CHAPTER 5

THE POWER OF FEMINIST ENGAGEMENT

EVEN THE KNIVES SLEEP

Laurel Richardson

If I were a fork, I would know my place,
to the left of the plate, tines beckoning
a hand to cradle me,
me holding meat for the knife.
The blade slips between my tines
scraping edges.
There is no pain, and after
I am bathed in water
and returned to the space
I share with others of my kind.
We nestle together, edges cradling edges.
I am safe in the drawer.
Even the knives sleep.

This chapter examines feminist scholarship in five carefully considered and substantial pieces. The focus moves between the early 1970s to the present day, spanning almost half a century, providing insight into the development of feminist epistemologies, particularly within the American context.

Kathy Charmaz firstly troubles the idea of permission in relation to gender in the academy, illustrating with her own history, observing that:

> My situation involved learning when and how I had permission or could negotiate it. I learned early that lack of permission was often arbitrarily imposed and contradicted policies and practices of the university. During several pivotal events, I challenged decisions in writing to the chagrin of those who imposed them. I understood the importance of active, recorded resistance when lack of permission imperiled either my job or my program.

Next is a co-authored piece by two of Laurel's former PhD students, Judith A. Cook and Mary Margaret Fonow, who begin by taking us to the early 1970s where, at different times, they each took Laurel's "Sociology of Knowledge" class. The most formative time for them both was Laurel's graduate "Gender Seminar" in the Spring and Summer of 1976.

> Our transformation into feminist scholars was guided by Laurel, based on a number of assumptions about the teaching/learning process that comprise the notion of feminist pedagogy. First, we saw personal experiences as legitimate sources of insight for theory-building and empirical research. Second, innovation in any aspect of the research process was valued and, in fact, we actively sought to demystify the research process by exploring dead-ends and failures. Third, a collaborative search for knowledge was encouraged through joint research projects and collective discussions about the conduct of inquiry.

After this is Verta Taylor's, *Becoming a Feminist Scholar*, where she acknowledges Laurel Richardson's important role in her own survival and development within the academy. Laurel invited Verta Taylor to join her in editing a very early feminist anthology, *Feminist Frontiers,* currently in its ninth edition. Verta's tales reveal much about the academy of the time, raising inevitable questions about what has changed and what has stayed the same.

> As a graduate student, my advisor had strongly discouraged me from taking Laurel's seminar because gender was not considered to be a legitimate field of sociology, warning that the class would distract me from "real sociology." The fact that sex and gender is today a thriving field at the center of the discipline and one of the largest sections of the American Sociological Association is because of women like Laurel who blazed the trail for so many of us who sought to bring feminist ideas and methods to sociological thinking.

In *My Scholarship is Deeply Indebted*, Bettie St Pierre writes of her experience in Laurel Richardson's graduate classes, observing that:

> I encountered brilliant female professors for the first time when I began my doctoral program at mid-life – women who were smart, tough, rigorous, and politically savvy but also captivating and mysterious. These women did not hover and "mentor" and "care"; they demanded our very best work.

The final piece in this chapter, *Building Intellectual Community,* is from Patti Lather who writes about the Postmodern Studies (PMS) group, established around 1990, for academic women across disciplines in one university who shared a "lust for theory."

> This group continued to meet for a quarter of a century and 'Laurel was as greedy as the rest of us to understand the "new" theory.'

To set the scene – and the tone – we begin with one of Laurel's unpublished poems:

FLIPPER

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

Laurel Richardson

You can pay a few bucks
To swim with dolphins
But the bulls turned on
By the smell of women
Are humping them.

The male guards yell,
"Roll with it honey,
Roll with it."

PERMISSION IN PERSPECTIVE

Kathy Charmaz

What does permission mean? To whom? Meanings of permission, who gets it, and how it becomes manifest differ in time, place, and situation. What constitutes permission may be fluid, unstable, and subject to redefinition. Once gained, permission still may remain partial, conditional, begrudging, and revocable. Permission may also again become provisional after long periods of seeming acceptance. Old misgivings reemerge and alliances shift. Resources dwindle and criteria for gaining permission increase. The multi-dimensions of what permission means become apparent when transgressed and with transgressions, questions about fairness arise. Fairness, justice, equity, and authority and power figure in giving, obtaining, receiving, and assuming permission. What follows? Suffering pervades problematic experiences of seeking and obtaining permission.

