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INVISIBLE WOMAN

By

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Thesis

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Invisible Women

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to illuminate the ways in which working class women are invisible within the feminist and ecofeminist movements. Using the faces and forces of oppression as presented by Iris Marion Young and Hilde Lindemann, I show how the working class experiences oppression. I also show how oppression based on class differs from that based on gender and how these differences contribute to the invisibility of working class women within feminism. In the second section, I use Val Plumwood and Karen J. Warren's versions of ecofeminist philosophy to show how working class women are again absent. Were ecofeminists to include working class women, specifically rural folks and farmers, the idea of attunedness to the land could be both better understood and incorporated within the environmental movement at large.

Within the past, second-wave feminism focused almost exclusively on the oppression experienced by middle class white women, at the expense of women of color, lesbians, working class and third-world women. However, this failing has been corrected with the current emphasis on building a more diverse, multicultural, multiethnic, multisexual movement emphasizing greater reflectivity and inclusion, recognizing the multiple causes, forms and ways to dismantle oppression. Because of this, Rosemarie Tong states that “feminist theory is not one, but many, theories or perspectives and that each feminist theory or perspective attempts to describe women’s oppression, to explain its causes and consequences, and to prescribe strategies for women’s liberation” (1).

Ecofeminism incorporates a similar emphasis on diversity and inclusion, recognizing that “there are important connections between the unjustified domination of women, people of color, children, and the poor and the unjustified domination of nature,” as stated by Karen J. Warren in *Ecofeminist Philosophies: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters* (1). Regardless of these proclamations of inclusion, I read feminist and ecofeminist works and do not see myself reflected there. I do not see working class women or rural people, neither our voices nor our insights. To recover these experiences, I will be exploring the historical connections feminism and ecofeminism have with issues of class, the ways this issue is invisible today and the metrocentrism present within the movements, as well as the ways feminism, ecofeminism and the working class can benefit from a renewed focus on class oppression.

Beginning with feminism, both the Marxist and socialist branches of feminism examine the intersection of gender and class oppression. Critiquing the Marxist view that class best explains women’s oppression, socialist feminists hold the position that gender

and class are forces that play equal roles, and thus deserve equal attention, when discussing women's oppression (Tong 39). As an example of a socialist feminist, Iris Marion Young sees the marginalization of women, and consequentially our role as a secondary labor force, as an essential and fundamental characteristic of capitalism, in that capitalism and patriarchy are so intertwined they cannot be discussed separately (Tong 184-5). Only by such an approach can we understand why it is women who take orders, do the unstimulating work on the undesirable shifts for less pay, who experience the majority of sexual harassment and perform most uncompensated domestic work. As we experience oppression not just as women and not just as workers, and construct our identities according to the unique and multiple ways we are located socially, an examination of women's oppression must take into account both gender and class, as well as race, nationality, sexuality, etc, in order to be accurate.

Ecofeminism has a similar connection with issues of class in its history as well. As Noël Sturgeon discusses in *Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory and Political Action*, the ecofeminist movement has numerous origins, each branch taking slightly different theoretical positions and focusing on different aspects, given the specific contexts in which it developed (3). One such beginning occurred in close connection with social ecology. Begun by Murray Bookchin, social ecology is a movement focusing on the elimination of all social hierarchies (including that of humans over nature), the critique of capitalism and the promotion of sustainable ecological relationships (Sturgeon 32). In addition to these theoretical similarities, Bookchin's Institute for Social Ecology housed the first courses on ecofeminism and early ecofeminists such as Ynestra King. Labeled as one of the founders of US ecofeminism

and a social ecofeminist, King's writing illustrates the similarities between these two fields of study, as well as the emphasis on class that early ecofeminism contained and subsequently lost. In her article "The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology," King states one of the four main beliefs of ecofeminism as the idea that:

Biological simplification, i.e. the wiping out of whole species, corresponds to reducing human diversity into faceless workers, or to the homogenization of taste and culture through mass consumer markets. Social life and natural life are literally simplified to the inorganic for the convenience of market society. Therefore we need a decentralized global movement that is founded on common interests yet celebrates diversity and opposes all forms of domination and violence. (20)

It is not simply that women are oppressed via their class position, but that class oppression, the domination of the natural world and the oppression of women are all essential components in the structure of our current society. In order to restructure our society in a just way, we cannot simply look at the intersections of classism and naturism or naturism and sexism, but must create a comprehensive movement in which each component plays an equal role.

Having gestured toward the ways in which feminism and ecofeminism have a historical concern for issues of class, I will now look at the ways this issue has faded into the realm of invisibility, beginning with feminism. As mentioned, in response to second-wave feminism, a strong focus today is on the lack of inclusivity within feminism of women of color, third-world women and lesbians, and the multiple ways in which these women experience oppression. Consequentially, the necessity of including diverse voices and recognizing intersecting systems of oppression when creating theories and initiating changes receives significant attention. However, even with this increased focus on inclusivity, the oppression experienced by working class women within the US has been

overshadowed by the more visible issues of racism, and to perhaps a lesser degree, imperialism, given in part the tendency to generalize all white women as middle class. By traveling into the world of working class women we can begin to understand the faces and forces this form of oppression takes, the extent to which it is made invisible, how feminism's lack of attention perpetuates this system of inequality and domination, and the responses and actions required of feminists and society as a whole.

In her article, "On the Logic of Pluralist Feminism," María C. Lugones critiques white feminist academics for recognizing the problem of difference, or the need to include a diverse range of voices within feminism, as it pertains to theorizing about women as a homogenous group, but failing to recognize actual difference, such as the different ways women identify, experience oppression, or view the world (38). The problem with this generalization lies not only in white women exercising authority over women of color, a process that results in white women becoming the experts regarding the lives of women of color, but ignoring their differences also perpetuates the oppression of women of color by creating the feeling that "one is about to be erased from the discourse by being asked to speak in or to listen to a universal voice" (Lugones, "Logic" 39). With this, Lugones points out the inconsistency of feminists to demand women's inclusion, contribution and recognition, while at the same time failing to do so themselves.

Unfortunately, a slight inconsistency exists in Lugones' writing as well, in that she does not explicitly acknowledge or address any differences between white women, grouping us all under the homogenous terms "white women," "white/anglo women," or "white women theorists" ("Logic" 38, 39, 40). Even though the majority of white women

write from at least a middle class perspective (though academic professionals actually occupy a position higher than the middle class), failing to notice the differences among white women perpetuates the assumption that all white women feminists belong to higher classes. Though this may be a justifiable and understandable assumption, in that most white theorists are from higher classes and because this generalization strengthens Lugones' critique, it is unacceptable in that not all of us come from, or speak from, a similar background. When including assumed class homogeneity within her writing, Lugones perpetuates the erasure of working class voices from academia and the continued ignorance of issues effecting working class women, both of which maintain class oppression.

