IT MAKES SENSE THAT the term “feminism” would find its way into an array of glossaries, because the function of a glossary, in general, is to define and clarify difficult terms. In our culture the word “feminism” covers enough ideological, intellectual, practical, and sensational territory to stir any number of map-makers into action. A General Semantics glossary, with its tools of analysis (e.g., et cetera, dating, and indexing) would appear to be an excellent forum to explore the diverse philosophic systems that make up the territory of “feminisms.”

In Robert Pula’s first installment of his “A General Semantics Glossary,” he states, “I affirm that a pedagogical device designed to ameliorate the agony of students of any discipline constitutes a potentially good thing and should be at-

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tempted" (GSG:I, 462. See references at end of article). The authors of this article agree. We have avidly read and appreciated Pula’s glossary definitions. However, his all-too brief description of contemporary feminism, presented in Part XI of this series, seems more appropriate to us as an editorial, than as a glossary entry, for editorials tend to involve a greater degree of intensionality.

In order to develop a more effective extensional orientation Pula, himself, suggests that one ask the following questions: “How do I know that? Why do I say that? What evidence might I discover, which might disconfirm what I am claiming, what I have just said?” (GSG:VIII, 225). Pula, in a manner similar to philosopher Karl Popper’s technique of “critical rationalism” or “falsifiability,” suggests these questions as a means to curb the influence and errors caused by one’s belief-systems. It is in this spirit, that we would like to offer a general-semantics critique of ETC.’s latest glossary entry. In the process, we would also like to present to Pula, and his readers, some additional theoretical, historical, and practical “evidence” toward the enterprise of describing the field of contemporary “feminism.”

One of the major areas of concern for general semantics, as well as for several trends of feminist thought, is the issue of moving beyond the traditional, either/or methods of Aristotelian categorization to a more multi-valued, and therefore “truthful,” system for interpreting our world. (1) In the strong words of Pula, “if we willfully (or stupidly) simplify a blatantly, unapologetically complex structure, we do violence to it and ourselves” (GSG:I, 463). As “general semantics-feminists” (one female and one male), the authors of this essay were surprised, then, that Pula cited Christina Hoff Sommers’s controversial book, Who Stole Feminism: How Women Have Betrayed Women, as one of the two primary sources for his glossary entry on “feminism,” the other being Pula’s own lived experience vis-à-vis his parents and family (GSG:XI, 208-209).
Although we were intrigued and entertained by much of Sommers’s book, and although we were sympathetic to some of her concerns, we found her two-dimensional method of analysis simplistic and far afield from the practices of a general-semantics investigation. Sommers unequivocally divides the many voices that make up the complex field of feminist criticism into two distinct, either/or camps—“equity feminists” and “sex/gender feminists.” Pula uses Sommers’s binary description of feminism as the basis for his glossary definition by explaining that Sommers has provided him with two differentiating, rather than oppositional terms (GSG:XI, 209). But how do Sommers, and in turn Pula, operationally define and apply those terms?

“Equity-Feminism” vs “Sex-Gender Feminism”:
An Either/Or Proposition

Sommers’s polarizing “equity vs sex/gender feminism” classification system echoes the age-old division of women. It attempts to divide the “good girls” (equity feminists) from the “bad ones” (sex/gender feminists) on the basis of their “sexual politics.” And, in the process, this system distorts, rather than describes the terrain it endeavors to explain. Sommers identifies herself as an “equity feminist.” She insists that members of this group are the direct descendants of the laudable nineteenth-century American suffragettes because they seek equal rights for all people. That is, “equity feminists” pursue equity in job and educational opportunities and reject the concept of “special treatment.” In the tradition of their noteworthy ancestors, equity feminists focus their energies on the reasonable task of eliminating specific injustices that can be repaired by legal reform. Sommers states that “the equity agenda may not yet be fully achieved, but by any reasonable measure, equity feminism has turned out to be a great American success story” (Sommers, 21-22).

In contrast, Sommers dubs the “sex/gender feminists,” as the “newer,” “angry,” fringe whose “unwholesome” and “divisive” practices constitute nothing less than “gender war-
fare." According to Sommers, this cadre of feminists make "war" on our society because they mistakenly believe that modern American women are still "in thrall to a system of male dominance ... the sex/gender system" — hence the label for this category. Sex/gender feminists insist that we must understand how male domination operates in all facets of our lives in order to rid ourselves of the oppression and discrimination of sexism. And to do this, Sommers baldly implies that all sex/gender feminists tell American women that they must "join with and be loyal only to women" (Ibid.).