Laurel Richardson received her doctoral degree 10 years before I did. At that time few women sociologists in the United States (U.S.) gained permission – or had encouragement – to enter the hallowed sanctuaries of academe, much less to obtain a tenure-track [i.e. permanent] position within it. Permission can be profoundly problematic. Women in male-dominated fields who assumed or sought permission transgressed taken-for-granted rules of their chosen professions. Early on in my career, I learned that others of similar rank and status were granted permission or could assume it while I did not have it and could not assume that it would be forthcoming. "Old white boys" guarded new positions and awarded them to their friends or students of close colleagues. By 1968, when I was finishing my master's degree, jobs in sociology in the U.S. were plentiful for white men but not for women and minority sociologists. My master's thesis advisor told me I could get in a good

doctoral program but might never get a job. Thus, I could be assured of partial, conditional permission to become a sociologist but not to be one. The department itself symbolized the uncertain fate of well-qualified women. Two women held positions on the permanent faculty but other well-qualified women lurked in the outskirts of the department as temporary lecturers. Each semester, they hoped to receive permission to teach a couple of courses which seldom turned into lasting appointments.

In the U.S. in the 1970s, much discussion about feminism and being a feminist scholar arose in numerous disciplines and professions. Yet women scholars' public claims of feminism did not necessarily translate into concrete actions to extend permission to obtain positions to all well-qualified candidates. Rather some established women reproduced the form of granting permission of the old boys who had preceded them.

My situation involved learning when and how I had permission or could negotiate it. I learned early that lack of permission was often arbitrarily imposed and contradicted policies and practices of the university. During several pivotal events, I challenged decisions in writing to the chagrin of those who imposed them. I understood the importance of active, recorded resistance when lack of permission imperiled either my job or my program.

However, I did not realize that resistance in other areas could alter lack of permission – and my situation. Just two years ago I learned how I should have handled being rejected 15 years before for one of the very few opportunities for merit raises my university has offered to faculty in the past 40 years. I had thought I had a good chance to receive at least one merit raise of the maximum of eight possible small raises. Fortuitously, I could document a number of recent contributions such as multiple international invitations, featured lectures, and publications in addition to teaching and service. Our very high teaching workload precluded me along with most faculty from having a sustained list of such contributions. The rejection letter arrived with no kind words about my accomplishments, or the difficulty of deciding between so many deserving candidates. The letter just stated denial of even one merit raise in cold bureaucratic terms. It stung. When I happened to mention this letter to a male colleague two years ago, he told me that what faculty should do is threaten to grieve as he had done. He said the administration routinely held back funds to cover potential grievances and he had received all eight of the merit raises. I had not known that I had permission to claim injustice and to file a grievance.

Many of my most trying experiences in obtaining and maintaining permission to have and keep a job preceded both meeting Laurel and the appearance of her publications about her experiences in academia. Laurel broke silences and the isolation accompanying these silences. She has given new scholars permission to look at their situations with clear eyes, face the trials and troubles within them, tell their stories – and survive. Perhaps one of her most important contributions is giving permission to resist taken-for granted practices that render some colleagues vulnerable and enhance the power of others.

What lessons about permission have I gained to pass on to others? I learned that women may not have access to crucial informal knowledge that male colleagues learn from each other. We should not have to obtain permission to exercise our rights. We can make our contributions known when others ignore them. The main lesson I have tried to pass on to new women scholars is to learn and claim their rights and demand due process so that they can recognize when no permission is needed.

