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Feminist scholarship as a vocation*

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Abstract. This analysis examines the emergence of feminist scholarship in the United States, specifically how a cohort of academic women came to challenge and propose revisions for the content and organization of academic knowledge. It is based on in-depth interviews from a larger two-year, multi-site study. The intellectual biographies and career histories enable us to consider how the current organization of knowledge has constrained or facilitated feminist scholars who advocate inter-disciplinarity and social change. The analysis uncovers some of the processes by which intentional intellectual communities are formed and sustained within the current systems of disciplinary peer review and academic rewards.

Introduction

It's harder to work when it's not fitting into one's discipline in a particular way. You can't expect to get clear judgements and rewards, although you'll get different opinions about it... The problem is the people who could judge it are out there and not in here in my department and my discipline.

These are the words of a feminist scholar who has struggled to gain recognition and tenure at more than one research university over the past fifteen years. That she drew from several disciplines to generate research questions and theoretical interpretations was only part of the problem. The other part stemmed from her explicit agenda for disciplinary as well as societal change. Among the first to assert in word and deed that feminist scholarship was not an oxymoron, she developed research 'for and about women' and declared her research intentions to be both 'consciousness-raising and paradigm-shifting,' asserting that 'the difference between the two are less than most people suppose.' Her primary network of colleagues lay outside her department, outside her discipline and sometimes beyond the academy altogether.

Although engaging in boundary-crossing may be rewarded academically as innovative or cutting edge, it becomes risky as a primary academic vocation, especially if the scholarship reflects a radical edge. Unlike academics who seek to explore the intersection of long-established fields (e.g. American studies, area studies, cognitive science), some scholars attempt to set up a new way of looking at the world by developing fundamental critiques of disciplinary assumptions and challenges to conventional norms of scholarly inquiry (e.g. ethnic, Marxist, feminist perspectives). When the project is cross-disciplinary as well as oppositional in nature, both the scholars and their scholarship engage in a more ambitious struggle for legitimacy. In an effort to re-frame issues and ask new questions, they seek and find intellectual communities that cut across lines of formal structure. The

formation and maintenance of such intentional communities becomes as much an organization and political endeavor as an intellectual one.

In this article, I focus on feminist scholarship as a contemporary case of struggle for recognition and resources in the American academy over the past two decades. The analysis reveals how a cohort of academic women, who received Ph.D.s. in 'traditional' disciplines, came to challenge the content and organization of academic knowledge. Their intellectual biographies and career histories enable us to examine two stages of this historical process: first, how informal organizing became a motivating and sustaining basis for constructing feminist scholarship, and second, how the prevailing context of department and discipline-based peer review framed the work of scholars who chose to work in departments as well as those who sought women's studies locations.

The data are drawn from a larger two-year study with in-depth interviews of forty women faculty and thirty-five administrators and faculty as disciplinary observers who were located at ten colleges and universities in the United States (Gumport, 1987). The faculty in this sample received Ph.D.s. in one of three disciplines: history, sociology and philosphy. While the choice of these disciplines limits the study's potential for capturing the entire landscape of academic knowledge, the sample selection was designed to reflect a range (from more to less) in early receptivity to women and feminist work, thus suggesting epistemological or historical factors that may have shaped the context of their struggle for academic legitimacy (Gumport, 1988). At the time of the study, 1985–87, the faculty in this sample were all employed full-time and evenly distributed across departments of history, sociology, philosophy and women's studies. Having entered graduate school between 1956 and 1980, the study includes retrospective data on the processes by which some women came to self-identify and contribute as feminist scholars within their disciplines or within emerging women's studies programs as well as other women who had little or no involvement but were nonetheless affected by virtue of their gender.