During the course of her book, Sommers classifies activists and writers such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Betty Friedan, Germaine Greer, Doris Lessing, Joan Didion, Susan Sontag, Cynthia Ozik, and Iris Murdoch as "equity feminists," without indexing their disagreements or differences in methodology. In a similar fashion, Sommers relegates other noted feminists such as Gloria Steinem, Susan Faludi, Kate Millet, Alice Jardine, Carolyn Heilbrun, Marilyn French, Patricia Ireland, Catherine McKinnon, Carol Gilligan, and Simone de Beauvoir to the "sex/gender" sect. These either/or categories dismiss the number of practical concerns and rhetorical similarities that exist between the theorists whom Sommers so blithely separates into opposing camps. They also negate the importance of a nuanced analysis of each individual's work.

In his own description of the "equity feminism vs sex/gender feminism" categories, Pula reiterates Sommers's explanation of the historical and philosophical derivation of her term, "equity feminism." However, he neglects to define Sommers's "sex/gender feminism" classification in the same manner. Pula describes the latter category by quoting a few of Sommers's adjectival characterizations of the group (e.g., "angry," "prone to self-dramatization," "chronically-offended," "a moral vanguard fighting a war to save women," etc.). He mentions that some of its leaders are poor scholars and that a few are fraudulent as well. He agrees with Sommers that sex/gender feminism, despite its fringe status, "is the
prevailing ideology of contemporary feminist philosophers and leaders," but offers no substantiation for this claim. Nor does Pula attempt to explain the ideology of "sex/gender feminism." He simply restates Sommers's accusation that this group is making "gender warfare" on our nation. Pula brings up the concept of indexing the many practitioners of feminism only in the very last sentence of his glossary entry. But by then, his single-line reminder that feminist 1, is not feminist 2, is not feminist 3, is not feminist 4, reads like a disclaimer, rather than as an extensional tool of analysis (GSG:XI, 208-211).

Label or Libel? Historical Analysis, Dating, Indexing, Etc.

According to Korzybski's structural differential, the first verbal level involves naming and describing. When we name relatively simple things, like "pencil," we may have little trouble getting our ideas across. However, labels such as "truth," "justice," "equality," "equity feminism" and "sex/gender-feminism" are higher-order terms that need clarification—referents to particular instances and times. Sommers's referents for the latter two terms, the staples of her book and Pula's glossary entry on "feminism," involve some serious discrepancies. Her definition of "equity feminism" overlooks critical historical data, and her explanation of "sex/gender feminism" is so reductive that the label libels an entire body of research.

As noted, Sommers defines contemporary "equity-feminism" as a continuation of the balanced, wholesome activism and philosophy of the early American suffragettes. In order to lend weight to this description, Sommers cites nineteenth-century women's rights activist Elizabeth Cady Stanton as "perhaps the ablest exponent of equity-feminism." She offers several incidents of Stanton's career to demonstrate how the original followers of "equity feminism" sought, without discrimination, equal rights for all people. She mentions that Stanton based her women's "Declaration of Sentiments" for the 1848 Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention on the
words of Thomas Jefferson’s “Declaration of Independence” (Sommers, 34-35). She quotes from Stanton’s courageous 1854 address to the New York State legislature in which Stanton demanded universal suffrage (Ibid., 22). And, she relates the story of how, in 1869, Stanton and Susan B. Anthony organized a campaign to save Hester Vaughan, a woman unjustly convicted of murdering her newborn baby after she was seduced, fired, and then left to starve by her employer (Ibid., 35). But, Sommers does not date or discuss these events in terms of the complicated relations that transpired between women’s rights and abolitionist activists, of which Stanton was an integral part.

In 1866, Stanton and leaders of the women’s rights and abolitionist movements joined forces to create the American Equal Rights Association, a coalition whose initial purpose was to press for universal suffrage. However, under the pressure of a government which remained adamant in its refusal to grant women and African-Americans the full rights and benefits of citizenship, some influential members of the coalition began to insist that the quest for universal suffrage was simply too difficult to achieve. They proposed that the group focus on obtaining the black male vote first, as a retribution for the national crime of slavery. This proposal, and the heated exchanges that followed, irreversibly split the coalition three years after its founding. (2) Stanton, outraged by her former colleagues’ betrayal of the women’s movement, and by what she saw as the ignoble machinations of a conservative government, responded to the situation with a torrent of rhetoric that was deliberately as divisive. According to historian Ellen Carol DuBois, these circumstances accounted “for the quite extraordinary mixture of militant feminism and intense racism in most of Stanton’s writings during 1868 and 1869.” (3) Stanton temporarily abandoned the cause of political parity for all Americans.