WE FIRST MET LAUREL

Judith A. Cook & Mary Margaret Fonow

We first met Laurel during the 1970s as graduate students in the Department of Sociology at The Oho State University. Mary Margaret entered the graduate program in 1971 and Judith in 1974. Both encountered Laurel for the first time as students in her course, Sociology of Knowledge, in classes taught several years apart. During those years, pivotal events in Laurel's life led her to transform her approach to teaching and scholarship, as well as to alter fundamentally her thought processes and perceptions of being in the world. These changes in Laurel's life, along with co-occurring changes in the lives of her two graduate students, left an indelible mark on all three women as scholars and sociologists, resulting in lifelong bonds and collaborations that extend to this day.

Mary Margaret was a student in Laurel's graduate seminar on the Sociology of Science in 1973, the first course Laurel taught after her traumatic brain injury in a car accident, about which she has written in her article Paradigms Lost (Richardson, 1999). While neither of them knew this about the other, Mary Margaret was struggling with whether she belonged in graduate school given her working class background and the misogyny she encountered in academia. Laurel was struggling with her post-accident identity as a sociologist since her brain injury left her unable to think and speak clearly, let along engage in computational and analytical activities needed to teach the statistics and theory courses to which she was assigned. About the accident, Laurel wrote, "As if I had experienced an earthquake in my brain, the orderly strata of knowledge had been destroyed – old material collided with new material. The shards had been reshuffled" (p. 80).

The seminar served as Laurel's path to recovery, yet her students were unaware of how hard she struggled to find her words, remember concepts and theoretical formulations, or think in a linear fashion. With her department's admonishment of "teach or risk termination" in the forefront of her mind, Laurel struggled to demonstrate that she could maintain her teaching presence with graduate students. To save face and mask the extent of her "disability," she created a collaborative learning environment so that the students in her class could share in the teaching of the material, as co-creators of knowledge. This democratic pedagogy was something that deeply affected Mary Margaret, a sixties radical and budding feminist. The

friendships she created with fellow students spilled over to intense out-of-class discussions about the nature of inquiry – a topic she would pursue for the rest of her career. Unaware of her professor's struggles, what Mary Margaret remembers from that class is reading and discussing Thomas Kuhn's classic text on paradigm shifts and, as a result, her world shifted too. She discovered that there was more than one way to do sociology and that she need not change to fit the discipline but could shape the discipline as a political radical and feminist scholar. Meanwhile Laurel went home after each class in tears, crying from the exhaustion of trying to stay the course. In retrospect Laurel wrote, "Now, I see that teaching that seminar was a path for me into recovering my brain. The students defined my by-default pedagogy as 'open' and 'inviting,' not an indication of my lack of knowledge or inability to claim authority. The students learned to shift paradigms" (p. 86). And so did Mary Margaret, who went on to take additional seminars from Laurel and to eventually become her teaching assistant in one of the first courses on Sociology of Women to be taught in the U.S. She asked Laurel to supervise her dissertation on women steelworkers, one of the first feminist dissertations in the department (Fonow, 2008). Laurel more than recovered; she was promoted with tenure and went on to have a distinguished career as a sociologist.

Judith joined the sociology program in 1974, the first woman in her family to complete an undergraduate degree, and the only one to pursue a graduate degree. Unlike Mary Margaret, she had taken her first Sociology of Women course as an undergraduate, from sociology professor Sally Bould (Vantil) at the University of Delaware. She entered graduate school flush with enthusiasm and excited by the possibility of combining her double major in sociology and psychology with the study of women's roles and experiences in society. What she encountered instead was a discipline mired in stale debates regarding macro-level theories such as structural functionalism, symbolic interactionism, and conflict theory, none of which considered the experiences of women apart from their relationships to men. She sought in vain for the relevance of sociology to the "real world" she saw around her, and despaired of ever finding a community of like-minded scholars. This began to change when she took Laurel's Sociology of Knowledge class and experienced a more egalitarian, empowering pedagogy, along with encouragement to center the enquiry in the experiences of women and micro-level social processes. Her perspective shifted in a more fundamental way when she participated in Laurel's graduate Gender Seminar in the Spring and Summer of 1976. There, she met Mary Margaret, who would become a lifelong friend and colleague, with whom she would go on to publish an influential anthology and a number of articles on feminist methodology and epistemology (Cook & Fonow, 1984; Cook & Fonow, 1986; Cook & Fonow, 2006; Chakravarty, Cook, & Fonow, 2012; Fonow & Cook, 1991; Fonow & Cook, 2005). Despite this long collaboration, both agree that their most formative experience was participating in Laurel's graduate Gender Seminar in the Spring and Summer of 1976. Through Laurel's teaching, mentorship, and collegiality,