The analysis for this article examines the distinctive experiences of one particular cohort of academic women. These women entered graduate school roughly between 1964 and 1972; although not all of them became highly politicized, they all began graduate school in a very politicized era, which promoted a skepticism, if not a detachment, from conventional orientations to scholarly inquiry and to scholarship as a vocation. I focus on the social processes and conditions in which some of these women, whom I call the Pathfinders, made the initial fusions between political and academic interests to construct feminist scholarship.

The emergence of feminist scholarship in the academy

Pathfinders recall that they created what has since become feminist scholarship without forethought or conscious planning. They were women *in* academia, but not *of* it. Having 'backed into' graduate school with ambivalence and having experienced tension between political and academic interests, they came to generate new scholarly questions that derived from their political, personal, emotional and

intellectual sensibilities.

Recalling their years as graduate students or as young faculty, many Pathfinders got the content and inspiration to carve out a new terrain in a discipline as a result of experiences in cross-departmental networks of campus women. Increasingly supported by the momentum and language of the 1960s wave of the women's liberation movement, many Pathfinders reinterpreted their academic contexts as in need of change, the kind of change that would require collective effort.

Attending cross-departmental meetings that entailed long hours of discussion generated transformative political and academic experiences, the nature of which had not been at all apparent at the outset. One senior sociologist explained how this developed when she took the initiative to organize a group to meet at her home in the late 1960s: 'At the first meeting I asked, "do we have something in common as women?"... It looked as if there were some structural barrier... A good number of us were dropping out... We were in the pipeline, but could we get aboard? That was the question. Obviously all of us were wondering...'

Yet, when the group began, any clear expressions of a gender-based experience, such as feelings of discrimination or invisibility, were not forthcoming: 'As we went around the room, people said they were having a writer's block, having difficulty in the library, one thing and another, but not one of them gender-related. At the end of the evening, I felt, well, that we gave it a try. I called the meeting to an end and no one left for three hours afterward. They turned to the person next to them and could say privately what they couldn't say publicly.'

Gradually, people realized and disclosed their personal experiences as women in a campus environment. The process was an amazingly slow unfolding, given that the group was all women, which would more likely be a safe place. 'And so we held another meeting and a little more came out and then another meeting...,' said the group's organizer.

Over time, the intensely private and personal nature of their conversations served as the basis for a new consciousness about their intellectual work. A critical stance emerged out of their experiences as women: 'It turned into a wonderful group in which we began to really talk about ideas. For example, what was social class, what was social mobility, and why was it determined by male occupations, what does that mean about the work women do, how should it be conceived? We began to really reconceive the whole thing. And it was intellectually an extraordinary experience.' Much to everyone's surprise, this group continued to meet regularly for eight years.

Participation in a 'women's group' or 'women's caucus' like the one just described was commonplace for Pathfinders when they were younger faculty and graduate students. The initial motivation was often to talk about their experiences of the immediate campus environment. Some women experienced it as alienating and hostile: 'There's no room for the likes of me!' or they joined 'to overcome anomie basically' and 'to share horror stories over lunch.' Others saw the campus as discriminatory and sought, for example, 'to abolish the admissions quota for women' or 'to plan a strategy to change a nepotism regulation.' In the process of validating emotional and previously private perceptions ('I always thought it was 'just me''), they used the informal meetings to determine how to survive in an

inhospitable context.

Such colleagueship on campus was essential, not just for social support and validation, but for collaborating and searching for intellectual openings in the canons of their disciplines. When Pathfinders constructed questions for their research, they did so with an awareness that it entailed a risk of 'alienating powerful faculty in the department' or 'not being understood.' Pathfinders recall that campus peer networks were particularly valuable to them during graduate school, as they often found few or no faculty resources. As one now tenured sociologist recalled, 'When I wanted to write my dissertation, the faculty couldn't understand why anyone would be interested in abortion, or women...' Another scholar remembered that her dissertation research switched from 'a professionally promising but uninteresting topic' to a study on women; she subsequently 'dug up a new committee,... with a woman as a chair who didn't know anything about (the topic) or feminist scholarship, but was a kind of voyeur of it... and two men who rubber-stamped anything.' Some Pathfinders suggested that the preferable situation for them as graduate students was to be left alone, an arrangement that would permit maximum autonomy from faculty; however, in retrospect years later, some characterized this as an unhelpful alternative in an academic system where sponsorship and colleagueship are essential elements for validating research.