A specific example of Lugones' inconsistent demand for inclusivity and recognition occurs in her article "Playfulness, 'World'-Traveling, and Loving Perspective." When discussing her relationship with her mother, Lugones states, "I thought that to love her was consistent with my abusing her (using, taking for granted, and demanding her services [)] . . . I was not supposed to love servants I could abuse them without identifying with them, without seeing myself in them" ("Playfulness" 5). The problem lies in that she loved her mother but loving her was not consistent with treating her like a servant, with the implicit assumption Lugones makes being that servants were treated poorly and her mother ought to be treated better. Thus, she had to learn a new way to treat her mother, which necessitated traveling into her mother's world to learn who her mother was, on her mother's own terms. What I find disturbing is that though Lugones says we ought not treat our mothers like servants, she does not address how we ought to treat servants, whether or not people are justified in abusing them. I am

concerned that Lugones' failure to critique the treatment of servants continues to hide and treat as unimportant the oppression experienced by the working class.

By traveling into the world of working class women, my world and the world of my mother, those who are of a different, higher socioeconomic position “can understand *what it is to be them* [working class] *and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes*” to a greater degree (Lugones, “Playfulness” 17). This journey will also help show how and why the oppression of the working class becomes and remains hidden and ignored, as invisibility is a specific aspect of oppression overlooked by Hilde Lindemann in *An Invitation to Feminist Ethics* and given inadequate attention by Iris Marion Young in *Justice and the Politics of Difference*.

However, before traveling into the working class world, a general understanding of what this term means is helpful. Like many terms describing social phenomena, “working class” does not easily allow for a concrete, universal and timeless definition. Rather than attempting to provide one specific factor determining working class status, such as income, The Center for Working-Class Studies at Youngstown State University sees “class as based on a combination of factors—what kind of work people do, how much they earn, their social and economic power, their education, lifestyle, and culture.” Likewise, as Gail Hebson states in “Renewing Class Analysis in Studies of the Workplace: A Comparison of Working-Class and Middle-Class Women’s Aspirations and Identities,” the new approach to discussions of class are based on the “recognition that employment categories cannot capture the dynamic and emotive ways that class is lived” (28). In this respect, class is not simply an economic category but is a culture, a way of life, an identity. That being said, a general definition of the term “working class,”

as used within this paper, is necessary. Within our culture, this social class consists of unionized and skilled workers; the “working poor,” i.e. non-unionized and unskilled workers; and the “poor,” those whose income comes primarily from welfare. Coming from a Midwestern “Right to Work” state that blurs the distinction between the working class and the working poor by decreasing, if not eliminating, the presence and benefits of union forces, I will use the term working class, though not everything I say will apply to everyone who identifies as working class.

Within *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Young discusses four faces of oppression readily applicable to the experience of the working class, including exploitation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and marginalization (48-63). Though these faces often overlap, I will attempt to discuss them separately, beginning with exploitation. In perhaps overly simplistic but readily understandable terms, capitalism focuses on the consumption of goods and services, with the profitability and efficiency of this system dictating the means of production of the demanded goods and services. When the bottom line consists of the profit margin, this system necessitates the invisibility of the resources, both natural and human, as recognition of their actual value would require better treatment. In order to reach maximum profit, the working class generally does not receive a living wage, nor are we given reasonable working hours, with mandatory overtime, inadequate sick leave and drastic, unexpected changes in schedules and cuts in hours. This understanding of the exploitation of the working class, especially when thought of in terms of the manufacturing industry, is not a new idea, having roots in Marxism, nor has it affected the consumptive patterns of much of the Western world. Acknowledging the extent of worker exploitation necessitates better treatment and

benefits, higher wages, and in many cases, more expensive products, given the emphasis on a high profit margin. Thus, having an exploitable class of workers is essential to our capitalistic, growth- and profit-oriented system.

Women within the working class experience particular vulnerability to exploitation. During the hiring process, women are often not the preferred worker, in that men are seen as more dependable than women, owing to our tendency to get pregnant and require maternity leave and additional time off to care for sick children and ailing parents. Though the Civil Rights Act of 1964 declares this practice illegal, it is often the unspoken, though occasionally specifically stated, preference.¹ Thus, when we do find employment, especially given the current economic recession, we are more willing to work for the \$0.75 we receive on average compared to the dollar a white man would make. The result is there being “more women among the poor than men,” a phenomena known as the “feminization of poverty,” as stated by Devaki Jain in *Women, Development, and the UN – A Sixty-Year Quest for Equality* (107). Regardless of what the Great American Dream states, when you do not make enough money to support your family, you do not have the option of pursuing the education necessary to qualify for a better paying job. This creates a situation in which working class women will settle for whatever exploitive jobs we can get, simply because we have no other option.

Hilde Lindemann articulates this phenomenon when discussing the pressive force of oppression, which occurs when “the group is pressed into serving members of the dominant group,” largely because the structure of society does not allow for any other option (34). An example analogous to the pressive force compelling the working class to

¹ During a job interview in the summer of 2007, a potential employer stated she did not like to hire women with children because they could not be depended on – they would come to work late, miss shifts because of sick children or have to leave before the work was done to pick up their children from day care.

serve the middle class is the way wives were once compelled to serve their husbands. When society was structured so that women could not seek education or employment outside the home, pressive forces first compelled women to marry and then continually serve their husbands so as to maintain this relationship, a relationship which often was their only means of survival (Lindemann 35). The preservative force Lindemann discusses likewise plays a role in perpetuating the exploitation of working class women by maintaining the status quo (36). Like the housewives of the past, the working class women of today are forced to settle for less than we deserve.

In addition to financial difficulties resulting from exploitation, Lindemann states “exploitation causes groups of people to be identified primarily as resources for other people, requiring them to serve these others’ interests” (32). The working class orientates around and caters to the interest of the middle class as the primary consumers of goods and service, given the economic disparity. As such, the middle class dictates the production of specific goods and services, which consequentially dictate the manufacturing jobs available to the working class. Within the service sector specifically, as an unstated condition of employment, we are required to cater to the middle class customers—fetching what they want fetched, listening without comment to what they say, standing at attention, and tidying up after them. Our survival necessitates such action, in that if we do not act the servant to the customer, they will shop elsewhere, leaving us with no job and no way to support our families and ourselves. In this way, serving the customer becomes a necessary condition for employment, though being seen as a servant is not. In Kantian terms, we are treated only as a means to an end, without being recognized as ends in ourselves. When our economic system requires, to a large

degree, that we be identified as resources, it is far too easy to see us as servants rather than people who happen to serve you.