From 1869 to 1870, Stanton wrote about “Saxon” women’s fears of black men; proposed that educated white women should be enfranchised before “ignorant” black men; and
stated that American white women were just as enslaved as black men because they were forced to live under the constant threat of rape. Stanton denounced American culture as a male-dominated society that was nothing less than "one grand rape of womanhood." (4) She suggested that, in order to protect themselves, white women should buy Newfoundland dogs, carry guns, and dress as men. (5)

In her litany of the many ways in which sex/gender feminists discriminate against other women and men, Sommers states that "gender feminists are especially disapproving of the lives of traditionally religious women ... whom they see as being conditioned for highly restricted roles" (Sommers, 260). By the late 1880's, Stanton's concern about sexual and individual rights for women led her to argue that religion was, in fact, the ultimate root of women's oppression. In 1895, she outraged many of her fellow suffragettes and the Christian community by publishing her book, *The Woman's Bible*, a feminist commentary on the Old Testament. (6)

Dating and indexing Stanton's career illustrates some of the pitfalls of single-category labeling. A more complex and complete picture of Stanton's work also suggests how "radicalism" can evolve out of harsh social circumstances, and, that one may only be able to begin to understand and appreciate the difficulties of such circumstances, and the contributions of the struggling individuals (and groups) in hindsight — which is part of the time-binding process.

Sommers's "sex/gender feminist" label is problematic as well. As mentioned previously, Sommers selected this term to refer to the feminist theorists who believe that sexism or gender bias is so insidious and rampant in our culture that much of the time we are not even aware of its presence. Sex/gender feminists seek to investigate and expose the ways patriarchal gender biases operate in our society in order to eradicate sexual discrimination. However, Sommers distorts both the drawbacks and the value of this body of work through her "allness-statement" arguments and her one-dimensional system of documentation.
The sum total of her book implies that all feminists who use the above “sex/gender lens” analysis draw the same oppressive and regressive conclusions: women are the absolute and immutable victims of our society; females are inherently more advanced than males; anyone who does not go along with politically-correct politics must be punished or at least censored. Sommers never really addresses the historical and political reasons that may foment these kinds of judgments. Nor does she investigate such radical rhetoric in terms of our larger popular culture — a culture which is bombarded by a variety of politically-correct discourses and inundated by the “victim literature” of the self-help industry.

Sommers complains that sex/gender feminists are scholars manqué and that they encourage women to categorically discriminate against men. In order to build her case, Sommers carefully documents and discusses at length the sex/gender feminists who presumably lie about their statistical research (Sommers, 11-17, 188-208); who attend conferences to sing songs, play with teddy bears, and hug each other (Ibid., 30-31); who inanely argue that the art of quilting is as profound as Michelangelo’s work in the Sistine Chapel (Ibid., 62-64); who attempt to rewrite history by replacing the monumental events of our culture which involve mostly men with the “trivialities” of women’s everyday lives (Ibid., 56-63); and who unjustly charge men with sexual harassment because of their misguided need for power, their sexual confusion, or their anger, etc. (Ibid., 111-116).

Sommers never bothers to differentiate the numerous feminist scholars and writers who work in a wide range of disciplines, who study the ways in which sex and gender biases operate in our society, but who nevertheless argue their cases without resorting to poor scholarship or to retaliatory acts of discrimination. And again, Sommers never examines the historical and political circumstances that may be partially responsible for the reactionary strategies and behaviors she lists throughout her book. Nor does she pause to contemplate whether there may be particles of “truth” or merit em-
bedded in even some of the most outrageous comments or actions.