Mary Margaret, Judith, and others created a community of feminist sociologists, sharing a common language, common values, common history, common collection of research folk tales, and a shared sense of identity. Feminist pedagogy used in the seminar contributed to the development of a community of gender sociologists as well as to our professional development as scholars and researchers. This experience also resulted in an essay about the seminar's long-lasting effects, published in the journal *Teaching Sociology* (Richardson, Fonow, & Cook, 1985).

At that time, Laurel was and has remained at the forefront of the theory and practice of qualitative research. Her central theoretical question has always been "how do we know we know?" In her early work, using content analysis, historical analysis, and norm-breaking experiments, she became part of the emerging qualitative research fields of science studies and ethnomethodology. As her career matured and her scholarship deepened, her focus on the nature of "knowing" led her to explore topics and pioneer areas of study decades prior to their acceptance by the larger academic community. It also led her to focus the qualitative lens on a series of supposedly "un-addressable" topics, such as adulterous relationships and racial profiling.

Our transformation into feminist scholars was guided by Laurel, based on a number of assumptions about the teaching/learning process that comprise the notion of feminist pedagogy. First, we saw personal experiences as legitimate sources of insight for theory-building and empirical research. Second, innovation in any aspect of the research process was valued and, in fact, we actively sought to demystify the research process by exploring dead-ends and failures. Third, a collaborative search for knowledge was encouraged through joint research projects and collective discussions about the conduct of inquiry.

In Laurel's seminars we came to see that someone's success was not someone else's failure. Since the personal and the structural were constitutive and equally salient, there was nothing to compete over. Each had her sphere of experiences, and those experiences were the basis for the doing of sociology. We vicariously experienced new social worlds: steel mills; baton twirling competitions; lesbian/parent relationships; custody battles; fencing teams; the death of a child. One of the most important outcomes of this sharing of work-in-progress was that the research process was made visible. Listening to other students formulate and reformulate, do and redo their work, demystified the research process and demonstrated that the cooperative mode and the collaborative spirit were effective research strategies. Students were, indeed, completing their papers and dissertations, and having them accepted for publication and for presentation at meetings.

Laurel's textbook, *Writing Strategies: Reaching Diverse Audiences* (1990) is still in print and selling strongly. Perhaps its most notable quality is that it gives qualitative scholars "permission" to experiment with their material. Her chapter in the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, "Writing: A Method of Inquiry" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) has revolutionized how qualitative researchers think about writing – not as a mapping activity but as a place of discovery, learning, and engaging. This

chapter is one of the most frequently cited pieces in qualitative research. Her other monographs, *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life* (1997) and *Travels with Ernest: Crossing the Literary/Sociological Divide* (2004) provide a model of how gender and disciplinary hierarchies can be transcended, and how authors can maintain their voice while operating in the interstices of various modes of creativity. Her book, *Last Writes: A Daybook for a Dying Friend* (2007), offers another model of writing that is immediate, intense, personal, and ethnographic – in an alternative genre.

Less well known is Laurel's commitment to making her work accessible to people outside of academia, and to doing work that would change the structure and culture of injustice. One example of this is her monograph *The New Other Woman* (1985) on relationships between single women and married men. Another example is her use of qualitative research to alter the wording of items used by the National Opinion Research Center in surveys regarding race and ethnicity. Yet another example is her application of concepts and theory from the field of ethnomethodology to the creation and delivery of in-service trainings to teachers regarding racial stereotyping.