Though the consequences of exploitation are oppressive, there also exists a deeper level to this oppression that Marilyn Frye's concept of the arrogant eye gestures towards. As she states in *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*, the arrogant perceiver views the world and everything in it as being made for himself, rather than seeing the independence of the other, with a significant aspect of sexism involving "dis-integrating an integrated human organism and grafting its substance to oneself" (Frye 67, 75, 66). When applied to the working class, we are seen only as workers, as expendable and exploitable. We are not seen as the valuable people we see ourselves as when we are in our world. In a very real sense, we are not allowed to be, or recognized as, full human beings with goals and desires of our own. In this way, arrogant perceivers "organize everything seen with reference to themselves and their own interests" (Frye 67). When seen through the eyes and according to the terms of the arrogant perceiver, the extent of our exploitation, the resulting harms, and our position as quasi-human resources remains invisible.

Young lists powerlessness as the second face of oppression, which in the case of the working class ties inextricably to exploitation. According to her, "The powerless are those who lack authority or power [in relation to others] . . . those over whom power is exercised without their exercising it; the powerless are situated so that they must take orders and rarely have the right to give them . . . [who] have little or no work authority" (Young 56). Within this sense, the majority of the working class lack power to a significant or total degree, in that we are allowed no contribution when deciding work

hours, etc, nor do we have power over others within the work world, (though we may have legitimate power over children within the household). Additional components of powerlessness include the lack of “an expansive, progressive character,” in that the working class lacks a significant opportunity for professional development, and also does not enjoy the privilege of respectability (Young 57). However, though these are all important ways in which the working class is made and kept powerless, they are rather superficial in that they only refer to specific instances of powerlessness experienced because a person is working class. A more detailed discussion of how powerlessness itself is oppressive in general is necessary in order to better understand the oppression of the working class.

As a powerless group, the working class lacks the opportunity to change the situations or social positions we find ourselves in. As bell hooks states in “Feminist Scholarship: Ethical Issues” oppressed groups are no longer subjects but objects whose “reality is defined by others,” whose “identity is created by others” (42). The financial difficulties we experience because of exploitation dictates, to a large degree, the reality we experience on a daily basis, as do the stereotypes that we are less intelligent and/or motivated than the upper classes. In either case, we have little to no power to change the material circumstances or views others have of us. Frye’s discussion of the arrogant eye is helpful in understanding this degree of powerlessness. As she states, one with an arrogant eye “manipulates the environment, perception and judgment of her whom he perceives so that her recognized options are limited, and the course she chooses will be such as coheres with his purposes,” creating “in the space about him a sort of vacuum mold into which the other is sucked and held” (Frye 67, 69). In the case of class, the

arrogant eye manipulates our society by forcing the working class into exploitable and powerless situations so that we have few, if any, legitimate employment options that are not in service of the middle class. The structure of the social world results in the working class having no choice other than to be working class. At this point, exploitation fuels powerlessness, in that many of us experience exploitation to the degree that no other option is financially feasible; we are thus placed in a situation in which we have little to no power over our lives as they are and even less power to choose a different life.

Working class women experience powerlessness to a greater degree than their male counterparts, given our greater experience of, and vulnerability to, exploitation.

Two stories exist within our society that need to be addressed in order to understand the extent and perpetuation of powerlessness, as well as the ways this form of oppression remains invisible, specifically the glorification of the working class as the “Heart of America” and the Great American Dream. In Lindemann’s terms, these stories are master narratives, which “provide the character types and plot templates that let you locate yourself (or other people) within your society” (49). These master narratives are particularly interesting in that by giving the working class a false sense of power, society is allowed to ignore our actual circumstances, the extent to which we are powerless and oppressed. As our society as a whole, and the middle and upper classes in particular, benefit from having a powerless and exploitable class, it is in the interest of those in higher positions to create stories that maintain the status quo. For this reason, these stories tell us not only who we are but contain a strong prescriptive element and tell us how we ought to behave.

The first master narrative states that the working class is the “Heart of America,” the backbone of society, an important, valuable, respected and essential component of our country. The implicit prescriptive element states that there exists no oppression of the working class, in that we receive proper appreciation and respect. Even if we sometimes feel unappreciated, the cause we are working for, i.e. America, is great enough to make up for any difficulties we may experience. This provides an illustration of Lindemann’s dismissive force of oppression, in that a group is tolerated, in this case given a supposedly respected place in our societal narrative, as long as they do not demand any goods and services enjoyed by the upper classes or question why they are not entitled to them as well (35). So long as we accept our place within this story we are seen as valuable.

This narrative is problematic first and foremost because it is false. We are not shown the respect and appreciation we deserve, either as workers or as human beings. Secondly, when it does occur, the lionization of the working class is only a temporary acknowledgement, most noticeably used during election years. When the elections are over and our votes acquired, we are again invisible. Even if used consistently, the “Heart of America” is a problematic identity for the working class as it simplifies our existence into that of dedicated, hardworking folks serving a noble purpose. This ignores the exploitation, powerlessness, expendability and anger we see and feel every day. In addition to perpetuating the invisibility of our oppression, this romanticizing of our lives attempts to placate us by providing the illusion of importance and recognition, in a way similar to the traditional glorification of women as the keepers of morality within the household. This romanticization serves yet another purpose, in that it provides those in

positions of greater power a way around the guilt they may or may not but ought to feel regarding the oppression of the working class, their role as oppressor and the benefits they receive from the oppression of the working class. In this rose-colored picture, the workers are not only not oppressed, but the middle class is, in fact, doing us a service by providing the means to develop into the hardworking, dependable, down-to-earth, virtuous selves everyone admires. Admitting the truth of the situation would show the middle class themselves “as a duplicitous person,” a self “inattentive to our interactions,” a self who’s “rules are used against us,” a self that is oppressive to working class women (Lugones, “Logic” 42).

The Great American Dream likewise serves the purpose of keeping the working class powerless, though in an opposite manner from the romanticization of the working class. The Great American Dream tells us that anyone who works hard enough can transcend their original working class position and enter into the middle or upper classes—we can all pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. This story is problematic in that it ignores the fact that it is extremely hard to pull yourself up by your bootstraps when you do not make enough money to buy boots, that is, it ignores the actual situation, difficulties and oppression experienced by members of the working class. Specifically, it ignores the powerlessness we experience as a result of being working class, e.g. financial hardships, and how powerlessness keeps us working class. Even with the extreme difficulty of class mobility, a few token examples exist serving to perpetuate this myth so the oppression can remain invisible. Aside from the practical problems of pulling oneself up by one’s bootstraps, this story carries with it strong normative aspects. If everyone can succeed through hard work and one woman cannot, then she is at fault and not working

hard enough, never mind the fact she works two jobs. This is a disturbing version of victim blaming that continually allows the system and classes that create, maintain and benefit from oppressed classes to deny any responsibility.