With all of this in mind, it is understandable that Sommers also overlooks the fact that the nineteenth-century suffragettes practiced a form of sex/gender feminism. In order to argue their case for statutory equality, the early women’s rights activists first had to study and then refute their society’s hidden and not-so-hidden views about sex and gender. To win the right to vote, Stanton and her colleagues had to dispute commonly held ideas about gender such as those found in the writings of Rebecca Harding Davis, a noted author of the period. In her pamphlet, *Aris et Focis* (For Altar and Hearth, circa 1870), Davis explains that voting and job equality for females did not make sense because women and men were not equipped to do each others’ work. She asks her readers whether they really think that women are fit to, or would even want “to dissect babies rather than to suckle them?” She insists that a woman’s brain “being like the rest of her frame, of more delicate organization, is not capable of such sustained and continuous mental exertion as man’s.” And finally she tells her readers that it is ridiculous to try to interest females in politics and voting because most women are far too occupied with the proper responsibilities of homemaking. (7)

It was not until 1920, almost one hundred and fifty years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, more than seventy years after the Convention in Seneca Falls, and fifty years after African-American men were granted suffrage, that women’s rights activists were finally able to convince the public-at-large that their brains and bodies were sufficiently strong enough to endure the rigors of voting.

Much of the feminist sex/gender research today involves something akin to an organism-as-a-whole-in-environments approach. Investigators explore how gender intersects with class, race, sexual orientation, age, religion, and ethnicity. Such studies examine how our cultural beliefs about sexuality and gender continue to impact on the social mores and
laws of our country, and therefore, on the equal rights of all people. (8) Job discrimination; pornography; our laws on abortion; the composition of our military; divorce (including alimony payments and child custody); the private sexual behavior of consenting adults; the institution of marriage (which excludes gays and lesbians from the social, tax, health, and inheritance benefits of the state); sexual harassment; and the crime of rape, reflect our changing social views about sexuality and gender.

For Whom Does the “Critic” or “Activist” Speak?

Despite our reservations about Sommers’s book, we still welcome her contributions to the field and will continue to read her work with as many grains of salt as she implies that one should use when reading Faludi’s book, Backlash (Sommers, 227-244). But, we can not agree with Pula’s assertion that Sommers, (or Pula himself) presents a “balanced,” albeit tough description of feminism today. Pula points out that Sommers never resorts to a Rush Limbaugh “Feminazis” style of name-calling. However, Sommers’s polemical intentions (and we do not in any way dispute her right to take a position) are evidenced through her purposeful compilation of sensational and reductio ad absurdum examples to make her case about the “horrific” sex/gender feminist take-over.

The slanted direction of her book is clearly reflected by the partisan reviews she received. New York Times reviewer, Nina Auerbach, states that Who Stole Feminism? “is so overwrought and underwritten that it is unlikely to amuse or persuade. Contemporary feminism is certainly open to criticism, but it deserves a more informed adversary.” (9) The Publishers Weekly review taken from Allure magazine begins, “Despite its author’s claims to the contrary this book reads like a right-wing, anti-feminist call to arms.” (10) In Library Journal Cynthia Harrison asserts, “Unfortunately, Sommers’s scornful tone makes her reporting suspect; she mocks the arguments she opposes rather than engaging and refuting them...
This book will have as an audience readers who share her politics." (11)

Writers for conservative or libertarian publications typically laud Sommers's work. Tama Starr, reviewing for Reason quips, "the answer to the question in the book's title is, nobody stole feminism. The liberals gave it away ... What one wonders is, why does she (Sommers) want it back?" (12) Mary Lefkowitz titles her essay on Sommers's book for the National Review, "Robbery in Progress." Lefkowitz calls Sommers's work "an excellent new book which everyone interested in the subject (feminism) should read." Agreeing with Sommers's arguments Lefkowitz laments, "now 'equity feminists' like me have themselves become the Enemy of other feminists who reject the values that we fought for ... "(13) And Cathy Young, making her debut as a writer for Commentaty states, "Sommers chronicles in depressing detail the 'colonization' of universities, academic councils, and other institutions by radical feminists."(14) And so forth...

In his glossary definition/essay, Pula, like the reviewers above, seems to use Sommers's arguments as an entry point to discuss his own "political" views about feminism. Pula states:

I wish to make clear my operating assumption that the fact that a significant minority of formally educated women have self-appointedly declared 'gender warfare' in the name of more than 50% of our population constitutes a deep socio-biological pathology, probably (and sadly) expressive in many cases of deep individual pathologies. If I am correct, the matter is a serious one. The need for us to distinguish individual and positional 'feminists' seems vital for our societal and individual relations — for the health of our society, and for the humaneness of our personal evaluations (GSG:XI, 209-210).

