

WHO LISTENS WHEN WOMEN SPEAK?

THE STRUGGLE FOR FEMINIST CRITIQUE IN UNIVERSITIES

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Suppression of intellectual dissent sometimes occurs in obvious and dramatic ways, such as a blocking of critical publications or sacking dissidents. These cases are important, but they may divert attention from even more important aspects of suppression: the systematic downgrading or denial of whole areas of thought and action. If the systematic suppression is highly effective, then overt suppression will seldom be required. One of the areas which has been suppressed in this way is feminist critique.

Feminism is a wide, diverse body of thought and political action. I define feminism here as the theoretical critique of patriarchy and the action being taken by women to remove male domination from their work and personal lives.¹ Feminism is not a new phenomenon, rather a new formulation of an old problem: how to prevent the power and integrity of women being denied or dismissed by men.²

Feminist critique, at the intellectual level, encompasses a number of challenges to established ideas, including insights into the nature of power and hierarchy, analysis of the importance of the gender³ division of labour, the division between public and private, and a re-valuing of women's experience. Feminist critique is linked to feminist political practice, which includes struggles for equal opportunity, struggles against male domination over reproduction and women's sexuality, and struggles for a more just society.

Within universities, feminism has presented a challenge both to established ideas and to the structures of power, including staff control over curriculum and students and administrative control over job opportunities. It is not surprising then that feminist theory and action has been greeted with opposition, opposition both to the feminist critique of dominant intellectual frameworks in academia, and opposition to the advancement of feminist scholars within academia.

My aim here is to describe the structural nature of the suppression of feminist thought in universities, with some examples of strategies used to overcome it. It is important to note that I am concerned primarily with suppression of *feminist thought*, not with discrimination against and suppression of women because they are women. This latter phenomenon, though highly important, is peripheral to my concern here.

Also, I do not intend to catalogue individual struggles for feminist studies in particular universities, but only to mention a few such cases in passing. My primary focus will be the silence which has surrounded the work and ideas of feminists.

As well as including analysis and documentation of suppression of feminist critique, this account also includes many comments based on my personal experiences and perspectives because this is the only authentic voice in which I can speak. I am part of the process I am attempting to understand, not an independent anthropologist from another galaxy.

ORIGINS OF THE CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST CHALLENGE

It was not until my first few weeks of women's studies, lectures and tutorials at the Australian National University in 1981 that I realised the full impact of Simone de Beauvoir's observation⁴ that men describe the world from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth. I was outraged when I thought about my earlier studies at the same university. Apart from the few famous queens, wives, saints and whores, women had rarely been mentioned in the history and political science courses I had been taught a decade before. No serious attention had been paid to the concerns of *half* the humanity talked about in the humanities.

On reflection, even more disturbing than the absence of women's concerns and contributions was my uncritical acceptance of such scholarship as adequate. During my two years of Women's Studies I often pondered the paradox that the questions generated by a feminist critique were needed to discover that the central concerns of feminism were being ignored in the first place. It became clear to me that most of the analytic tools I had taken for granted in the social sciences were very inadequate since they did not incorporate a feminist critique.

When I, and many other women students like me, entered university in the early 1970s we were mainly aware that we were privileged to be there. Any unease we felt as women in an overwhelmingly male environment was repressed or dismissed, and attributed to our personal inadequacy rather than the environment. The absence of women's writing or anything which could be definitely identified as a women's perspective reinforced the ambient androcentric concerns of the university. Without any guidance or encouragement to explore women's work it was hard to sustain more than a fleeting glimpse of what was missing.

Universities in Australia expanded in both size and number during the post-war period. The legacy of the English tertiary system with its classical traditions and conservative outlook shaped the form of Australian academic life. Until the 1960s, the institutions remained the province of the wealthy and the few exceptionally gifted students who received government bursaries. The values enshrined by the institutions were those of the establishment they supported. The almost total absence of women both as teachers and students reflected the absence of women in significant numbers from any public sphere of life. It was taken to be the natural order of things and appeared to need no comment.⁵

Despite their rapid expansion through the 1960s, Australian universities seemed to manage to contain any challenges to established authority. The uprisings of student radicalism on Australian campuses were mild when compared with their American or French contemporaries. A wider cross-section of Australian youth was in attendance at university than ever before but the students did not, in general, bring much awareness of class politics into their classrooms. This is significant when trying to understand why women had so little awareness of the lack of feminist critique in their studies: even the more established radical critiques such as Marxism were ignored.