These master narratives aside, those in powerless situations often experience the wrongful accusation of possessing a false consciousness, in which working class folks are seen as not fully aware of our own oppression and often make choices that either perpetuate or worsen our situations. As Susan Moller Okin states in “Gender Inequality and Cultural Differences,” this results in situations in which “oppressed people have . . . internalized their oppression so well that they *have* no sense of what they are justly entitled to as human beings,” thus “*committed* outsiders can often be better analysts and critics of social injustices than those who live within the relevant culture” (19). One example of the false consciousness the working class supposedly possesses involves our shopping habits. As society states, it is in the best interest of the working class to support local, independently owned businesses and whole foods co-ops that provide locally grown and/or produced, environmentally and socially just products, and decent wages and benefits to employees, even though this often results in higher prices that we cannot easily afford. If and when we shop at the big box stores, we are accused of being falsely conscious in that it is not in the best interest of us as a class to support such stores, given that they often do not treat their working employees as well as other companies do. As these actions show that we do not understand what is in our best interests, and because the middle and upper classes do understand supporting environmentally and socially just stores is to the working class’s benefit, they are better able to tell us how we ought to act. This is simply not the case. We are well aware that it is in the long-term best interests of

the working class to support such stores. However, it is often a short-term necessity that we buy the most inexpensive items available, thus placing us in a position where both available options are far from ideal. Given the degree to which the difficulties we face remain invisible to the middle class, as well as the pervasiveness of the “Heart of America” and American Dream myths, they cannot be the experts on what we need and desire. Inaccurately claiming that the working class suffers from false consciousness continues the stereotypical and oppressive description of the working class as unintelligent, ignorant and in need of paternalistic treatment from outsiders. This perpetuates the assumption that we are powerless for a reason and that we ought to remain so.

Though accused of false consciousness, the working class actually holds an excellent position for developing a double consciousness. As W.E.B. Du Bois states in *The Souls of Black Folk*, African-Americans “are gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which . . . only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world . . . this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of another . . . One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings” (3). What I interpret Du Bois as saying is that African-Americans were, in his time, defined by the dominant white culture as subordinate, while the individuals themselves created a more positive and accurate identity. However, the dominant society also influenced this counter-identity. As stated, De Bois lived in a world that would only let him see himself through the eyes of the dominant culture; thus, any identity he could create would be, in part, responding to what the dominant culture said he must be. Thus, even when not in the presence of the

dominant culture, Du Bois still felt himself as two people, in that he had internalized, though not accepted, the identity of an African-American man as created by the dominant culture.

A similar dual consciousness phenomenon occurs within the working class. As mentioned earlier in regards to exploitation, the working class becomes a resource for and required servant to the middle and upper classes, as the primary consumers dictating the production of specific goods and services. As workers, we must travel into the world of our middle class employers and consumers, first to determine, and then to provide, the services they desire. If we do not cater to what the middle class consumers and employers desire, our employment becomes insecure at best. However, in order to do so, we must first understand as completely as possible the world they live in—what they want, how they want it and how they want us to act when we meet. To use Lugones' words, the working class necessarily travels into the middle class world for purposes of employment. As such, members of the working class often feel a sense of what Du Bois calls twoness, in that we exist in the middle class as an "other." Thus, we need to know how to function both in our world and in the world of the middle class. The possession of a dual consciousness and feelings of twoness are both consequences of cultural imperialism, a process in which the dominant culture "render[s] the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the Other" (Young 58-59).

The working class's double consciousness and travel into the middle class world brings me to yet another face of oppression—cultural imperialism. As Young defines the term, "cultural imperialism involves the universalization of a dominant group's

experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm” (59). She likewise claims that cultural imperialism exists as an oppressive force outside the system of labor, presumably because capitalistic societies require exploitation and powerlessness to function (Young 58). I, however, disagree, because cultural imperialism is an essential component of powerlessness and necessary for the continued growth of capitalism. Take, for example, the imperialism that occurs between the so-called developed and undeveloped countries. Developed countries use cultural imperialism to destroy, or at least subvert, another culture, taking for themselves the other country’s natural and human resources, and attempting to instill Western consumptive patterns so as to increase their product market. A similar phenomenon occurs within the American class system, when middle class culture is pushed on the working class.

When interacting across class lines, the required mannerisms are those of the middle class, necessary if we want to acquire and maintain employment. Additionally, when attempting to interact within the middle class professional world, as occurs if and when we need to visit a lawyer, accountant or loan officer, we must emulate to the highest degree possible the mannerisms of the middle class, we must dress “appropriately” and speak properly. In this way, the middle class requires the working class to adopt their culture when in the public sphere. Lindemann refers to this as a preservative force, in which “the dominant group considers this group abnormal, which keeps its sense of what is normal in place” (36). The working class must conform to the standards of the middle class, which reinforces them as the norm. Respect often dictates this emulation, in that resources, including human, are not the types of things that require respect. Thus, to receive respectful treatment, we must pass as middle class. The

requirement to act in a way dictated by the middle class when at work and when conducting other transactions conveys a clear message, the message that we, as working class people, are simply not good enough. We are other and we are inferior.

The establishment of the middle class way of life as the norm carries beyond the world of business into our personal lives as well. As Frye states, the arrogant eye creates the norms of virtue and health, “set according to the degree of congruence of the object of perception with the seer’s interests” (69). In the context of sexism, women were, and far too often still are, seen as virtuous and healthy when conforming to the standards the dominant males set. As it pertains to issues of class, the working class is healthy and proper when emulating the standards set by the middle class. Take, for example, the American Dream that says we ought to be working to become middle class. Poor folks receive considerably more respect and sympathy when we show we do buy into the American Dream and are doing everything we can to achieve a middle class life. We are not supposed to want to remain in our working class neighborhoods, to be content eating casseroles, to spend our free time playing pool rather than hiking. If we enjoy these activities and wish to continue living a working class lifestyle, we are segregated into different neighborhoods and our culture is marginalized. As Lindemann and Young state, expulsion is another force and marginalization is another face of oppression that work to deny entire categories of people full participation in social life (Lindemann 35, Young 53). If content and happy with who we are, we are called poor white trash—we become garbage that ought to be gotten rid of, or at least confined to the “bad part of town.” This message of inferiority goes beyond our lifestyles—it is not just our chosen way of life that becomes trash, *we* become trash. When the middle class is never required, and

clearly does not desire, to enter into the world of the working class, this segregation and class oppression is maintained, as is the stereotype that all working class people do, in fact, live this way.

I would like to discuss in more detail one last issue regarding the oppression of working class women, the issue of respect. As Young states, “To treat people with respect is to be prepared to listen to what they have to say or to do what they request because they have some authority, expertise, or influence” (57). In addition to supporting, furthering and contributing to the oppression of the working class, many of the factors already discussed lead to a practice in which the working class in general, and working class women in specific, are not treated with adequate, if any, respect. The false consciousness Okin and others accuse the working class of possessing takes away our authority of lived experience regarding what we want and what we need. When we do not know ourselves, there is little reason for any other to listen to or value what we have to say. The systematic powerlessness we experience also works to take away any influence we could have. The American Dream myth and the romanticization of the working class via the “Heart of America” narrative work to make our experiences and oppression unimportant, or at least not important enough require a response from society at large or feminism in particular. When we are not important enough to elicit a response, it is clear that no one is listening to what we have to say. Cultural imperialism and marginalization state quite clearly that in order to receive respect we must become or emulate the middle class, as it is only those who are in or above this social level that are worthy of respect. This lack of respect for us as people and as working class is not only an oppressive

consequence of being working class, but is also a force that keeps us oppressed by reinforcing the idea that we are not important.