The extent to which academic women needed a cross-departmental network on campus varied by department. On rare occasions, a women's group would be constituted by graduate students and faculty entirely in one department, usually history because there were more women in history. There were too few women, let alone feminists, in any other single department to form a critical mass. In philosophy, for example, the cross-departmental forum was the only option, and an attractive one at that. According to a philosopher, 'the women in philosophy who see themselves as feminist scholars will generally be the only person doing feminist work in a department and may sometimes be the only woman period. They may feel cut off or deprived of collegial relationships.'[1] In past decades, the arrangement of faculty offices by department reflected the likelihood that a philosopher could to go a colleague in the office next door to share intellectual interests, associations and audience. The emerging needs of feminist scholars called into question the premise that a department could indeed be one's primary home.

Beyond sheer numbers of women present, history and philosophy shed light on how different disciplines responded to the Pathfinders. In history, Pathfinders had to move away from their departments the least, in contrast to their colleagues in philosophy. While history as a discipline was more receptive to adding material on women and ultimately to establishing a niche called women's history, philosophy had never provided a clear space for feminist interests. Simply stated, it was easier for a feminist historian to be a historian than for a feminist philosopher to be a philosopher.

Due to the increasing popularity of social history in the late-1960s, history was more receptive to raising questions about women. Research on women seemed like a 'natural extension' of the domain of inquiry for social history, which expanded ideas of what counts as worthy subjects of historical research to include studying the

lives of ordinary people, including the downtrodden and oppressed. Social history also signaled a change in notions of what counts as acceptable evidence, to include material that could reconstruct women's experiences, such as oral histories. Still, the initial tasks for a burgeoning feminist historian in the early 1970s were ambitious: 'It was damned hard to do because you didn't know where the sources were – they were so hard to find. You didn't know what the questions were. You didn't have the kind of definition by other people of what you should be looking for.'

One Pathfinder in history took a circuitous route to becoming one of the first feminist contributors to family history. She had always been interested in social history and pursued those questions because they were 'most interesting intellectually,' although she recalls not having an initial intention to study women: 'The women's part passed me by at first. It simply never occurred to me that women were part of the package.' In fact, early in her graduate school experience, a professor had suggested that she write on women, which she 'took as an enormous insult, that I was pushed into that because I was a woman. So I ignored it.' She 'managed to do the entire dissertation without ever mentioning women,' and yet in the end carved out a theoretical perspective that became a precursor to feminist work in family history.

The dynamics of developing her dissertation are noteworthy. She had identified a dissertation topic that entailed studying a kinship-organized revolution. She wanted to analyze how kinship structures worked, rather than how political revolutions worked. Yet her advisor and graduate student peers were more interested in conventional questions of power: 'they defined politics narrowly to mean political history of kings and other leaders of nations.' She tried to re-phrase her work on kinship in their terms, but to no avail: 'I knew if I couldn't translate it into (their) political terms, it was marginal... I never was told I was wrong, but no one knew what to do with it. No one would advise me.' The process left her questioning her own competence, 'I felt I didn't understand the terms of the field.' It is striking that, in retrospect, she laments that 'there was no model for me anywhere' in the canon to think about power and politics in a way that ended up taking women's experience seriously.

A social and economic historian did not begin feminist research until midway through an assistant professorship, when she 'stumbled upon' a topic in women's history 'by accident.' While working in the archives, she discoverd some significant information about sexuality that was previously unreported in the historical literature. That her interest was captured she attributes to always having implicitly valued women as historical agents and to the fact that women's history was becoming a hot topic at the time, the late 1970s.