Towards the end of the 1960s, articulate, energetic women outside Australia were rediscovering their ability to join forces to claim better working conditions and personal rights for themselves as women. Some of their writings and accounts of their political action began to filter into the newspapers, magazines, bookshelves and discussion groups of Australian women. The early days of Australian Women's Liberation had begun.

Gradually universities found themselves confronted by feminists within and without

who were demanding that women's views should be listened to and accommodated. Many women realised that they were no longer prepared to accept the privilege of a tertiary education at the price of silence about themselves. They began to speak out.

FEMINIST CRITIQUE

The second wave of feminist theorising began with the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan in 1963, and the further development of some of the same ideas in the 1970s by Kate Millet and Shulamith Firestone.⁶ They, together with other women writers, articulated the unease of women in western societies about the gulf between what they had been taught from birth that they were supposed to feel and what they actually knew to be their experience.

Friedan and others argued that males and females were artificially differentiated from birth onwards by a series of pressures from family, school, church, workplace and other agencies of socialisation. These theories of gender socialisation suggested that while boys were being taught to be rational, logical and objective and to repress their feelings, the girls were learning to cultivate their emotions: to be directed towards the care of others and to ignore their facility to reason. Boys were being prepared for life-long occupations in the public domain — girls for immersion in the unpaid labour of domestic service, where child-bearing and child-rearing would constitute their only true vocation.

The new feminist theorists were drawing on the analysis of other women before them, women like Mary Wollstonecraft and Simone de Beauvoir⁷, in trying to account for the position of women as "other". They sought to name the process by which women are made object, becoming a subject only by reflection on the face of the male mirror. They sought to explain why women were so vilified when they dared to reject their image on the face of patriarchy.⁸ What followed the publication of their ideas was an explosion in thinking, writing and talking and publishing⁹ on the cultural, social, historical, psychological, philosophical and anthropological condition of women.

The formulation and development of feminist perspectives has led to insights and challenges involving many areas of life, including personal self-image, the division of labour, child-rearing and macro-political practice. Here I am mainly concerned with the feminist critique of areas of scholarship and ideas.

The feminist demands were not new¹⁰ but they were based on claims which had been so successfully suppressed in the past that it seemed to the women making them that they were new. They challenged the way in which the course content of the traditional disciplines was determined. Feminist scholars began to name the previously unnamed gaps in the orthodox descriptions of the world.¹¹ Some of these areas included:

- rediscovery and re-examination of the role of women in history;
- the role of women's labour, both domestic and public, in economic production;
- the importance of gender socialisation;
- the importance of gender in interpersonal power relations;
- the gender division of labour;
- the link between gender, violence and war;
- the masculine formation of the deep structure of language;
- the connection between masculinity and the notion of scientific objectivity;
- the role of social hierarchies and patterns of domination in the creation and maintenance of ideologies;
- the misogynist bias in medical research and practice;
- the role of gender stereotypes in media and the arts;
- the role of social institutions such as marriage in the maintenance of male domination;

the importance of concepts such as the "family wage" in the economic oppression of women;

the use of rape and sexual harassment in social power relations between men and women.¹²

From this list it should be clear that feminism has enormous potential implications for academic disciplines, ranging from philosophy and psychology to medicine and law. Furthermore, feminist analysis by its nature is trans-disciplinary because the established methods of inquiry do not fit with women's experience of the world. Thus feminist analysis threatens to break down barriers between many of the intellectual empires of academia. This is profoundly shocking to some of the traditional owners of knowledge.

When, for example, feminist anthropologists began questioning male views of their subject cultures, began re-interpreting geographical, historical and linguistic material on the basis of their perceptions as women, whole areas of anthropological study were severely shaken.¹³ The boundaries between disciplines were no longer preserved as sacrosanct limits between separate "states" of knowledge to be defended, but rather as frontiers on a whole new landscape waiting to be traversed.¹⁴

Feminism thus provides a threat not only to established ideas and the prestige and self-image of their promoters and adherents, but also to the academic power structure which is built on hierarchy and the intellectual division of labour.