When bringing this discussion of the oppression of working class women back into the specific context of feminist academia, I turn once again to third-wave feminist developments. With these developments, feminists realize the necessity of including a range of diverse, multicultural, multiethnic and multisexual voices, given the different ways women identify, experience oppression and view the world. Unfortunately, recognizing these differences does not, and did not, necessarily lead to viewing the world through a loving, as opposed to arrogant, eye. According to Frye, the loving eye “knows the independence of the other,” “is the eye of one who knows that to know the seen, one must consult something other than one’s own will and interests and fears and imagination,” an eye that will “look and listen and check and question” (75). In Lugones’s terms, the loving perceiver realizes that in order to truly understand working class women, one must travel into our world, repeatedly, for extended periods of time and with a playful, though not agonistic, heart, so as to know us on our own terms (“Playfulness” 15-16).

The problem is not that feminists within academia possess the traditional arrogant eye regarding the working class, in that they often gesture briefly towards classism and list it as an additional form of oppression. Unfortunately, these token references do not qualify as a letting go of arrogance in favor of love. Rather, the replacement has been made with loving, knowing ignorance, a position that still incorporates aspects of arrogant perception while claiming to love working class women. As Mariana Ortega states in “Being Lovingly, Knowingly Ignorant: White Feminism and Women of Color,”

loving, knowing ignorance occurs when there is “an ignorance of the thought and experience of women of color that is accompanied by both alleged love for and alleged knowledge about them” (57). In the case of women of color, this occurs when a white woman cites works done by women of color, both to legitimize those works and her status as a third-wave feminist, thus using women of color for her own end and perpetuating the academic authority of white women (Ortega 62). What has not happened in the case of the lovingly, knowingly ignorant feminist is the checking and questioning requirements of loving perception necessary to ensure accurate representation of experiences and reality that does not reinforce a dominant world view (Ortega 61). Both components are necessary in order to recognize the value in the world of working class women and the academic feminists’ oppression of working class women. If they were to check and question, feminists would see the extent to which they create a separate world for themselves, a world of privilege uncomfortable and oppressive to working class women.

The ways academic feminist are lovingly, knowingly ignorant of the oppression of working class women in the US becomes clear first through their failure to adequately address this issue. Take, for example, Alison Jaggar’s article “Global Responsibility and Western Feminism.” Within this article, Jaggar mentions how the oppression of women intensifies when conjoined with class oppression; however, she quickly focuses on how this effects third-world women, rather than women in this country (185). Likewise, she encourages us to focus on the ways we, as Westerners, contribute to the oppression of third-world women, while never mentioning the ways Western women contribute to the oppression of working class women in the US (Jaggar 193). When mentioning the

oppression of US working class women, the focus tends to be on the oppression resulting from being working class, such as the difficulties in providing for our families, as previously mentioned. However, when this discussion occurs within academia and does not involve the insight of actual working class women, it remains incomplete and inaccurate. In this case, the feminists may well love us; they may well know something about our lives, but they do not really *see* us, or know the extent of our oppression, or love us enough to include us. Until working class women become visible, respected and able to tell our own stories within the feminist movement, feminists may claim to be concerned with class oppression but will remain lovingly, knowingly ignorant.

In order to move beyond the lovingly, knowingly ignorant stance feminism takes towards working class women, feminists will have to acknowledge the benefits they receive from systems of class exploitation. As Young states, women experience “specific forms of gender exploitation in which their energies and power are expended, often unnoticed and unacknowledged, usually to benefit men by releasing them for more important and creative work, [and] enhancing their status or the environment around them” (51). These aspects easily apply to the middle class and higher positioned academic feminists. However scary it may be to look into a mirror that projects them as the less-than-perfect, socially just and non-oppressive women they may like to think of themselves as, they must look into that mirror, as Lugones suggests (“Logic” 42-3). As she states, “You may not want to think about that self, but not thinking about that self leads you not to know what U.S. women of color know:--that self-knowledge is interactive, that self-change is interactive” (Lugones, “Logic” 43). At the most basic

level, feminism must focus on and address the multiple ways working class women experience oppression in order to live up to its own standards.

The idea of third-wave feminists embodying loving, knowing ignorance leads to my critique of ecofeminism, in that much of the theoretical work within this field takes a similar stance towards working class women, specifically rural women and farmers, and incorporates a significant degree of metrocentricism. However, before beginning this discussion, it is helpful to clarify why rural folks and farmers are working class, and why we, specifically as rural people, ought to be included within ecofeminism. Many rural folks are easily categorized as working class according to the definitions of unionized and skilled or non-unionized and unskilled workers, given our employment within the manufacturing, service and skilled trade industries. Unfortunately, farmers do not easily fit within the popular definitions of these class categories. Though neither provides specific definitions of working class occupations, both Hebson and The Center for Working-Class Studies limit their discussion of the working class to the manufacturing and service industries (Hebson 32, *Center*). However, the amount of manual labor our job entails, our differences from the standard middle class norm and, more importantly, our culture, lifestyles and identities all tell us that we are not members of the middle class. We understand quite well that we are working class, even if we do not fit the standard definition.

In order to illuminate the ways in which we, as rural folks, farmers and women, experience invisibility, powerlessness, marginalization and cultural imperialism, and consequentially the ways in which a rural perspective could strengthen ecofeminism, I will be focusing specifically on Val Plumwood's version of ecofeminism as found in the

texts *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* and “The Concept of a Cultural Landscape: Nature, Culture and Agency in the Land,” and Karen J. Warren’s position as contained in *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters*.

However, before I do so, it is again important to note that I will be speaking specifically from a rural North Dakotan perspective, from a community of small family farmers. As such, I will be speaking of farmer as family farmers, in contrast to those involved in big business, i.e. agribusiness farming. Additionally, what I say may not be true of every farmer, though hopefully will be an accurate representation of many.