Viewing this research as a dramatic departure from her earlier work as a graduate student and new assistant professor, she was now concerned about the reception it might get from her history department colleagues at the high prestige university where she worked. For a while, she considered keeping it a secret: 'I toyed briefly with not telling anyone here that I was working on it, because I was afraid of how it might be perceived, especially as I was coming up for tenure. But I decided not to. One reason was a practical reason that people would wonder what I was working

on. Then it also just didn't seem right.' In spite of the risk, she presented some of this research to her colleagues in the department. She was relieved when she realized that they were intellectually engaged by her topic: 'It went very well. I was amazed. Some of the issues that I deal with are at the intersection of sex and power. They are interested in sexuality. And power they understand very well.'

In the two years following, she did receive tenure. She has made further contributions to women's history and now self-identifies as a women's historian. What began as 'an interruption,' she realized, '...turned out to be not an interruption at all, but a major (shift) in my outlook as a historian.' Her serendipitous experience in the archives became a catalyst for a new scholarly trajectory, one which entailed a deeper intellectual and emotional involvement: 'I had realized on an intellectual level that I was uncovering some of the past... But it's another thing to realize how far back and how rich and how complicated and how painful some of those times are. It's like seeing a patient in a hospital beginning to recover memory. That's something that is emotionally very charged.'

She has also come to see her discipline in a different light: 'For me it is a revelation at the emotional level – to think through fully what repression of history does to people and has done to women... (Y)ou can see what has been done to women's history and the history of the poor and the history of all the oppressed. I was aware of the expression that history was written by the victors. And again, I could understand that on an intellectual level, but to experience it emotionally... I'm just beginning to understand what that means for me. It is a very enriching experience.' Now tenured in her history department, she continues to pursue this work with the understanding that '...there is no going back to the way I did it before.'

In contrast to history, philosophy as a discipline was hostile to women and unreceptive to feminist analyses. 'Fifteen years ago,' a Pathfinder remembered, 'it was a major production even to have a women hired in philosophy... In my first job I was told by the chairman that he had opposed my appointment because he didn't think women could do philosophy.' The substantive challenge for feminists in philosophy was first to make 'the woman question' a bona fide philosophical problem (Gould, 1976). While on one level it was a struggle to establish that women constituted appropriate subject matter, on another level it was even more radical to claim that women have a unique perspective to share from their experience as women. This standpoint epistemology directly contradicted the universal, abstract, and rational assumptions of philosophical inquiry. As one feminist noted, 'Philosophy above all thinks of itself as the activity of disinterested reason. And so to have any sort of agenda is a kind of debasement of philosophy... Philosophy is about universals, and women are particulars which by definition doesn't count as philosophy.' Another observed that feminist philosophers continue to be discounted due to the fact that 'it's mostly women engaged in this funny kind of work which just really confirms people's initial prejudice that women can't do real philosophy...' A metaphor echoed by several Pathfinders is that philosophy has been 'a hard nut to crack.'

Feminists in philosophy handled this disciplinary context in one of two ways. One way was to develop two separate agendas that would parallel each other but not

intersect. The other way was to move out of philosophy and into women's studies, in an effort to integrate feminist and philosophical concerns.

As an illustration of the first strategy, one Pathfinder who was trained in analytical philosophy saw herself as writing to two sets of colleagues and audiences, each requiring 'a kind of translating or re-shaping the work to fit a different set of concerns.' Her philosophy training in logic gave her a technical expertise, as she stated, 'I am equipped... to explore the structure of reasoning.' She has developed a research agenda that she calls 'straight philosophy'. Recalling the emergence of her feminist perspective, she explained that by the mid-1970s she began to examine the morality of abortion and affirmative action. She remembered wanting to consider these timely issues with some other women philosophers, yet she and her peers were 'puzzled about what we could do... I think most of us were really at a loss to see what the relation was between our work as philosophers and our political commitments as feminists.'