Is it any wonder that the academic response to feminist critique has largely been one of silence? This is the essence of the suppression of feminist critique.

Appropriately, feminism provides its own explanation of this suppression, in the theory of patriarchy.

PATRIARCHY AND THE RESISTANCE TO FEMINIST CRITIQUE

Heidi Hartmann defines patriarchy as

a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women. Though patriarchy is hierarchical and men of different classes, races, or ethnic groups have different places in the patriarchy, they are also united in their shared relationship of dominance over their women; they are dependent on each other to maintain that domination. . . . in the hierarchy of patriarchy, all men, whatever their rank in the patriarchy, are bought off by being able to control at least some women.¹⁵

The university exhibits several features which are characteristic of patriarchy. First, most of the key decision-making positions are controlled by men, who have a vested interest in preventing collective challenges to their positions. Women overwhelmingly occupy subordinate positions, as tutors, research assistants, secretaries, typists and cleaners. Second, the university is built around the narrow-track, full-time career, which strongly favours men. Those who take breaks in their career for childbirth and child-rearing, or who start their career late or prefer to work part-time, have little chance of receiving academic preferment. Many men receive valuable career support from their wives, whose subordination in this is integral to the success of their husbands.¹⁶ Third, the ethos of academic life is built around career competition, intellectual aggressiveness and emotional aloofness, which is typically masculine behaviour, rather than the feminine characteristics of cooperation and emotional support. Finally, female staff and students are sexually exploited by many academic men.

Contrary to these patriarchal features, the male self-image of academia is one of fair assessment of scholarly contributions and value-free intellectual endeavour. But the use of the terms "value-free" and "objective" obscures the hidden agenda of the institution. If, as I

have suggested, the structure of the university itself is a snapshot of patriarchy, then it is extremely difficult to see how those with a vested interest in maintaining the structure can claim to know how to evaluate knowledge objectively. It is more than just an absence of women in the institution, it is a fundamental perception by men of differences between themselves and women. Simone de Beauvoir described it as being reduced to the status of the second sex. She says,

just as for the ancients there was an absolute vertical with reference to which the oblique was defined, so there is an absolute human-type, the masculine... Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not as herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being... she is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute — she is the other.¹⁷

The belief, however, that universities are places of sophisticated, objective evaluation of knowledge is fundamental to the careers and self-esteem of the majority of the inmates. To find themselves confronted by a group of women proclaiming their right to focus on previously submerged areas was unpleasant, even frightening. In the words of Dale Spender,

Patriarchy requires that any conceptualization of the world in which men and their power are a central problem should become invisible and unreal. How could patriarchy afford to accept that men were a serious social problem, to gather together what women have said on the subject and make it the substance of the educational curriculum, to treat women's versions of men with respect, and to discuss at length with impartiality the origins of male power and the means by which it is maintained?... Groups in power validate themselves by reference to those out of power — which they dismiss as *wrong* — and justify their own power in the process...¹⁸

The oppression of women and the suppression of feminist critique are different faces of the same beast. As Spender identifies, for women to really be listened to requires men to admit that their world view is inadequate in some fundamental aspects. Theory which addresses the inadequacy, if it is tolerated or encouraged, must eventually challenge the oppression also. Such a challenge would be uncomfortable and ultimately dangerous to the power monopoly of the dominant gender. Rather than engage in a systematic, rigorous debate leading to fundamental change in intellectual and political frameworks, the serious attempts to promote feminist critique were opposed. The implications of the deeply embedded misogyny of patriarchy need to be understood if any sense is to be made of the fear often associated with the idea of a “feminist”.

It is this understanding which is necessary when women are called upon to endure the litany of sexist jokes which inevitably accompany any attempt to initiate a thoughtful discussion of the need for feminist critique amongst androcentric academics. Women who refuse to join in the laughter usually evoke the hostile charge of being “humourless feminists”, adding insult to injury.