Pula's reference to some feminists manifesting a "deep socio-biological pathology which is probably (and sadly) expressive in many cases of deep individual pathologies" is
clearly an intensional description. Labels such as "socio-biological pathology" and "individual pathologies" are high level abstractions which Pula neither defines, nor substantiates. Likewise, the next set of labels Pula uses, "individual" feminists as opposed to "positional" feminists, not only lacks extensional definition, but poses yet another either/or dichotomy. For Pula, the good feminists are the "individual" ones and the bad feminists, who "threaten the health of our society," are the positional ones. But why does Pula frame "positionality" negatively? Isn't it our position, as general semanticists, that general semantics is valuable for most people to know? Don't good individual feminists like Pula, Sommers, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton take positions on the issues which concern them? And didn't Stanton attempt to build a coalition of like-thinking people to fight for universal suffrage?

In her feature article for the New York Times Book Review, "Feminism's Third Wave: What Do Young Women Want?," Wendy Kaminer suggests that "Feminism remains a balancing trick. Negotiating the drive toward individual autonomy and the demand for collective identity, young women must walk the same tightrope as their elders." (15) Feminists and non-feminist "individualists" alike, may wish to define themselves as "human beings" whose goals, character, and intelligence can not be determined by sex, race, or creed, etc. However, if we use an organism-as-wholes-in-environments lens, we know that individuals are also partially defined as a result of their affiliations, whether these affiliations be family, friends, neighborhood, school, religion, political party, state, country — or whether a person is female, male, white, a person of color, heterosexual, or homosexual, etc.

Both Pula and Sommers tell their readers that sex/gender feminists presume to speak "in the name of more than 50% of the population" (GSG:XI, 209; Sommers, 275). What is the evidence for this statement? How does the rhetoric of the many feminists who presumably make up this category, significantly differ from that of other activists, politicians, phi-
losophers, and writers — including Pula, Sommers, and the authors of this essay? The use of the words such as "we," "our," "us," "women," "men," "the American people," may function as conventions of speech as well as elocutionary devices of inclusion. Words such as "have to," "must," "imperative that," and "should," are often used as tools of persuasion. In the beginning of his entry on feminism, Pula refers to "A General Semantics Glossary" as "our glossary." In the paragraph cited above, he speaks of the "need for us to distinguish individual and positional 'feminists'" which "seems vital for our societal and individual relations — for the health of our society, and for the humaneness of our personal evaluations." Sommers insists that (my emphasis again) "American women owe an incalculable debt to the classically liberal feminists who came before us ... Battered women don’t need untruths to make their case before a fair-minded public..." (Sommers, 17). And so forth ... For whom do Pula and Sommers speak?

The fact that feminists take positions individually or in groups; the fact that they speak out and argue with one another about their theories and beliefs and sometimes engage in the use of radical or sensational rhetoric (including Sommers's); the fact that feminists compete for jobs, grants, publishing opportunities and pedagogical territories are, in our view, not examples of women betraying women. On the contrary, the wide range of critiques, philosophies, and activist strategies encourage many feminists and other social critics to rethink and refine their ideas about the world we live in on an ongoing basis. In this way, the field of feminism(s) embodies both Popper's and Pula's process of "falsifiability." The authors of this essay think that if anything can partially define the territory of contemporary feminism it is the belief in social, political and economic equality, defined and redefined through a process of communal, critical refutation.

In closing, does Pula, or even Rush Limbaugh, have the right to express their opinions about feminism? We think so. But we also think that definitions expressed in "A General
Semantics Glossary" ought to be extensionally-oriented and thoroughly explored, because the writer of such a forum, in our opinion, does presume to speak for others. We admire our friend and fellow feminist Bob Pula and we look forward to his glossary entries. We also encourage the readers of ETC. to follow the debates of feminist communities as they continue to evolve.

REFERENCES

Please note the abbreviations used for the essays of Robert P. Pula):


NOTES


2. See for a concise description of these events, Elizabeth Frost-Knappman, assisted by Sara Kurian, The ABC-CLIO Companion to Women's Progress in America (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 1994), 16-17.

3. Ellen Carol Dubois in Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony: Correspondence, Writings, Speeches, edited with a commentary by Ellen

4. Stanton, 119-123.


6. Dubois in Stanton, 182-188; Stanton, excerpts from *A Woman's Bible*, 229-243.


