

**THE HISTORY OF WOMEN'S STUDIES
AS AN ACADEMIC SUBJECT AREA
IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE UK:
1970-1995**

KELLY COATE

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**INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON**

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Abstract

Women's studies has become a recognisable subject area in higher education in the UK since the first named postgraduate degree programme was offered at the University of Kent at Canterbury in 1980. This multi-disciplinary subject area gained impetus from the politics of the second wave women's movement, growing in popularity through adult education courses for women, and gradually entering higher education as undergraduate options mainly within sociology degree programmes.

This thesis locates the growth of feminist and women's studies courses within the political and higher education context of the 1970s and 1980s. The research is based on a qualitative, case study approach of four higher education institutions. The data consist of fifty interviews with staff and students who were in various ways involved in the early years of feminist scholarship at the chosen institutions during the time period studied, as well as historical documentation about the universities and from the women's movement.

The women's studies literature has constructed an account of the development of women's studies which has emphasised connections with the women's movement, and in so doing has glossed over the significance of the changing higher education context. In particular, the disciplinary differences between women academics and the differences in institutional cultures will be shown to have made an impact on the types of feminist and women's studies courses which were developed. In order to explore the divergent nature of the integration of feminist knowledge into the mainstream curriculum, the variety of feminist and women's studies courses which were developed in the case studies will be examined historically through the construction of their curricula, the pedagogical strategies employed, and issues of assessment on these courses.

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CHAPTER ONE

WHY WOMEN'S STUDIES?

Women's Studies is at the centre of a revolution whose aim is nothing less than the transformation of the university.

(Beck, 1990, p. 211)

1.1 Introduction

The current status of women's studies as a subject area on an international scale is impressive. Women's studies is a diverse field which encompasses a vast range of courses and programmes both inside formal higher education systems and in educational projects on the margins (such as community education). Women's studies is now a well-established field in, to name but a few, the Netherlands, Australia, New Zealand, India and Canada, and there are several national networks and a growing European network for women's studies practitioners. Women's studies on an international level has an educational presence which is strengthening in some countries, and has even been credited with the rise of activist women's movements in non-Western countries (Howe, 1997). As a worldwide movement, the expansion of women's studies has been a significant contribution to education provision at many different levels. Yet in the United States, which developed the first women's studies programmes, there are indications that it is 'institutionally fragile' (Allen, 1997). As a subject area in the UK higher education system, women's studies is also in a precarious position.

At present the history of women's studies in the UK remains largely uncharted. This thesis will explore the ways in which women's studies became established as a subject area in higher education, gaining impetus from the women's movement and the

growth of women's studies courses in the States, in the hopes of providing insights for the future development of the subject. The research brings together a variety of historical materials, the women's studies literature, and the literature from higher education studies to develop an understanding of the factors which influenced the development of women's studies as a subject area. The context of this research is the higher education system in England in the 1970s and 1980s, and the women's movement which began in the 1970s. An historical overview will provide the basis for understanding the ways in which women's studies gained impetus from a social movement to form an academic subject, taking root within departments of sociology before spreading widely to other disciplines and also establishing itself as an academic area in its own right.

The research project uses a qualitative, case study approach. Four higher education institutions have been chosen which were to varying degrees influenced by feminist scholarship in the 1970s and 1980s¹ (The London School of Economics, the University of Kent at Canterbury, the University of Sussex, and the University of North London). The bulk of the data from the case studies consist of interviews with staff and students who were involved in the early years of feminist scholarship at the chosen institutions during the time period studied. In addition, university archives have been consulted in a search for historical documentation concerning the area of study. The aim will be to provide a detailed account of the ways in which feminist knowledge was integrated into the higher education curriculum. At one level, the data (interview transcripts and historical documentation) has provided an historical account of the events which led to the development of women's studies courses. On another

¹The cut-off date of this research is 1990. The case study data focuses mainly on the first few years of any feminist and/or women's studies courses offered, so most of the data concerns the period from about 1975-1985. However, it was necessary to slightly widen the boundaries to include early data from the London School of Economics and later data from the Polytechnic of North London. A number of informants from the LSE were discussing their experiences from the late 1960s. And as undergraduate degree programmes in women's studies did not begin until the mid-1980s, at the PNL case study student and academic informants were discussing their experiences of the course from around 1986-1990. Women's studies has been going through a number of changes in the 1990s, and although it is sometimes necessary to refer to these changes, they would require another thesis to analyse properly.

level, the analysis of the data allowed implicit meanings to emerge, on the basis that there are 'hidden' discourses within the construction of knowledge which define boundaries, maintain power, and create mechanisms for legitimising certain practices within higher education.