Not all women within universities were pleased about the feminist challenge. Having been trained for years to see the world through “masculine” eyes they were as disturbed as their male colleagues at the prospect of unworthy women receiving attention or recognition. Many of those who had been successful in achieving the male standard for themselves were even more reluctant to admit the validity of feminist perspectives.¹⁹ Any challenge to the male hierarchy was a challenge to the system they had done well in, and after all, if they had done well then surely other women could if they chose to. While such a view ignores the benefit bestowed upon some women by virtue of their birth or special opportunity, it does not begin to explain the enormous disparity between the numbers of successful males and females at every level in the hierarchy.²⁰

One of the ways used to justify exclusion of feminist critique was on the basis of its alleged emotionality and lack of objectivity:

Those who try to put forward an alternative to patriarchy and male values, when the male values are the basis of the society and men's opinions the very standard of reasonableness and veracity, are being *extremist* and acting as *politicos*. They too can be dismissed as subversive, or stupid, or sick.²¹

This charge essentially reflects the adherence to the notion of "objectivity" which in practice has meant unquestioning acceptance of the political and intellectual status quo. Admittedly, much feminist writing has been angry and polemical. Many people have found it very threatening. Some male academics have been indignant that such "ratbaggery" should try to pass itself off as serious theory-making. But to dismiss its importance as theory because it first appeared couched in highly emotional terms is to misunderstand the significance of theory which is created in active struggle.

Early feminist writing in England, America and Australia informed the groups of women who gathered together spontaneously in what became known as the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM). The Movement actively encouraged women to discuss and debate the issues which affected their lives and to raise their consciousness.²² The early searching discussion of WLM groups played an important role in fostering personal skills and political determination. The interplay of theoretical ideas and group activity strengthened the belief of the participants in themselves and in the justness of their complaints.

Many of the women active in WLM consciousness-raising groups were studying or teaching in universities. Their determination to have feminism treated seriously carried over into their academic lives.²³

The clamour of their demands was in part a response to the profound silence about women which was characteristic of the traditional disciplines. Women who agitated to change the content of courses quickly realised that changes in academic approach were needed as well. To add a few lectures about women to the existing courses, or even a few courses within a whole faculty, would mean taking the "add women and stir" approach. It might have livened up the existing mixture but feminists understood that the inclusion of women in course content should be more than a token gesture or for mere entertainment value. A feminist critique would need to address the structure and process of scholarship as much, or more, than content. It would demand a thoroughgoing re-examination of the whole enterprise.

How could feminist perspectives be introduced into existing disciplines? Because most university administrators were reluctant to listen to feminist demands and even more unwilling to do anything substantial about them, the task has fallen to feminist academics — mostly women, and a very few men, sympathetic to the claims of feminism.

Those secure or brave enough to risk publicising their feminist re-interpretations from within their disciplines provide a valuable opportunity for their students to explore a feminist critique. What might be described as an "osmosis effect" may operate: feminist ideas may be pulled from one course to another because students transfer the strength of the critique away from its original location.

However powerful such internal critique might be, it remains vulnerable because of the nature of the hierarchy mentioned earlier. Women who are admitted to the hierarchy are generally clustered at the lower, less secure levels as a matter of course.²⁴ Job insecurity may silence or modify the scholarship of women within the institutions even though they are aware that their academic integrity is compromised by such silence.

A woman anthropologist²⁵ of my acquaintance at another university, who dared to inject gender as a variable to radicalise her analysis of cultural development, encouraged (empowered) a number of her students to challenge what they were being taught in political science and sociology courses at the same institution because it failed to take account of the differences that the inclusion of gender would make to the analysis. Needless to say the anthropologist the students kept citing as their authority for the critique did not earn herself any favour with her male colleagues in other departments who regarded her "militancy"

with abhorrence. They were extremely hostile to the presence of one feminist theoretician in their ranks who encouraged her students to awaken to patriarchy.

As there is much more discussion of feminism and women's history on the campuses around Australia in classrooms, student newspapers, collectives of women activists and on graffiti-sprayed walls, it is much harder for the hierarchy to completely contain or suppress the ideas generated by such discussion.

WOMEN'S STUDIES

Very few university course administrators were prepared to allow feminist critique to be included in the teaching of the traditional disciplines. Such a transformation would require teachers of the traditional disciplines to confront their own sexism and to adopt an open mind on the challenges to their accepted beliefs which feminist theory would be bound to throw up. If feminism were to be taken seriously, the very carefully conserved boundaries between the traditional disciplines would be called into question. Such challenges would threaten both the intellectual self-image and the disciplinary power base of traditional academics.

