The Idea of God in Feminist Philosophy," in *Hypatia* (9 no 4 Fall 1994): 57.

[105] Plaskow, Judith "We Are Also Your Sisters: The Development of Women's Studies in Religion," in *Women's Studies Quarterly* (21 no 1-2 Spring/Summer 1993): 10. Many feminists have claimed that the uniqueness of the woman's perspective is the oppression they have suffered at the hands of men. Although I will not deny the fact that this is true on some level, the idea of oppression is far too complicated to be offered as the fundamental shaper of women's experience. Women have experienced oppression to varying degrees. In many cases, white women have not experienced it to the extent that women of color have. In fact, some women, as evidenced in the discussion of exclusion, have been oppressors themselves. Furthermore, the emphasis on oppression lacks any positive, constructive elements which help women to develop theological constructions that name and fit with their experiences.

[106] Because I am not familiar with the various nuances of narrative theology, I cannot speak authoritatively on its problems. However, I do find Paul Lauritizen's interpretation of it as the idea of reporting one's story to others to be troublesome. It seems very one-sided and lacks the necessity of active participation by the listener.

[107] Mudflower Collective, *God's Fierce Whimsy* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1985): 36.

processes."[108]

Conversations, in this way, however, do not involve merely a "sharing" of others experiences, where we process and reduce other's experiences to our view of them. Instead, conversations about experiences different from our own, work to "challenge us and stretch us."[109] Isasi-Diaz explores this idea, claiming that dialogue "is dialectic and creative, that it thrives on criticism, on difference; that it is not circular and that, therefore, it will lead us to a new place where we will not be afraid, for we will not be alone."[110]

Davaney echoes this in her description of the radically democratic conversation. This type of conversation "rigorously examines its participants' values, power and interest . . . pledg[ing] itself to the historical project to creating justice seeking solidarity across lines of difference so that our futures, while they emerge from the past, need not duplicate it."[111]

This challenging and rigorous examination is particularly difficult for white women because it requires that they look critically at their own lives, owning up to ways in which their experiences are detrimental to others. Talking candidly and openly about one's own racism and ability to oppress is not an easy thing to do. It requires tension and conflict, both with others and with oneself. As Carter Heyward writes in a letter to womanist Katie G. Cannon[112], white women dislike these types of activities because the white liberal tradition has been one that dislikes conflict. White liberal women do not like to get in touch with the difference that race makes. Furthermore, they have been cultured to be reconcilers; to resolve everything.

However difficult it may be, it is necessary for all women to engage in this process of challenging their own experience and others. Entering into conversations that employ

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108 "Roundtable Discussion: What's in a Name? Exploring the Dimensions of What 'Feminist Studies in Religion' Means," 122.

109 Viva la Diferencia!," 101.

110 Viva la Diferencia!," 101.

111 "Roundtable Discussion; What's in a Name?," 123.

112 This series of letters is found in *God's Fierce Whimsy*. See footnote 117 for a description.

such tactics allow women to interact with each other in a way that appreciates differences, instead of trying to replace them with a false commonality. Moreover, as both Isasi-Diaz and Davaney recognize, these conversations lead in new directions, to more hopeful futures.

This idea of new directions in conversations is discussed by Gordon Kaufman in a chapter entitled "Serendipitous Creativity."[113] For Kaufman, conversations are a "mix of determinateness and indeterminacy."[114] Because participants enter in the conversations with a unique set of experiences and history, they interpret what is said in their own unique way. However, as the conversation progresses, "the interchange comes to have a 'life of its own'," leading to new, unimaginable places. The dynamic of such a conversation, where participants respond in new and creative ways to each other's comments, leads to new futures that go beyond the individual participants contributions. As Kaufman writes,

> The experience of the conversation may . . . be so unforgettable as to meld the several speakers into a group which lives and develops for a long time, shaping and reshaping the individual lives of its members in the future in ways none could have anticipated during the original exchange.[115]

Although, as Kaufman adds, this is a highly idealized form of conversation, I feel it serves as an excellent model for finding ways in which to create lines of solidarity among women.[116]

This list of suggestions, which discusses the complex nature of the category of

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[113] This chapter is part of the larger work, *In Face of Mystery* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993.

[114] *In Face of Mystery*, 275.

[115] *In Face of Mystery*, 277.

[116] Conversations like these have already begun to take place. A good example of this is the series of letters that Carter Heyward and Katie G. Cannon send each other, as recorded in *God's Fierce Whimsy*. This series of letters offers an interesting conversation between a black womanist and a white lesbian attempting to make sense of the question, Can we be different and still get along? Through these letters, they not only share their own thoughts and experiences, but they learn from each other. For a closer examination of where these conversations should take place, see Toinette Eugene's "On 'Difference' and the Dream of Pluralist Feminism." In this article she addresses the question: Should these be political or academic conversations?

women's experience, the need for agency among women, both through commitment and positionality, and the model of conversations, provides a way in which to further explore and examine the category of women's experience. I strongly feel that all three must be implemented if feminists are to continue using women's experience in their theological constructions. First, a recognition of the complex, multi-layered and multi-traditioned nature of women's experience dispels the assumption, held by many feminists, that commonality is a given, existing as absolute and a priori. Replacing this assumption, is the idea that commonality is a messy project, one that exists on varying levels and degrees. Because of this, it must actively be sought. Women must be active agents of their own histories as they engage in the richly involved process of making connections and constructing common ties across cultures and traditions.