Over the course of her career, she has worked to develop a feminist research agenda, but she has kept it as a distinctly separate path from the 'straight philosophy.' 'When I was doing it, I didn't see it as a new direction. I mean I understood myself to be sort of doing something different, which was much more linked with my political commitments and personal inclinations. And when that was done, I'd go back to doing more standard topics.'

As a tenured professor in a philosophy department, she continues to differentiate between the two audiences. On the one hand, there is a philosophical audience, with 'narrow disciplinary boundaries.' On the other hand, a feminist audience is broader: 'if it's academic, it tends to be interdisciplinary, and sometimes (it's) not entirely academic.' A lot of 'specific disciplinary concerns' are 'totally irrelevant' to a feminist audience; 'the level of detail and the distinctions' have to 'get excised in order to keep the question alive.' In speaking to a feminist audience, she explained, '...it's not that I have to drop my philosophical standards, ...it's that I have to make my work relevant in ways that I don't have to when I'm speaking to a philosphical audience that really wouldn't care about how a particular distinction is going to get applied in the world.'

Reflecting on the development of her work over the past fifteen years, she said that 'my professional ties and my intellectual ties didn't have very much to do with each other.' This is a striking comment since she clarified her sense of professional ties to be among philosophers and her intellectual ties to be in the feminist community. She saw herself as generating scholarship for both communities.[2]

Some of her feminist colleagues have chosen not to work on two separate paths. Rather they have abandoned the standard interests of the discipline in favor of developing feminist scholarship on its own terms, far from the disciplinary base yet ultimately trying to reconcile both feminist and philosphical interests. As an example of this preference, one Pathfinder in philosophy decided to work in a women's studies program rather than a philosophy department. She had two reasons for making this decision after graduate school. The first was that she found the discipline to be 'very aggressive, ...to be challenging and critical and antagonistic in breaking down others' positions.' The second reason was that she wanted to

resolve 'the mind/body split,' which she found problematic both in the theory and the practice of philosophy. She perceived that a philosophy department would be intolerant of her ambitions to develop 'a non-aggressive analytical stance' and 'a historical reinterpretation of spirituality': 'At the time, I felt that it was much too difficult to push my ideas into the narrow constraints of philosophy.' She also recalls having had no models in the discipline: 'It was very hard for me to begin work because the work wasn't done yet. And until it's started it's hard to know what to do. You are always challenged from people who have a defined or articulated methodology going back a couple thousand years.'

A women's studies program offered a more promising campus context in which to nurture these interests. In that setting, she would seek and find 'continuing sources of support' for her scholarship as well as 'a language from feminist theory.' She found women's studies to be a 'stimulating political, intellectual and emotional climate which has been enormously valuable' to her scholarship. She 'felt it was important for women to have some separate space and autonomy to develop on our own terms, not always tied to a male audience or male criteria... I feel that in my development as a thinker, as a woman thinker, a feminist and a philosopher, it's been invaluable to be able to develop my thinking freely within the context of an autonomous women's studies program.' However, her location in a women's studies program has not entirely been immersion in 'a safe harbor' for thinking, as she has been encouraged to be actively involved in local community issues about violence against women and racism. This work as 'an activist' has 'enriched' her development of 'a holistic perspective for my scholarship.'

As a Pathfinder doing feminist philosophy, her primary colleagues are outside the discipline. Although her scholarship is perceived as innovative in feminist circles inside and outside the academy, it remains unclear whether she will succeed in persuading philosophers that it indeed counts as philosophy. Having been in women's studies for ten years, she has become more interested in 'moving (her) focus back into philosophy': 'I feel ready to do this... partly because I've had ten years to develop my ideas and they feel real solid to me.' Initially, she 'had qualms about presenting something as unorthodox, philosophically speaking, as a talk on fertility, sexuality and rebirth... Although my work may be considered part of philosophy of religion, it's basically about the meaning of life. Philosophy, to me, means the pursuit of wisdom. I reach for that. But it's more a multidisciplinary approach than a strict philosophical approach.' Her attempts to re-engage in a dialogue with philosophy department colleagues have been encouraging. She is currently employed half-time in women's studies and half-time in philosophy at a state college.