But in the face of feminist demands, opposition to any teaching at all of feminist critique was an unacceptably overt form of suppression. Those in universities who opposed the feminist demands laid themselves open to the charge of being intolerant, illiberal and unscholarly because they were unwilling to allow an area of ideas to be debated. Rather than be seen to be opposed to the discussion of important ideas, many members of the university hierarchies sought a compromise. They would allow the ideas to be explored as long as they were kept within certain limits. Thus, in many cases, feminist demands were accommodated by the establishment of small programs or area studies dedicated to women's studies²⁶, within a particular department of an existing discipline, as at ANU and Flinders.

Although certainly far better than nothing, such programs do have disadvantages. First, they may serve to reinforce the common perception of feminism as a marginal concern if their establishment excuses the wider academic curriculum from addressing the questions of feminism. It was sobering to hear women who attended the "Feminism and Academics" workshop at the third Women and Labour Conference in Adelaide in 1982 say that it was probably the perception of feminism as a peculiar, unorthodox ideological phenomenon which would prove to be of transient appeal to students that contributed to the willingness of university boards and departments to accept women's studies programs in the first place.

Second, women's studies programs are more readily suppressed than the incorporation of a feminist perspective in a range of established disciplines if that teaching in the disciplines is done seriously and in good faith. As long as the teaching of feminism remains dependent upon the existence of small, often understaffed, isolated programs then it remains vulnerable to being silenced with minimal disruption to the administration of the wider academic community. Students and teachers involved in women's studies programs have found that they need to be continually alert. Experience at both ANU and Flinders has proved that those engaged in analysing patriarchy are foolish to trust patriarchal institutions to deal generously with them.

To protect themselves from arbitrary closure, women's studies programs need to forge solid links with other courses in other departments. Developing a network of interdependencies with courses in related areas is difficult to achieve because of limited staffing and the innate resistance of most university teachers to interdisciplinary courses. But where it has been tried it has become a source of great strength to the women's studies programs.

Although women's studies programs have the disadvantages of potential marginality and vulnerability, these are outweighed by the advantage of actually having a part of academic discourse actively using and developing a feminist critique. Women's studies courses offer a place of support and self-validation for their women students which has

proved to be crucially important in combating the wider academic silence about women. The women involved in one of the most successful of the early women's studies programs, the Bristol Women's Studies Group²⁷, noted that as the women became confident in thinking through concepts related to their own experience as women, they also became much more confident in speaking out and participating in other areas of their academic studies. Their battles to have a feminist analysis of traditional approaches considered legitimate were strengthened by their knowledge that at least one area of the academic discourse accepted such inquiry.

My own experience in the program at ANU bears out these observations. I have found that the women who grasped the feminist critique of psychology or learned to ask new questions about the position of women in a sociological framework inside the course work of women's studies were much more confident and better equipped to tackle the traditional content back in the psychology or sociology departments. They could not so easily be dismissed as eccentric individuals by the traditional disciplines because they could point to the legitimacy of their questions from women's studies. Even students not actually involved in the program themselves felt more confident in challenging the orthodoxies of their departments because they knew the challenge could be supported from at least one other area of inquiry in the university.

From overseas experience in women's studies courses it appears that the longer they run the stronger they become in terms of student participation, enthusiasm and commitment. However, they also encounter increased hostility from some established areas because of the discomforting nature of their endeavours.

One example of such resistance has concerned the credentialling of women who have sought to lecture and tutor in women's studies programs. Often the agitation to establish a program has come from one or two women who were able to draw on outside support and student demand. Their attempts to set up a functioning course using feminist critique may be interpreted by some women as attempts to get permanent jobs ahead of others "better" qualified in traditional terms.

The difficulty here is that many of those who have credentials acceptable to the establishment may be too well trained in orthodox modes of analysis to be able to meet the requirements of transdisciplinary thinking and innovative teaching to do the new studies justice, while those who are sufficiently radical are unlikely to have achieved the credentials normally required to teach at university level. Women's studies programs as a result may be caught between conflicting expectations by established women scholars and feminist activists.