Working with Laurel prepared us to be innovative and resourceful, and as members of the "lost generation of sociologists" who earned their PhDs at a time (1975–84) when the job market in sociology was extremely soft, we had to be (Lyson & Squires, 1993, p. 4). After graduation each of us had to carve out our own career paths. Mary Margaret stayed in academia, first in non-tenured, visiting faculty positions at small liberal arts colleges and then in 1985 returned to Ohio State as an administrator helping to build one of the largest most comprehensive women's studies programs in the US. This was not an uncommon strategy as many feminist sociologists in that time period migrated back and forth between women's studies and sociology (Skeggs, 2008). In 2004 she moved to Arizona State University as Chair of Women's Studies and in 2009, she became the founding Director of the university's School of Social Transformation. Judith completed a dissertation on the impact of gender on parental bereavement following the death of a child from cancer (Cook, 1983, 1984), with Laurel as her committee chair. She followed graduate school with a post-doctoral fellowship in clinical research methods, and then left academia for a job in "applied sociology" as the Director of Research for a large network of mental health centers in Chicago. She simultaneously pursued a career as an evaluation researcher studying programs for women with HIV/AIDS, educational reform, and people with disabilities. In 1990, she was awarded a federal grant to establish a 5-year Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC) on psychiatric disability, and moved that Center in 1995 to the University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of Psychiatry, where she became a Full Professor of Psychiatry. Movement between academic and applied sociology positions is another common career strategy of the lost generation (Kim, Mencken, & Woolcock, 1998). Since re-entering academia, she has continued to win funding for a series of RRTCs,

the most recent one devoted to the integration of health and mental health care in community settings.

Three women, feminist scholars, friends, and colleagues, our careers were molded by encountering Laurel at a formative moment in our and her intellectual and personal development. Working with Laurel gave us permission to chart our intellectual pursuits and our careers in surprising and novel ways. We might not have survived the academy without learning how to take the risks her permission suggested. We hope we are keeping alive the spirit of her gift in all the work we do with our students, colleagues and the public we serve.

REFERENCES

Chakravarty, D., Cook, J. A., & Fonow, M. M. (2011). Teaching, techniques, and technologies of feminist methodology. In *Handbook of feminist research: Theory and practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cook, J. A. (1983). A death in the family: Parental bereavement in the first year. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior, 13*(1), 42–61.

Cook, J. A. (1984). Influence of gender on the problems of parents of terminally ill children. *Journal of Psychosocial Oncology*, *2*(1), 71–91.

Cook, J. A., & Fonow, M. (1984). Am I my sister's gatekeeper? *Humanity and Society*, *17*(3), 34–47.

Cook, J. A., & Fonow, M. M. (1986). Knowledge and women's interests. *Sociological Inquiry*, *56*(1), 2–29.

Cook, J. A., & Fonow, M. M. (2006). A passion for knowledge: The teaching of feminist methodology. In S. N. Hesse-Beiber (Ed.), *Handbook of feminist research, theory, and praxis* (pp. 705–712). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fonow, M. M. (2003). *Union women: Forging feminism in the united steelworkers of America*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Fonow, M. M., & Cook, J. A. (Eds.). (1991). *Beyond methodology: Feminist scholarship as lived research*. Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press.

Fonow, M. M., & Cook, J. A. (2005). Feminist methodology: New applications in the academy and public policy. *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society*, *30*(4), 2211–2236.

Kim, J. M., Mencken, F. C., & Woolcock, M. (1998). Trends and future directions in the academic job market for Ph.D.s in sociology: A research note. *The American Sociologist*, *29*(4), 78–89.

Lyson, T. A., & Squires, G. D. (1993). The "lost generation" of sociologists. *ASA Footnotes*, *21*(2), 4–5.

Richardson, L. (1985). *The new other woman: Single women in long term relations with married men*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

Richardson, L. (1990). *Writing strategies: Reaching diverse audiences*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Richardson, L. (1997). *Fields of play: Constructing an academic life*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Richardson, L. (1999). Paradigms lost. *Symbolic Interaction*, *22*, 79–91.