Despite innovative efforts, feminist scholars' legitimacy in philosophy does not appear to be forthcoming. A Pathfinder characterized the status of feminist work as 'fairly fragile:' 'There isn't a location for feminist work in philosophy, except to some extent (now) there's some recognition... Fifteen years ago a philosopher might have sneered at it, whereas today that same person will be careful about the company in which he or she sneers at it.'

Feminist scholarship as a vocation

Indeed, the increased visibility of feminist scholarship in the American academy would make its opponents less apt to sneer openly. Over the past two decades across the country, feminists have both expanded the boundaries of their disciplines and contributed to an autonomous body of work, which is now recognized as feminist scholarship, taught in women's studies programs and, although less perceptible, integrated into departmental curricula.

The magnitude of this growth is noteworthy: from 17 courses in 1969 to over 30,000 women's studies courses, 500 degree-granting programs, and 50 centers for research on women in 1980 (Howe and Lauter, 1980), not to mention the ongoing proliferation of over a hundred publications and dozens of professional associations within and outside all of the disciplines (including philosophy, several physical sciences, and even engineering). Increasingly, these women's studies activities seek and obtain substantial institutional resources for teaching and research operations, including salaries for staff and academic personnel with expertise in feminist scholarship. Even Harvard in its 1986 reversal of a twelve-year-old decision established a degree-granting program in women's studies, 'after a prudent waiting period to see if it was a genuine field of scholarly inquiry' (Nelson, 1987).

Although almost two decades have passed since the Pathfinders entered graduate school, and despite the major institutionalization of women's studies as inter-departmental teaching programs, the academy has yet to accept the legitimacy of feminist scholarship as an academic vocation, whether on the programmatic level or on the individual level. Women's studies programs usually lack control over faculty hiring and promotion. Relying on administrators' discretionary resources and senior academics' departmental decisions about tenure-track faculty billets, the achievement of program status does not necessarily reflect genuine or continued validation of feminist scholarship as a coherent area of expertise on which claims to authority can rest.

While in the late 1980s one does not often hear entire women's studies programs dismissed, negative sentiments about the scholarship are openly expressed in the evaluation of individual faculty, especially in hiring and promotion decisions. Involvement in feminist scholarship and in multi-disciplinary intellectual networks is often perceived by administrators and senior academics who control peer review as 'trivial,' 'self-interested,' 'faddish,' or, perhaps more accurately, 'subversive.' Thus, whether or not the scholarly work is cutting edge, its radical edge renders it problematic.

For example, in a well-publicized case of a feminist sociologist who appealed her tenure denial, Chancellor Sinsheimer of the University of California explained that he had dismissed the testimony of outside experts in the peer review process.

> It has become clear that there is an academic network of 'progressive' social scientists who will fervently support any member of this club... This makes even the interpretation of outside evaluations very difficult... Supporters of these politically committed women... are by definition politically motivated, by definition invalid... Critics of these women, on the other hand, are motivated only by a disinterested

respect for scholarship. (Sternhell, 1984, 97)

Sinsheimer's statement and the subsequent granting of tenure to this scholar confirmed the inherently social nature of peer review – that without a community, feminist scholars, like other academics, could not make successful claims to expertise and authority. In this fundamental sense, the advancement of feminist scholarship has been like other aspiring professional groups, engaged in an organizational and political endeavor as well as an intellectual one.

Although Sinsheimer correctly acknowledged the existence of a 'politically committed' and 'politically motivated' community of feminist scholars, he did so in such a way as to reinforce the dominant belief that those who oppose feminist scholarship are not political. While this is only one case, it is a valuable reminder of a long history perpetuating the idea that politics and scholarship are incompatible.