Out of those few²⁸ women who have succeeded in the eyes of their own discipline, many seem oblivious to the structural suppression of feminist demands. These women may express the most hostile opposition towards those they perceive as "unqualified" entering their ranks.

Just as it is difficult for some women within the system to accept that less qualified women are capable or suitable to analyse patriarchy, it is difficult for many women who have worked hard for women's liberation outside of universities to accept that there is any real benefit to be gained from setting up women's studies courses within such institutions. They regard the energy invested in establishing a women's studies program as better spent improving the situation of women in the wider society. This may underestimate the particular advantage of locating feminist struggle in a university. Kathy Ferguson summed up the advantage quite succinctly when she noted:

Sometimes (certainly not always) women's studies programs can maintain a commitment to radical, rather than liberal, feminism. Because the members provide a support structure for one another and because as a group they are providing a valuable resource to the university... they can disguise their radicalism externally and maintain it internally...²⁹

The anxiety of some concerned feminists outside the university about the possibility of feminist critique being diluted or sold out in universities is valid. Those charged with the responsibility of teaching and administering women's studies programs need to be constantly vigilant about the degree of compromise they make with the keepers of the hierarchy. As Ferguson goes on to note

... the requirements of organizational survival are likely to penetrate into the program itself and endanger the alternative values and processes that insurgents seek to maintain.³⁰

Feminists inside the university system cannot afford to allow the evolution of feminist critique and theory-making to become too remote from the political action of other feminists.

Like other unorthodox critiques — Marxism³¹, political economy, radical ecology — feminist theory draws strength from the activities of its committed practitioners outside the universities. The political action taken by women on issues that concern them and their children has taught feminists the importance of continually reviewing the processes of their actions while striving for their goals. Feminists know that the *personal is political* and are therefore reluctant to make artificial divisions between feminist theory and practice. Inevitably, tensions have arisen at times between the women committed to the frontline of feminist action and those who are more distanced from the action but actively thinking about it.

The women who seek to support women who have been raped, those who work for the provision of shelter for women who are the victims of domestic violence, and those who endeavour to provide alternative, woman-centred health care as cheaply as possible have important things to say about the way that feminist theory interacts with the everyday lives of women from diverse class and ethnic backgrounds.

In the efforts to establish viable women's studies programs it has been important for the women involved not to regard the lives of the women they seek to record, research and explain as something divorced from themselves as inquirers after knowledge. For example, a better understanding of the power relations which underlie rape and domestic violence is an important subject for feminist study. Such study would probably include observing the lives of women who are already vulnerable. The study would need to be conducted very sensitively in order not to contribute to accusations of academic exploitation and possibly even voyeurism, thereby risking alienating women from the very understanding it sought to promote. The charge of "voyeurism" springs from the common perceptions of academics as watchers of other people, not doers. Both the elitism and the intellectual orientation of university feminism is offensive to many activists of the women's movement.

While feminist activists may criticise women's studies programs for their lack of contribution to the feminist struggle, traditional academics may perceive the programs as radical and threatening. Even the existence of a separate program, once it is established, can be seen as a threat to other areas. The approach of the program at Flinders to assessment and to power sharing between teachers and students was deemed too radical by many of the other courses. Flinders' women's studies program emphasised the need for students to examine their personal lives and happiness as a part of understanding how they learned and how they decided what they wanted to learn.³² Much of the later hostility towards the program, which undermined its credibility, probably reflected the unease about the challenges the program presented not just to traditional content but also to traditional methods within the university.

At ANU, the demands for a separate course focusing on the concerns and contributions of women was a part of more general demands for better teacher accountability and more appropriate forms of assessment across the whole of ANU. During the "Education Campaigns" of 1974–5 the needs of students were brought to the attention of the university hierarchy in a more forceful way than ever before.

One response to threatening programs within the university is suppression. This can take the form of limiting resources, denying flexibility in staffing and curriculum, and denigration of the intellectual content of the subject matter. The difficulties of the programs may even then, in typical scapegoating fashion, be blamed on internal tensions within the programs. The situation at Flinders, where staffing and funding difficulties led to the program being dismembered, serves as an excellent example of this process. The program at ANU has fared much better but there were some very shaky moments in 1983 when it appeared that the staff of two would be reduced by 50 per cent.