Like many feminists, Val Plumwood, one of the more prominent names within ecofeminism, also presents a position of loving, knowing ignorance towards working class women in her book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. To summarize her theoretical approach, Plumwood focuses on the five-part dualistic construction of society through which “the colonised are appropriated, incorporated, into the selfhood and culture of the master, which forms their identity” (*Feminism* 41). Beginning with backgrounding, the master makes use of the other for material survival and for the creation of his identity as master (Plumwood, *Feminism* 48-9). However, this dependency must be denied so as to maintain a position of superiority, done through inessentializing the work and existence of the other (Plumwood, *Feminism* 48-9). In Youngian terms, this is a complex process in which the other, though materially and definitionally necessary, is rendered powerless through the denial of their contributions, with the goal of reducing the other to invisibility as they “are simply not ‘worth’ noticing” (Plumwood, *Feminism* 48). As the second component, radical exclusion plays a significant role in this backgrounding, in that the master focuses on differences and downplays commonalities

between the two groups, creating “not merely a difference of degree within a sphere of overall similarity, but a major difference in kind, even a bifurcation or division in reality,” (Plumwood, *Feminism* 50). Once these separate realities have been created, incorporation, or relational definition, comes into play in that the subordinate is defined in relation to the master as a lack and as inferior, a process which involves homogenization, in that the master views the others as possessing no differences within the group, so as to maintain the nature of the others as completely separate (Plumwood, *Feminism* 52-3). Lastly, the others are instrumentalized and seen as created for the master, to be a means to his ends, rather than as independent ends in themselves, a view which, again in Youngian terms, contributes and leads to exploitation (Plumwood, *Feminism* 53). Remembering Frye’s description of the arrogant eye, it is clear that the masters “see with arrogant eyes which organize everything seen with reference to themselves and their own interests” (67).

Plumwood’s discussion of the master’s culture is enlightening in that by understanding its dualistic foundation, we can see how to create an alternative society through critical reconstruction, in which we affirm the “range of tasks, values and interests, concerns, areas of life and social orientations of real value and importance” that have been backgrounded and devalued, while at the same time remaining critical of and “transcending the false choices created by the polarized understandings of dualism” (Plumwood, *Feminism* 65, 66). Unfortunately, her position also provides another example of loving, knowing ignorance regarding the working class. In the opening line of this book Plumwood states: “It is usually at the edges where the great tectonic plates of theory meet and shift that we find the most dramatic developments and upheavals,” specifically

the intersection of liberation theories regarding gender, race, class and nature (*Feminism* 1). Unfortunately, this recognition is only in theory. One specific example is found in Plumwood's explanation of the logical structure of dualisms, chapter two, pages 47-55. Backgrounding is explained through a discussion of how "it is the slave who makes the master a master, the colonised who makes the coloniser" (Plumwood, *Feminism* 48). Colonization is the primary example used to illustrate radical exclusion, though there is a brief mention of racial and gender hyperseparation (Plumwood, *Feminism* 49-52). The same applies to the discussion of relational definition, instrumentalism and homogenization, in that colonization remolds the colonized, wives and colonized people are valued instrumentally, and that homogenization is a feature of colonial relationships and gender division (Plumwood, *Feminism* 52-4). The way in which these are oppressive to the working class as well is mentioned only once, specifically that instrumentalization is what defines a "good worker" (Plumwood, *Feminism* 53). This brief reference to classism indicates that it is an appropriate addition to this conversation, one that Plumwood does not follow through with. As such, Plumwood's stance towards the working class is one of loving, knowing ignorance in that she claims to care about our oppression but only in a superficial way that does not involve actually learning about our differences and similarities and addressing our social subordination.

Karen J. Warren, another prominent ecofeminist, treats class in a similar way in *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters*. Taking a theoretical approach, Warren's version of ecofeminism focuses on the idea of an oppressive conceptual framework, "a set of beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions which shape and reflect how one views oneself and one's world" (46). The first

component of the framework is value-hierarchical thinking, “‘Up-Down’ thinking, which attributes greater value to that which is higher, or Up, than to that which is lower, or Down,” followed by oppositional value dualisms, “disjunctive pairs in which the disjuncts are seen as exclusive (rather than inclusive) and oppositional (rather than complementary) and that places higher value (status, prestige) on one disjunct than the other” (Warren 46). The third and fourth components are power, specifically the power the Ups have over the Downs, and privilege, the unearned advantages the Ups have that the Downs do not (Warren 46-7). Lastly is the logic of domination “that provides the moral premise for ethically justifying the subordination of Downs by Ups in Up-Down relationships of domination and subordination” (Warren 48). As sexism and naturism share the same oppressive conceptual framework, feminists ought to oppose naturism, as well as any other similarly constructed form of oppression that works to subjugate women, such as racism, classism, ageism, etc (Warren 62). Thus, in order to truly liberate all women, as the expressed goal of feminism and ecofeminism, we must take into account these systems of oppression as well.

In addition to understanding the similar conceptual foundations of various forms of oppression and recognizing that women experience oppression in multiple ways, Warren’s specific version of ecofeminism also fulfills the unstated third-wave inclusivity requirement by focusing largely on the oppression of third-world women. Her version of ecofeminist philosophy develops out of, and is responsive to, the intersection of “feminism (and all the issues feminism raises concerning women and other human Others); nature (the natural environment), science (especially scientific ecology), development, and technology; and local or indigenous perspectives” (Warren 44). Thus,

any policy or practice will be prima facie wrong if it interferes with the ability of rural Indian women or other third-world communities to maintain their domestic economies and sustainable agricultural practices (Warren 45-6). This recognition is also important because, in many cases, the women inside the culture are the true experts, possessing a more comprehensive and in-depth knowledge of the area, an expertise known as “indigenous technical knowledge” (Warren 5). Within this discussion, Warren focuses specifically on developing countries, on how third-world women are responsible for most water collection, non-mechanized farming, and sustainable (as opposed to commercial) forest use and consequentially suffer disproportionately from resource depletion, prompting responses such as the often-cited Chipko movement in India (Warren 3-10).

Unfortunately, the idea of valuing local perspectives is one area in which Warren could have, but does not, include rural working class women, in that we are one group within this country that possesses this type of knowledge. In fact, the most notable mention of the rural working class occurs in a brief discussion of food and farming in which she mentions the invisibility of women within this line of work (Warren 10). Unfortunately, Warren does not expound upon this reference to farming, therefore failing to adhere to her claim to value local perspectives and knowledge and her theoretical stance regarding the importance of class discussions. As such, Warren is likewise guilty of displaying a loving, knowing ignorance towards the working class.

While it is certainly important that both Plumwood and Warren, and feminists in general, pay attention to the developing world and the issues effecting third-world women, this focus, in combination with token references to classism, contributes to the invisibility of US working class women within ecofeminism. By focusing primarily on

those who suffer because of colonialism and imperialism, ecofeminists fulfill their unstated third-wave inclusivity requirement without having to actually notice or respond to the ways they benefit from the class-based oppression of women in their own communities. As Lugones states, “it is possible not to quite notice cultural imperialism when you are a victim of it, because it is so impersonal,” with no person-to-person mistreatment (Logic 39). This is also why it is easier to discuss. Distance and government, military and/or economic forces mitigate this mistreatment, creating a society in which we are rarely in a position of direct personal confrontation with those who suffer oppressive effects of cultural imperialism, and it is this direct personal confrontation that would force us to reevaluate and change our lives. It is easier to admit to your role in oppression when it remains an abstract cultural force, when you are not confronted every day, everywhere with the people you are oppressing, when you are not continually forced to look into the mirror that reflects a dissatisfying version of yourself, when you can ignore your role as oppressor. What is missing is practical engagement, the interactive step where those in positions of power act on the responsibility that position entails, challenge the principles and policies of systems that oppress, and scrutinize their own involvement, benefit and complacency (Lugones, “Logic” 39, Jaggar 195, Ortega 68).