Specifically, these ties can be developed through common causes, such as the working towards child care, reproductive control and safety from sexual and domestic violence for all women.[117] More generally, these ties can be created through continued, responsible conversations, where women work together, listening and challenging each other, for solidarity and more promising futures.[118]

The category of women's experience remains an important part of feminist theology. Yet, it is necessary to view this category more critically than it has been viewed in the past. This research has helped to formulate this problem of women's experience as a category for theology, enabling a better understanding of what it involves and what is at stake. Through the discussion of essentialism and exclusion and the problems they entail, I have provided a position from which to argue for a closer, more particular analysis of the use of women's experience. Finally, by emphasizing the historical and

[117] These concerns were taken from "Cultural Feminism Versus Poststructuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," 435.

[118] By more promising futures, I mean ones that allow all women, and any other groups that have been oppressed, to name their voices and concerns. In a pragmatic sense, I am suggesting futures that more effectively fit with our concerns and commitments. Finally, I see these futures as ones where all women, all people for that matter, recognize their relationship and innerconnectedness to others. By understanding that their identities are not self-enclosed but instead shared in some ways with others, women can become more fully themselves. They can begin to understand that the ways in which they treat others can and will affect their own existence.

social nature of all experience, I have offered both a direction in which to proceed for future research and a way in which to initiate future and hopefully fruitful discussions and conversations about the issue. However, the suggestions offered in this section have only begun to address the issues raised in the introduction. The category of women's experience is so richly complex and involved and there is much more work to be done on the subject. Therefore, as a conclusion to this paper, I offer a series of questions that this thesis has raised for future study.

First, what effects does biology have on a women's experience? Although this paper addresses the dangers of relying too heavily on biology (essentialism), it has not discussed the ways in which biology does play a role in women's lives. How do women respond to their ability to bear children or the very fact that they are physically different from men? These "biological" experiences must be considered if we are to truly discuss all aspects of women's experience.

For historicists, this issue of biology is highly problematic. Because experiences, like the way in which we respond to our biological functions, are seemingly constant and existing cross-culturally, they pose a threat to the historicists argument that all things are value-ladened and socially constructed. For this reason, work by postmodern/historicist feminists on this issue is severely lacking.[119] This absence of work has resulted in the ultimate undermining of many historicist's work. How can a theory which promotes the turn to practical, everyday experiences (as historicism does), neglect some of the most important, everyday experiences that women have? Furthermore, by not discussing bodies and focusing only on the empirical questions of what we perceive and what we construct as experience, aren't many postmodern feminists helping to perpetuate the mind/body split?[120]

[119] This is not true for all feminists. Many non-historicist feminists have strongly emphasized the notion of embodiment and the importance of biology within theology. A striking example of this is Sallie McFague's *Body of God.*

[120] William Dean takes up this issue of the mind/body problem of historicism in *The Religious Critic In American Culture.* In this work, he discusses the need for ontological conventionalism, where nature in itself is viewed as historical. Perhaps his ideas could be taken up by postmodern/historicist feminists in their search to reconcile the difficulties that biology presents.

The next two questions that must be raised about the category of women's experience concern the relationship between theory and practice. Although there is strong concern over whether or not a theoretical construction can effectively respond to an individual situation throughout theological circles, within feminist theology it is particularly strong. Those involved in feminist theology believe that its purpose is to combine the two elements. Not only does feminist theology strive to provide theoretical responses to patriarchy and the exclusion of women's voices, but it attempts to offer fundamentally practical and political suggestions that affect real social and moral change within society.

Yet, this ideal account of feminist theology is not always effectively implemented. In the case of feminist historicism, one must ask, where are the pragmatic, concrete suggestions that fulfill the turn to particular, socially constructed experiences? In particular, I see this lack of tangible solutions and overabundance of theory as affecting two major issues: solidarity and new theological constructions.

Throughout the second section of this paper I have argued for the recognition and appreciation of difference among women. I have contended that women and their experience are the result of many different levels. And I have emphasized the ways in which particular locations and traditions strongly affect women's unique perspectives. To this, I have insisted on the need for women to engage in active conversations, where together they reach for solidarity and more just futures. However, this advocacy for solidarity has been mostly theoretical.

Indeed, many feminists have made reference to the need for solidarity. Yet, they have not discussed what solidarity specifically means or why women should maintain it as their goal. In most cases, there have not been any concrete examples for why women should unite or what this uniting entails. If women have their own unique experiences, why should they bother listening to others' experiences? Who is included in this move for solidarity? Is it just women, or are men included? How, specifically, will this move to solidarity be implemented?

Additionally, in this paper I also have championed for the continued use of women's experience in theological frameworks. I have argued that it must continue because it serves to challenge and positively criticize our theological constructions, ensuring that these constructions continue to fulfill the purposes for which they were created. Missing from this, however, have been any suggestions for constructions that *do* fit with our changing understanding of women's experience. How does this new understanding and appreciation of the power of history translate into a vision of God? How does it provide us with meaning? Finally, how does it serve as something in which we can have faith? The next step in defending the new definition of women's experience as historicized involves submitting it to pragmatic testing. Feminist historicists must heed their own call to particularities by offering concrete examples from their own communities and traditions.

Although all three of these questions have relevance that extends beyond feminist theology, the issues of solidarity and unity are particularly pertinent. Questions such as, How do we understand each other in a pluralistic world? and Why do we need to understand each other?, are not just limited to women within feminist theology. They apply to all people living in a postmodern world. The continued study of unity and solidarity within feminist theology may offer some ways in which to make sense of these postmodern problems.

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