CONCLUSION

The feminist critique of patriarchy and of orthodox disciplinary knowledge provides women with a source of strength. But, unless the critique is available to draw on and *to transmit to the next generation of women* then it is in danger of lapsing once more into a deafening silence. In male-dominated society where men are still largely able to control knowledge, they are always in a position to deprive women of this source of strength. If they are able to assert that it is masculine experience which is to be valued, and to insist that it has always been this way³³, then any gains made by individual feminists or women's studies courses in this generation may be lost to the next. This is partly how patriarchy has sustained itself, and those who would seek to overthrow patriarchy forget this at their peril.

Certainly, significant gains have been made over the past two decades. The suppression of feminist theory has neither been complete nor automatic. The concerns of feminists have not been so readily ruled out-of-order or placed at the periphery of academic affairs. Neither have they remained isolated from the claims for justice proposed by other minority consciousness groups. However, the acceptance of the claims central to a feminist critique are still a long way from being realised in universities.

Consider the following scenario: a group of women are working collectively and non-hierarchically on a piece of research which reflects their perceptions of themselves as women. They are using language which in its very structure affirms them as equal with men. The content of their research is not considered exceptional or trivial if it is drawn from the domestic sphere. When it is finished their contribution to scholarship is treated with complete seriousness by other male academics who then cite it in their own publications without hesitation. If such a description sounds far-fetched it is a measure of how hard the feminist critique still has to battle to move from the margins of academic discourse to an accepted place in the methodologies of the disciplines within the universities.

The contributors to the critique itself have come a long way since the early days of WLM writings. All around the world there is now a formidable and rapidly expanding collection of books being published under the general heading "women's studies". The theories, descriptions and explorations undertaken by the pioneering works of second-wave feminism have been subjected to vigorous, creative analysis by later feminist writers.³⁴ There now exists a substantial body of core literature relating feminist critique to sociology, history, anthropology, geography, psychology, medicine, economics, political science, philosophy and linguistics.

It is less and less excusable for the universities to ignore or trivialise this large and growing body of thought, which is the basis of feminist critique. An increasing number of academic decision-makers have accepted that there is a profound gap in the evaluation of knowledge so long as no specific attention is paid to women's concerns. They have begun programs to address the issues.

The public interest outside the universities has slowly begun to recognise the structural inequality of women and this has provided the stimulus behind official moves towards remedying some of the inequality.³⁵ University hierarchies are subject to some of the same pressures as state bureaucracies and so general interest in equal employment opportunities has stimulated a climate of debate over the place of women in university, which fosters the

increased demand for the inclusion of feminist critique to explain the mechanisms which underlie the inequalities.

In the universities, where at least lip service is paid to the belief in the freedom to pursue knowledge fearlessly, there is a chance for women to have their concerns and contributions taken seriously. The suppression of their demands can never be far away, however, while the majority of the most powerful members of the hierarchy continue to view women as *other* and regard current feminist analysis as dispensable.

The fear of what true equality for women might mean goes to the heart of patriarchy so it is not surprising that it has been so long lived. Feminist critique and all it implies for the liberation of women will go on being covertly or overtly suppressed in the spirit of this fear unless women refuse to be silent.

Part of that refusal is the quest for a secure place for feminist analysis and theory-making and for the acceptance of feminist critique across all fields of knowledge. There can be no true freedom to think, to write, to teach while women remain an unspoken, unrecognised component of those ideas: while women's reality is denied. It is one thing to unconsciously participate in an accepted practice of the dominant group and another thing entirely to choose to perpetuate an unjust practice after being confronted with its real nature. Those who would champion the freedom of academic inquiry should pay close attention to *whom* they would include in that freedom, and why.