Richardson, L. (2007). *Last writes: A daybook for a dying friend*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Richardson, L., & Lockridge, E. (2004). *Travels with Ernest: Crossing the literary/ethnographic divide*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Richardson, L., & St. Pierre, E. A. (2005). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 959–978). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Richardson, L., Fonow, M. M., & Cook, J. A. (1985). From gender seminar to gender community. *Teaching Sociology*, *12*(3), 313–324.

Skeggs, B. (2008). The dirty history of feminism and sociology: Or the war of conceptual attrition. *The Sociological Review*, *56*(4), 670–690.

CHAPTER 5

BECOMING A FEMINIST SCHOLAR

Verta Taylor

I owe my start in the field of gender and women's studies to Laurel Richardson. Here's why. In the early 1980s, after Laurel published the second edition of her path-breaking text, *The Dynamics of Sex and Gender*, an editor from D. C. Heath approached her about taking on a women's studies text, an edited book that could be used in the interdisciplinary classes in women's studies that were springing up everywhere at the time. I was an assistant professor in the Sociology Department, having been hired to co-direct the Disaster Research Center, where I served as Director of Field Studies as a graduate student. It wasn't easy joining the faculty and dealing with my former teachers as colleagues. It was even harder because, after my advisor and co-director of the Disaster Research Center refused to let me go elsewhere, he confessed to being in love with me, prompting my very difficult decision to resign the Center and leave behind my research specialty. When I say "leave behind," I mean that my name was literally whited-out on coauthored publications, and I never again published on the social consequences of disasters, my then specialty.

It was at that point that Laurel saved me. She knew that I would be evaluated on my publication record when I came up for tenure and promotion and proposed that we co-edit the women's studies text she was invited to write. We titled it *Feminist Frontiers: Rethinking Sex, Gender, and Society*. The book was published in 1983, though not by D.C. Heath who abandoned its social science list, and it is now in its ninth edition. For four decades, *Feminist Frontiers* has introduced thousands of students to feminist scholarship. And it helped launch me into a career of research and teaching on gender, sexuality, and social movements. Although I had been a feminist activist involved in the women's liberation movement, I had been studying collective behavior, social movements, and social psychology. As a graduate student, my advisor had strongly discouraged me from taking Laurel's seminar because gender was not considered to be a legitimate field of sociology, warning that the class would distract me from "real sociology." The fact that sex and gender is today a thriving field at the center of the discipline and one of the largest sections of the American Sociological Association is because of women like Laurel who blazed the trail for so many of us who sought to bring feminist ideas and methods to sociological thinking. I will forever be grateful to Laurel for her confidence in me and her eagerness to make me a colleague, not just a former (non) student, by inviting me to work on *Feminist Frontiers*. It's hard to remember now what it felt like to have lost an advisor and research specialty in one fell swoop. But in the process, I gained Laurel as a co-editor and friend.

We had a lot of fun collaborating on *Feminist Frontiers* over the years, and I like to think we learned a lot from each other. We drove to academic conferences together, sometimes vacationed together with our partners, Laurel and Ernest got

married in our home, and I even took her son Ben shopping for clothes for his first job while Laurel was out of town. For the first two editions of *Feminist Frontiers*, many topics we wanted to address had not yet been researched by feminist scholars, so we sometimes had to include poems, newspaper articles, or write the chapters ourselves. And as we pulled these writings together into a coherent text of anywhere between 50–70 selections depending on the edition, we found ourselves debating and developing feminist theory in the process, contributing to the turn toward intersectionality in gender and women's studies. *Feminist Frontiers* was the first text to put sexuality and lesbian and gay issues front and center, well ahead of its time. When I think back to the fact that D.C Heath dropped the book because they did not think there would be a significant market for a women's studies text that is still a best seller in 2015, it reminds me how difficult it was for feminist sociologists to get our work published during those early years. *Feminist Frontiers'* nine editions reflect evolution of the field, and we would later invite our graduate student, Nancy Whittier, to come on as third co-editor because the book got so big and time consuming, and we wanted her input as a feminist who represented a new generation. After Laurel retired, my life partner of thirty-six years, Leila Rupp, replaced Laurel as co-editor, and she brought a fresh perspective to the book as an historian of gender and sexuality who taught feminist studies at the University of California Santa Barbara, an Hispanic serving institution.