Even Weber, in his famous 1918 speech 'Science as a Vocation,' put forth a normative argument that the two should be separated. In asserting that 'politics is out of place... on the academic platform,' Weber was speaking of prophets and demagogues who, he argued, should in their teaching 'abstain' from 'imposition of a personal point of view' and from fostering a dogmatic or ideological approach (Weber, 1958, 145–146). At the same time, however, he also admitted that the ability to separate the two is perhaps more difficult in the practice of scholarly inquiry than in teaching.[3]

Some feminist scholars, among other contemporary critics of positivism, insist that the dichotomy between politics and scholarship is conceptually false and in practice a fiction that has been used to legitimate claims to professional expertise (Bledstein, 1976; Larson, 1977; Silva and Slaughter, 1984). They assert that the work of both proponents and opponents of feminist scholarship is necessarily grounded in a political if not an ontological standpoint, even when its political premises are not made explicit. In an academic context that strives for maximizing objectivity, such a critical stance exacerbates the struggle for legitimacy of feminist scholarship.

The heart of the issue lies in the extent to which feminist scholarship may succeed not just as an area of inquiry but as a vocation. At least two significant dimensions have yet to be explored, not only conceptually but also in further empirical study. The first is the problematic nature of value commitments in an organizational structure that espouses a value-free ideology. In a Weberian sense of vocation, the pursuit of feminist scholarship would strive for value neutrality, like other scholarly callings, yet simultaneously rest on 'a passionate devotion' involving 'one's 'heart and soul'' (Weber, 1958, 135). As the interview data suggest, the source of feminist scholarship is indeed passionate commitment, although judged to be in excess from the point of view of conventional scholars while insufficient from the point of view of radical feminists. The pursuit of feminist scholarship as a vocation has been unlike conventional scholarly callings in that the particular brand of passionate devotion is often counter-hegemonic and the scholarship quite literally often strives to integrate heart and soul by exploring the intersection of personal, political and intellectual interests. Thus, the ideological foundations of feminist scholarship as a vocation challenge and seek to transform the very premises of traditional scholarly inquiry.

A second dimension concerns the precarious structural foundations of emerging academic vocations. In the modern academic system, the social production of knowledge rests on the enduring disciplinary division of knowledge; given the premise of specialized skills and knowledge, disciplines reproduce themselves through research training in Ph.D. programs. The possibility of the reproduction of feminist scholarship in future generations of scholars would hinge on its suitability for specialized training. In one sense, that suitability would meet the exigencies of training as in other fields, such as anthropology or even auto mechanics, where the expertise of the trainer is assumed as is the competence in evaluating progress of apprentices. In a second and equally important sense, suitability is also determined by achieving an institutional home base where training can occur. The dynamics of sustaining commitments of institutional resources will be played out differently depending on whether the institutional home for feminist scholars is an autonomous unit, as in a department of feminist scholarship, or a token position in a discipline-based department, as is the case for Marxist scholars.

Both ideological and structural foundations point to a deeper question of historical possibility: what is the likelihood of institutionalizing a political movement? The first generation of feminist scholarship emerged out of a confluence of particular social conditions, where challenges to inhospitable organizational and intellectual contexts of the academy were spurred on by a wider political movement. In consciously risking their scholarly careers, early proponents of feminist scholarship did not intend to establish a vocation. Moreover, the emerging scholarship challenged the very premises of the ideological and structural foundations of conventional scholarship, without regard for ensuring the reproduction of feminist scholarship in future academic generations. Will feminist scholarship succeed as a vocation? That will depend on the prospects for changing the existing economic and political structures of higher education institutions sufficiently to accommodate the agenda of the proponents of feminist scholarship.