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References

1. This is a working definition. It is similar to Linda Gordon's useful definition of feminism as "an analysis of women's subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to change it", in "The Struggle for Reproductive Freedom: Three Stages of Feminism", *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, (ed.) Zillah R. Eisenstein, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979), p. 107.
2. Merlin Stone cites archaeological evidence of the resistance of women against the systematic repression of their religious rites throughout the Middle East over a period of 1000 to 3000 years, probably beginning with the first invasions by the northern tribes around 2400 B. C. Merlin Stone, *The Paradise Papers: The Suppression of Women's Rites* (London: Virago, 1976), p. 79.
3. I use the word "sex" to refer to biological differences between men and women and "gender" to refer to feminine and masculine social roles into which women and men are socialised from the moment of birth.
4. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, transl. H. M. Parshley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), p. 102.
5. See the chapters by Bettina Cass in *Why So Few? Women Academics in Australian Universities*, Bettina Cass et al. (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1983).
6. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1963); Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (London: Davis, 1971); Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex. The Case for a Feminist Revolution* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971).
7. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1975, first published 1792), and de Beauvoir, op. cit. (first published in French, 1949).
8. For an exploration of this idea see Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974).

9. It has been no coincidence that a number of all-women publishers have been established in the same period. Women are no longer prepared to suffer the restrictions and bias of the male-controlled publishing houses. The women have organised to do it for themselves. See, Lyn Spender, *Intruders on the Rights of Men, Women's Unpublished Heritage* (London: Pandora Press, 1983).
10. Dale Spender, *There Has Always Been a Women's Movement This Century* (London: Pandora Press, 1983).
11. Betty Friedan's analysis in *The Feminine Mystique*, op. cit., gave the lead for the important task of naming the previously unarticulated concerns of women, as women.
12. For an indication of the scope of feminist theory and analysis, see: Hester Eisenstein, *Contemporary Feminist Thought* (Sydney: Unwin Paperbacks, 1984); Gloria Bowles and Renate Duelli Klein (eds), *Theories of Women's Studies* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983); and The Bristol Women's Studies Group (eds), *Half the Sky* (London: Virago, 1979).
13. See, for example: Diane Bell, *Daughters of the Dreaming* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1984).
14. I am indebted to Fay Gale for this description in geographical terms. See her paper: "Seeing Women in the Landscape: alternative views of the world around us", presented at "Women and the Social Sciences, New Modes of Thought", Symposium of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, Australian National University, 1983.
15. Heidi Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a more Progressive Union", *Women and Revolution*, Lydia Sargent (ed.) (Boston: South End Press, 1981), pp. 14, 15.
16. Hanna Papanek, "Men, Women and Work: Reflections on the Two-Person Career", *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 78, 1973, pp. 852-72.
17. de Beauvoir, op. cit., p. 316.
18. Dale Spender, *Women of Ideas and What Men Have Done to Them, From Aphra Benn to Adrienne Rich* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), pp. 7-8.
19. This is as difficult for many women as it is for men because of the androcentric conditioning both have received. See: Andrea Dworkin, *Right-Wing Women, The Politics of Domesticated Females* (London: The Women's Press, 1983).
20. Cass, op. cit.
21. Spender, *Women of Ideas*, op. cit.
22. For some interesting insights into the functions of consciousness raising (C. R.) groups, see: Betty Friedan, *It Changed My Life. Writings on the Women's Movement* (London: Gollancz, 1977).
23. Rita Helling, *The Politics of Women's Studies* (Adelaide: University Relations Unit, Flinders University of South Australia, 1981), pp. 167ff.
24. Cass, op. cit.; also, Marian Sawer, *Towards Equal Opportunity: Women and Employment at the Australian National University* (Canberra, March 1984).
25. She wishes to remain unidentifiable because of political difficulties over her reappointment which is due to coincide with the publication of this book.
26. For an attempt to describe the term "women's studies", see: Susan Magarey, "Women's Studies Programme", *ANU Reporter*, 28 November 1980. She suggests that women's studies is "a subject area, a field — but not a form — of intellectual inquiry".
27. The Bristol Women's Studies Group, op. cit.
28. Cass, op. cit.

29. Kathy E. Ferguson, "Feminism and bureaucratic discourse", *New Political Science*, no. 11, Spring 1983, p. 68.
30. *ibid.*
31. I have included Marxism because although it has almost become an orthodox critique, it still has the intellectual force to disrupt academic complacency, especially when combined with feminism and used to re-evaluate institutions such as the family. See for example: Zillah R. Eisenstein, *op. cit.*
32. Helling, *op. cit.*, pp. 166–8.
33. Spender, *Women of Ideas*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
34. Eisenstein, *op. cit.*
35. Sawyer, *op. cit.* (refer to the list of government initiated equal opportunity inquiries).