Laurel not only taught me everything about gender and feminist theory but, over the years, mentored me about being an academic, introduced me to senior feminist scholars, and I still find myself giving some of the same advice Laurel gave me to my own graduate students and assigning her writings in my seminars at the University of California. Without Laurel, I'm not sure where I'd be today. I never would have had the successful academic career that I have had, and I might have left academia altogether had Laurel not given me both the permission and the opportunity to be a feminist scholar. When I received the American Sociological Association's Jessie Bernard Award in 2010, the highest award for a scholar of gender in the field of sociology, two members of my graduate cohort at Ohio State who had also studied with Laurel were sitting with me. As I walked to the stage, I felt a tremendous sense of gratitude for Laurel who helped me "get the man out of my head" and to find my voice as a feminist sociologist.

Over the years, our relationship changed, especially after Laurel retired. I was suddenly the only qualitative and feminist scholar in the Sociology Department at Ohio State, and I felt responsible for carrying on her legacy. These were big shoes to fill. Eventually I took a faculty position at the University of California Santa Barbara where there were a large number of important feminist scholars. But my intellectual and personal connection with Laurel continues. Last year, I had surgery for a torn rotator cuff, debilitating me for many months. Like *Dynamics of Sex and Gender*, Laurel's latest book, *After the Fall*, which chronicles her recovery from a broken foot, was a source of insight into the male dominated medical system, but it also

brought hope and inspiration. Each year, I also teach Laurel's highly cited article, now a classic, on writing strategies in qualitative research, in my graduate research methods seminar, hoping to pass onto my students the same kind of permission that Laurel gave me to research and write about gender and sexuality. So, without Laurel, I am not really sure what I would be doing today as a sociologist.

MY SCHOLARSHIP IS DEEPLY INDEBTED

Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre

My scholarship is deeply indebted to Laurel Richardson, who continues to model excellence and creativity in all her endeavours. I encountered brilliant female professors for the first time when I began my doctoral program at mid-life – women who were smart, tough, rigorous, and politically savvy but also captivating and mysterious. These women did not hover and "mentor" and "care"; they demanded our very best work.

I have written elsewhere about my rather grim experiences during the first year of my doctoral program in education at The Ohio State University; about planning to switch degree programs to law or landscape architecture; about taking Mary Margaret Fonow's advice my second year and registering for classes with Laurel, Patti Lather, and Mary Leach simultaneously, all feminist scholars who were daunting. That combination of feminist energy in one quarter was transformational. I was both thrilled and challenged and wanted to be just like them. I read every book they mentioned and studied their smart publications as models of academic writing. Oddly enough, it was Laurel, a sociologist and a lovely, graceful writer, who taught this former English teacher how to write.

After that quarter, my doctoral studies began in earnest, and I took every course these women taught – four or five with Laurel. Though I'd always called myself a feminist, I'd never studied feminism and was eager to take Laurel's doctoral seminar in feminist theory. One of her assignments for the course was to write the feminist story of our lives. The thinking that writing produced helped me understand that my lifelong resistances and refusals were not only appropriate but necessary and that, all along, it had been the women in my life who mattered most. But all Laurel's writing assignments were like that – seemingly straightforward but profoundly disturbing. They took us places we could not have gone except in writing. So I am so very grateful for Laurel's commitment to the work and pleasures of writing, for giving me permission to write and think, to move in writing, to write for the sheer pleasure of putting words together differently – such a simple thing – but sometimes shattering. I am grateful for her bringing to social science research her understanding that writing, at its best, is a method of inquiry and a practice of freedom. I carry her words with me always.