Taking this interactive step, going beyond loving, knowing ignorance and including the working class within ecofeminism in meaningful ways requires confronting the stereotype that we are stupid. Lisa Heldke addresses this phenomenon in her article “Farming Made Her Stupid,” in which she discusses how rural people are defined as stupid because of what we know. She makes it clear that stupid knowing is not simply

marginalized knowledge, that is, a form of knowledge useful in our world but not in urban and suburban society as a whole (152). Certainly, our knowledge is marginalized, in that city folks generally see no use in being able to distinguish between fields of wheat and oats when traveling at 55 miles per hour or judge the temperature and moisture content of snow based on the sound it makes under your shoes. However, when “a form of knowing like farming is actually regarded as having the capacity to render one unfit for doing philosophy” we have gone beyond mere marginalized knowledge into the realm of stupidification (Heldke 156). At this point we can begin to see the metrocentricism that permeates ecofeminism, and philosophy in general, in that the type of knowledge that comes from the rural experiences is not valued enough to be considered actual knowledge. This assumption of stupidity leads to the questions of whether or not rednecks can do philosophy or whether poor white trash have any moral sensibilities, and the surprise some feel when learning that some farmers do, in fact, read philosophy and ancient Greek literature.

This form of stupidification leads to and results from two stories about rural folks that simultaneously denigrate and romanticize our culture, keeping us powerless within the environmental field in general and ecofeminism in particular. I will use Robert Alan Sessions’ article “Ecofeminism and Work” to illustrate these stories, not because he is the only one to take this approach, but because his is one of the few articles within ecofeminism that actually discusses farming. The first story points the environmental finger of blame at farmers as the destroyers of land. Farmers are “‘mining’ the soil in such a way that the ‘gold’ (topsoil) literally has been washed to the sea,” they “destroy the ‘ground of their being,’” “have sullied the waters farmers, their families, and their

livestock drink,” and, behaving as corporations, are “pushing their land and livestock to their limits” (Sessions 178-9). The first and most obvious problem with this narrative is its one-sided focus on the negative environmental consequences of farming, ignoring our positive contributions to society, such as food.

Another, more interesting, problem within this story is that it fails to distinguish between the economic system dictating such practices and the farmers themselves. Most farmers do not want the soil to erode or water to be polluted, but we are in a system in which it is financially difficult, often insurmountably so, for the average farmer to make the switch to no-till organic farming, what with a new no-till drill priced over \$50,000 and organic certification taking three years of decreased yields without increased prices (US, Case). While it is clearly a better option in the long run to grow organically, we have short-term responsibilities and obligations that simply cannot be postponed or disregarded. When these financial difficulties are ignored, when we are seen as nothing but destructive and when we are seen as stupid, we are in a position of powerlessness because we have nothing positive to contribute to the environmental conversation, regardless that we know best what we need to do our job better.

The opposite side of the destroyer narrative constructs farmers as the salt of the earth, as simple, unpretentious, rustic, old-fashioned stewards holding the land in sacred trust. As Sessions states, it is lamentable that “the proverbial idyllic life of the American Jeffersonian yeoman farmer, a life of hard, honest, and convivial work done in close families and communities, insofar as it ever existed, is, for the most part, a relic of the past,” “disappeared from all except necromantic movements ‘back to the land’” (179). Rural culture declines as “solitariness is replacing the solidarity of old-style farm

communities,” in that “farmers’ families have become smaller and less close-knit,” with farmers tied more to the market and “supported by their banks and machines rather than their neighbors and farm communities” (Sessions 178). While more positive than the destroyer narrative, this depiction of farmers is likewise inaccurate. First of all, farmers and country folks are not environmental saints to be placed on a pedestal, as the previous narrative so clearly illustrates and which we do not claim or wish to be. Secondly, the life of the Jeffersonian yeoman farmer and, as applied to the Midwest, the later pioneer experience, was far from idyllic in that we were virtually isolated during winter months and were always one unsuccessful growing season from destitution. More specific to the absence of farmers and rural people within ecofeminism is the mistaken idea that our culture has disappeared. Though many aspects of our culture have changed, given decreased population, technological advances and urban cultural imperialism, many core values remain. For example, contrary to what Sessions states, many rural communities retain an incredible sense of solidarity in which the community becomes family and we share in each other’s accomplishments and take responsibility for another’s failure.

The most disturbing aspects of these farming narratives is the message that, one, the only contribution to society important enough to mention is negative, and two, that even when romanticized we still cannot provide any beneficial contribution from within our culture because this culture no longer exists. This not only places us again in a position of silence and powerlessness, but also does a disservice to the ecofeminist agenda of dismantling the nature/culture dualism, in that we travel between these two worlds, while recognizing that they are, in fact, not separate worlds. Because of this position, we can offer the idea of attunedness to the land that builds on, yet goes beyond

and strengthens, Plumwood's concept of natural agency and Warren's idea of a caring relationship with the land, thereby strengthening ecofeminism.

In "The Concept of a Cultural Landscape: Nature, Culture and Agency in the Land," Plumwood provides the idea of a cultural landscape as an example of a conceptual framework hiding natural agency by creating a story of human agents acting on the passive medium of nature (119-21). Recognizing the need for mutual standing between humans and nature as agents in order to develop a genuinely sustainable relationship, Plumwood defines agency as "active intentionality," removing the consciousness requirement and recognizing "the creativity of nonhuman elements" ("Concept" 116, 124, 122). At this point we can recognize the collaboration or interaction between human and non-human agents in the creation of the natural environment, as well as the role natural elements play in culture, for example, through land formation and environmental goods and services (Plumwood, "Concept" 135-6). Our task becomes the reconceptualization of our identity as controller and manipulator of the earth and to learn to live in a sustainable manner, especially given the current environmental deterioration. An important component is the recognition of constraints or limits, which we are to envisage "as resistance arising from the project of independent systems and agencies" and which necessitate a mode of "encounter, respect, negotiation and (possible mutual) adjustment" (Plumwood, "Concept" 144-5).

