Introducing Women's Studies

Also by Diane Richardson

Women and the AIDS Crisis

Safer Sex: The Guide for Women Today

**Women, Motherhood and Childrearing*

**Published by Palgrave Macmillan*

Introducing Women's Studies

Feminist theory and practice

Edited by

Diane Richardson

and

Victoria Robinson

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June Hannam, Jenny Hockey, Stevi Jackson, Margaret Marshment,
Mary Maynard, Paula Nicolson, Diane Richardson, Victoria Robinson,
Christine Skelton, Jackie Stacey, Anne Witz 1993

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For my mother and father and in memory of my grandmother, Fanny Hinchliffe.

(Diane Richardson)

For my mother, Sandra Robinson, my nana, Nellie Robinson, and in memory of my grandmother, Winifred Thompson, for their strength and dignity.

(Victoria Robinson)

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Sheffield

DIANE RICHARDSON

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Introduction

Over the past two decades Women's Studies has become established as an important field of study in many countries across the world. It is now a rapidly expanding area both in terms of the number of courses available and in the proliferation of feminist theories from a variety of perspectives. Other academic disciplines such as Sociology and Literature are also in the process of being transformed as a result of the debates and ideas coming from within Women's Studies.

Despite these developments, there have been few attempts to provide a Women's Studies textbook that offers a comprehensive overview of past, present and future developments in feminist knowledge and theory. Many tutors have been unable to recommend an introductory text which covers the major debates, and consequently students have often found themselves without an accessible source book. This is one of the reasons why, having taught Women's Studies at different levels for a number of years, we felt it was important for this book to be written.

A number of textbooks for Women's Studies have been published (for example Gunew, 1990 and 1991; the Open University series, *Issues in Women's Studies*; and Humm, 1992) as well as books dealing specifically with current debates about the teaching and learning process in Women's Studies (for example, Aaron and Walby, 1991; and Hinds, Phoenix and Stacey, 1992). However, these are different in style and intention from this book, which is not a reader and sets out to provide students with a basic introduction to Women's Studies. Inevitably in a book such as this there are gaps and omissions, for instance feminist critiques of science and technology, and the absence of specific chapters on social policy and cross-cultural perspectives. However, no one book can do justice to the variety and richness of the diversity of feminist ideas available within the broad scope of Women's Studies. What this book does offer is a comprehensive overview of the key themes and issues in major subject areas within Women's Studies, from an inter-

disciplinary perspective. It introduces the main feminist ideas and perspectives on such issues as sexuality, the family, work, 'race', history, violence, reproduction, feminist theory, motherhood, health, education, literature, representation, and debates within Women's Studies itself to students of Women's Studies, and those studying feminism and gender relations on other courses. Each chapter benefits from the writer's specialist knowledge of their subject, and contains a summary of the research and a critique of the main arguments, highlighting differences between feminists. At the end of each chapter there are suggestions for further reading. These recommended texts are useful overviews or collections, allowing the reader to explore the issues raised in each chapter in more depth.

For those new to Women's Studies there are a number of dictionaries available which are useful in helping to explain and expand upon concepts and terminology used in this book (Kramarae and Treichler, 1985; Tuttle, 1987; and Humm, 1989a). The use of the term 'race' in quotes is to indicate that 'race' is a socially constructed category rather than a biologically determined one. Also, the word Black with a capital is used to indicate that it is a political category rather than purely a descriptive term, referring to the common experiences of racism directed at non-white people. The term Women of Colour rather than Black is preferred by some authors, particularly in the United States.

Finally, we would hope that this book clearly demonstrates that the idea that we have entered a post-feminist age is far from a reality for women throughout the world. Our aim is that this book will stimulate further discussion and analysis and show that feminist thought and action are constantly developing and informing each other in the process of working towards an end to women's oppression.

VICTORIA ROBINSON
DIANE RICHARDSON