Summary

The interdisciplinary and oppositional character of feminist scholarship causes scholars in departments to live out a 'personal tension' of being both insiders and outsiders, 'rooted in the contradiction of belonging and not belonging' (Westkott, 1979, 422). While this tension has thus far generated a distinctive angle for scholarly critique and questions, it also entails a burden of dual loyalties, shifting audiences, and multiple sets of criteria for evaluating one's work. For those scholars not in departments but in women's studies programs, the tension takes on a different hue: these scholars are clearly in marginal organizational positions with respect to academic power and some are situated more closely to the non-academic communities from which their feminist agendas emerged.

What can be learned from the study of how feminist scholars have made their own history? Not only can we see how a new area of knowledge was socially constructed by its proponents and supporters, but we see the organizational and

political ways scholars tried to gain control over the criteria and means with which to evaluate their own intellectual products.

Academia presents a double bind in constructing new scholarship. The conventional research imperative is grounded in an ideology of merit. Those who earn rewards for innovative scholarship do so by demonstrating that their work is relevant yet unique. Access to tenure, the means of decisions and power, comes from playing by, or at least near, accepted rules and expectations. To deviate too much, whether in questions or conclusions, is to run the risk of being deemed not cutting edge but over the edge.

The emergence of feminist scholarship reveals how its proponents have worked within this academic context. A cohort of academic women did organize within and across disciplines as well as within, across and beyond campuses. Their networks provided a social forum to develop and validate ideas as well as to find a convergence among political and personal and academic interests. It is a clear instance of academic change. Yet they did so without status or power in established channels of the academy. Especially for academic women who are still under-represented proportionally up the tenure ladder, involvement in feminist scholarship jeopardizes future access to power.[4]

While critical masses of like-minded colleagues and supportive wider cultural and political milieux may have been sufficient factors in establishing a scholarly niche, they are not sufficient for subsequent institutionalization *as a vocation.* Enduring academic change requires gaining control over criteria for evaluating the scholarship produced by individual faculty. At bottom, what counts as innovative is socially defined by a community of experts with claims to authority.

Since that control resides in formal organizational structures, the participation of feminist scholars in standard academic practices has become more salient. The nature and site of struggle, then, has shifted from gaining mere recognition or inclusion as academic programs to influencing such contested academic terrains as faculty hiring and promotion, peer review of publications and grants, and doctoral students' research training and dissertation advising. These are the arenas for future negotiation about the criteria for what constitutes good scholarship, for what will reconstitute the landscape of scholarly vocations, and ultimately for who can succeed as an academic.

Notes

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1. As cross-departmental networks on campuses crystallized in the late 1960s and into the 1970s, these forums were complemented by disciplinary associations which spawned groups of feminist scholars. In these forums, one could dialogue with disciplinary and feminist colleagues. As a philosopher explains, 'Women flock to (those) meetings because those are the only places where you get both philosophical colleagueship and feminist colleagueship. You get both of them at the same time, same place, in the same sentence. And for most women that is extremely rare.'
2. The extent to which intellectual and professional stimulation is generated by separate communities

requires further empirical study. It is significant that many twentieth century curricular initiatives emerged out of intellectual, political and economic ferment in the wider American society, for example World War II and area studies, civil rights and black/ethnic studies, women's liberation and women's studies, anti-Vietnam war protests and peace studies, conservation and environmental studies (Gumport, 1988).

3. While Weber stated it is a responsibility to seek 'inconvenient facts,' he conceded that science cannot be 'free from presuppositions' and that such presuppositions 'cannot be proved by scientific means' (1958, 147, 143).
4. Although the representation of women in the academic profession in the United States has increased from one-fourth in 1960 to one-third in 1980, women still hold about one-fourth of all full-time positions (Bowen and Schuster, 1986, 55) and only 17% of the positions at research universities (Astin and Snyder, 1982, 32), the top tier (3%) of the institutions in the higher education system. As a general picture of differences by rank, women are one out of two instructors, one out of three assistant professors, one out of five associate professors, and one out of ten full professors (Menges and Exum, 1983, 125).

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