BUILDING INTELLECTUAL COMMUNITY

Patti Lather

I am a poor enough historian to not remember exactly when I joined Postmodern Studies (PMS) at Ohio State University but it must have been around 1990-ish. Professor Gia Hinkle, Sociology, had started it as a feminist reading group for students that then invited faculty to join. It was a multi-disciplinary mix of women that included Laurel and something like six or so other faculty members as well as students from mostly sociology and education. We quickly figured out that the presence of students meant we never got away from the repetitions of teaching. Hence we reconvened ourselves as faculty only space and proceeded to stay together across various venues, collections of members and books until quite recently. We had social (usually potlucks) as well as book-focused meetings and we often wondered what held us together for so long. As I meditate on that question, I think six aspects were especially important.

1. Women only faculty members from across the university who had a "lust for theory": We had an open door membership at the front end, with whomever had an interest from word of mouth circulation. As time went on, we would need to replenish and became more targeted in terms of who had the feminist theory background to add to the mix. While we mixed it up pretty well regarding disciplinary affiliations and lesbian/straight sexualities with some ethnic and class background diversity, we were white girls to a fault.
2. Increasing flexibility as to what we read, even men upon occasion, with a focus on "books too hard to read alone." We read, for example, Deleuze, Derrida and Benjamin, being so flummoxed by Deleuze and *A Thousand Plateaus* that we would flip it open, do a choral reading of whatever pages were in front of us and then attempt a discussion toward some clarity. This worked surprisingly well and demonstrates how, often, no one of us was an "expert" beyond a perhaps wild enthusiasm, in my case for Walter Benjamin. Everyone taught and everyone learned in a Rancierean sort of "teaching what you do not know" where no one was afraid to be "wrong" or "stupid."
3. Openness to changing places, formats and foci. While we began in university meeting rooms within the school day, within a few years we were in one another's living rooms bi-weekly on late Friday afternoons for about an hour and a half, with one or another home deemed geographically central over the years. We made a point, mostly, of NOT eating or drinking. This does NOT mean we never indulged in the occasional treat, but the larger ethic was to get down to our work and not be a burden to our hostess.
4. We were serious about this space. We read (mostly); we began and ended pretty much on time; we were quite respectful of one another's effort to get there by getting down to business. This does NOT mean we never opened with a round of

"check ins" across our various life issues and/or check in on one crisis or another. But we all found benefit to our own scholarly work from our discussions and, mostly, kept our focus on that.

5. We included some social spaces. We were big on potlucks every semester although we segued into high end restaurant lunches toward the end. Early on, we presented together at a conference or two to great enjoyment and, as I remember, some anxiety. We even bowled together, with T-shirts made up for the occasion. There were also several "side" friendships that developed between a few members although, to my knowledge, no romances.
6. Finally, Laurel's presence: Laurel was as greedy as the rest of us to understand the "new" theory. She particularly added to the mix a deep grasp of classical sociological theory. She brought a variety of agendas to the group: art in any and every form; life and memoir writing or perhaps more accurately attention to writing; and a deep pleasure in not just the text but the non-text as well. At her urging, we viewed videos, went on field trips to such places as a book making studio, and read one another's work, the latter to uneven effect given, perhaps, the too much investment that shifted some of the dynamics.

In all of this, across over twenty years, Laurel was supportive of the ups and downs, career and otherwise, of the variety of women who came and went. She helped us negotiate the fine line between intellectualizing our task and keeping it to the bone of our lives without becoming some sort of C-R group. She listened as well as held forth upon occasion, as did we all, contributing to a very democratic space of intellectual community. Importantly, as the group limped a bit into its final year(s), she was instrumental in helping us see that it was time to end.

Mostly ahead of all of us career-wise and lifetime-wise, she helped us negotiate tenure, promotion, babies, divorces, getting published and not, the fashions of theory and anti-theory, the seasons of love and mortality and, of late, retirement. And so I will conclude with what she terms the three phases of early retirement, mid retirement and late retirement. I have found this enormously useful as I begin my own journey down this road, looking at the model she provides of an academic woman who began by pretty much doing what she had long done in the early phases, then shifting to having way too much to do outside the academy to keep that all up, to, of late, a more turning inward that surely includes travel but also the curating of the archive of her work. How's that for lifetime-wise!