While Plumwood provides an intellectual understanding of natural agency, she does not discuss how this new framework will play out in our relationships with nature, practically speaking. As such, I now turn to Warren's text in that she provides more guidance for this project. As the most pragmatic element in Warren's care-sensitive ethic,

when interacting with entities of moral value we ought to engage in care practices “that either maintain, promote, or enhance the health (well-being, flourishing) of relevant parties, or at least do not cause unnecessary harm” (115). As a process, rather than an event, a caring relationship includes caring about another through “cognitive attentiveness to both its health . . . and status as morally considerable;” taking care of or “having responsibilities towards the other;” giving care, i.e. competently exercising the skills, dispositions and capacities needed to engage in caring practices; and receiving the care the other may, or may not, give in return (Warren 141).

As Plumwood and Warren state, when interacting with nature, we are to be respectful of its service-providing limits and attentive to its health. However, neither provides a helpful discussion of how to negotiate such a relationship beyond Plumwood’s recommendation that we cultivate “sensitivity to nature” (“Concepts 137). What we need is a more in-depth discussion of what it means to be sensitive to nature’s needs and limits, what type of relationship to the land this requires and creates, and how we can encourage the further development of such sensitivity. This is precisely the point at which rural folks can strengthen the ecofeminist endeavor in that we possess the virtue, if you will, of attunedness to nature, perhaps best defined as a continual recognition of and sensitivity to the specific abilities and needs of nature, as presented to us by nature itself, necessary for a respectful relationship with nature that recognizes both its status as independent agent and our needs.

To begin understanding the concept of attunedness to nature it is helpful to first understand the world in which rural folks live. Ours is not a world in which nature is separate from culture, nor is it one in which culture ranks above nature. As farmers, our

lives are oriented around nature, our actions dictated by whether it is the season to plant or to harvest, our daily activities planned according to the weather. Even those of us who do not farm are oriented to nature as our paychecks depend on the weather and the crops, in that in farm communities most businesses rely heavily on the patronage of farmers and that the weather can often prevent us from getting to work. In this way, we understand not only that our rural society is dependent on nature, but that culture as a whole relies on nature as well, most obviously as the provider of food. Certainly, this understanding of culture's dependency on nature is available to those who live in urban areas, as the commonly understood areas of pure culture. However, when your occupation and financial stability are not structured directly and primarily around nature, it is far too easy to create a world in which it is backgrounded, denied and forgotten, a world in which nature *is* separate, hence the need for urban environmental education programs and an academic movement to address this perceived separation. The world in which rural folks live is one in which we recognize that nature is an entity equal to, if not greater than, culture. It is a world in which we must work with nature.

The world in which we live necessitates and helps to create a state of attunedness to the land. Our immediate and long-term survival depends on understanding the abilities and character of the land, which vary regionally, by county and by field, with certain fields being better suited for corn rather than wheat based on soil type and quality. However, attunedness goes beyond this scientific understanding of soil. To truly know the land and how best to work with it you must know how this land has been treated in the past; whether it has been farmed continuously since pioneer settlement; how it emerged from the dust bowls of the 1930's; what type of farm equipment your

grandfather used; what crops your father planted, chemicals he used and yields produced; what was grown in that field last season, what the yields were and how all these factors effect the immediate health of the land this season. You also need to be aware of the weather, knowing how hard the winters have been for the last seven years; how much rain was received last fall; when the ground froze; when, how much and what types of snow were received; when it thawed this spring and whether there was a cycle of freezing and thawing. You also need to keep in mind the type and number of animals that live on the land, for example, the strength of the coyote population. Last but not least, you need to be aware of what your neighbors are planting in surrounding fields, the state of the Ag market and economy in general and any recent developments in farm equipment. All of this tells us, first, that we do not and cannot have absolute control over nature and, second, that farming requires incredible amounts and numerous types of knowledge.

While this knowledge could, theoretically, be gained through studying the history of the land, its geography and weather patterns, and through conversations with farmers, it is important to recognize that this cognitive ability and factual knowledge does not get to the heart of attunedness to the land, in that it incorporates a strong intuitive and emotional component. An analogy to child raising can be helpful in understanding these elements. Even if you have read books about child development and are able to place a specific child within those categories you will be at a loss as to how to interact with a two-year-old unless you understand the ways that specific child is progressing through developmental states, the way in which she is being raised and her personality. In order to do your best by this child you need to be sensitive to her as a unique person and respond to what she gives you. This requires being in a relationship and interacting with this child

out of genuine care. Though some people are innately good at this, possessing the right personality traits and disposition, those who are not can become better through experience. The same applies to those who farm. Farming requires sensitivity to the land not simply as a resource but as an active agent we are working with, rather than against. This intuitive sensitivity to the land is not knowledge you can gain from textbooks but comes from lived experience with the land as it “grows you up [and] teaches you” (Plumwood, “Concepts” 127). In order for the land to teach you, you must first understand that the land is an entity that *can* teach, that we can best learn how to interact with the land from the land itself. To do this we need to recognize what the land can do, its abilities and limits, and how the land will tell us this.

I do understand that the attunedness to the land that many farmers possess, the ways in which it develops and the relationship with the land that it fosters may seem slightly romantic and idyllic. I am well aware that some farmers are not attuned to the land’s needs and abilities and attempt to force the land to do their bidding. It is also true that some farmers are not concerned with sustainability, that some farmers use the knowledge gained from attunement to exploit nature and push the land to the highest level of productivity possible. I do not deny this, nor do I deny that even when done with the best of intentions, farming has negative environmental impacts. However, these negative elements ought not discredit or overshadow the positive contributions farmers can make to environmental conversations. Rather than denying the environmental harms resulting from farming or the destructive practices some farmers engage in, we, as farmers, environmentalists and/or ecofeminists, must acknowledge and learn from these less than desirable aspects. What has been and is being done wrong can provide excellent

opportunities for readjustment and growth, can deepen our understanding of attunedness to the land and can show the extent to which this concept needs to be focused on within our communities.

Before closing, I would like to draw attention specifically to the rural folks and farmers who are also women. Attunedness to the land develops out of relationships that both men and women have with nature, leading me to discuss it in a gender-neutral manner. However, those women well attuned to the land are in an excellent position to contribute to the ecofeminist conversation. Like many others, we experience oppression in numerous ways, in that we are oppressed as women per se, as women working in a male dominated occupation, as working class, and as rural. This location can provide us with greater insight into the similarities between numerous systems of oppression. Specifically, we are in an excellent position to examine and discuss the ways in which classism, naturism, metrocentrism and sexism are interrelated, as well as the ways each system contributes to and benefits from the failure to see and appreciate attunedness to nature. Were ecofeminism to explore this area of thought, we would not only know more about attunedness and these connections, but the movement would exhibit a greater consistency between theoretical stances and actual practices of inclusion and interactions with nature.

Within this paper, I have attempted to show ways feminism fails to include the working class and how this results from and contributes to our exploitation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, marginalization and invisibility. I have also tried to show how this occurs in ecofeminism and the ways in which including the rural working

class could benefit ecofeminist theory. My hope is that this will ease classism within both feminism and ecofeminism and will re-open new areas for thought and growth.

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