The structure of the thesis is as follows:

- **Chapter One.** An overview of women's studies as a subject area, especially the issues in the women's studies literature, and the theoretical approach of the present research;
- **Chapter Two.** The research methodology and issues of power in interviews with feminist academics;
- **Chapter Three.** The women's liberation movement, and the development of feminist academic organisations (academic pressure groups) which had an impact on the development of feminist knowledge and women's studies;
- **Chapter Four.** The different perspectives of feminist academics, and the types of feminist academics who were influential in the development of women's studies in the UK;
- **Chapter Five.** An overview of the higher education system in the context of the time period of this study, and a summary of the major changes between 1970 -1990 which had an impact on the development of women's studies courses;
- **Chapter Six.** The choice of and an account of the histories of the case study institutions, as relevant to the time period of the research and the factors relevant to the development of feminist and women's studies courses in these institutions;
- **Chapter Seven.** In-depth analysis of the establishment of feminist and women's studies courses in each case study institution;
- **Chapter Eight.** The ideas which constructed the women's studies curriculum and feminist knowledge as a legitimate academic discourse;
- **Chapter Nine.** Feminist pedagogies and issues in feminist teaching strategies in relation to the case study courses;

- **Chapter Ten.** Issues in the assessment of feminist and women's studies courses;
- **Chapter Eleven.** Conclusions: the development of different types of feminist and women's studies courses.

The remainder of the present chapter will provide an overview of the development of women's studies, and analyse the debates and issues within the women's studies literature. The idea that women's studies has been a 'movement' in UK higher education will be proposed, and the characteristics of this movement will be explored. Women's studies has always been a highly divergent field, and it is necessary to clarify the definitions of 'women's studies' and 'feminist courses' which will be used throughout the thesis. Finally, the theoretical framework for the research will be proposed.

1.2 The Development of Women's Studies as a Subject Area

Women's studies was once unforgettably described to me by an academic in the UK as 'that dreadful American import'. I have come to accept that this view is perhaps not as uncommon as I initially presumed. Although women's studies originated in the US, and developments there were influential in the establishment of women's studies courses in the UK, there are significant distinctions between women's studies in the US and women's studies in the UK which will be touched on throughout this thesis. Both were motivated by the politics and women's movements of the late 1960s, and the women academics on both sides of the Atlantic who developed the first feminist courses were keen to bring the ideas from this political activism into the academy. Women's studies in the US grew rapidly from the late 1960s in the higher education system (Tobias, 1978; Howe, 1982), offering undergraduate courses over a decade before the first degree programmes in women's studies were established in the UK.

In 1971, the first 'Guide to Current Female Studies' was published in the US, and listed 610 courses at 200 universities (Howe, 1975). In contrast, the booklet

'Women's Studies in the UK' listed 25 courses in 19 universities (Hartnett & Rendel, 1975). The book opens with the sentence 'Women's Studies are becoming established in this country', and goes on to mention that universities such as Oxford, Cambridge, London, and Reading offer some form of women's studies courses. There are two interesting points about this opening paragraph. It is notable that there was, in general, a shift in the 1970s from referring to women's studies in the plural and often with lower case letters ('women's studies *are* about. . .') to a singular usage with capital letters² in the 1980s ('Women's Studies *is*. . .'). This may denote a significant change, as Bernstein argues that 'disciplines or singulars are on the whole narcissistic, oriented to their own development rather than to applications outside themselves' (Bernstein, 1990). Secondly, the emphasis on courses in élite institutions now seems overly optimistic, as these institutions have not been at the forefront of developing women's studies courses.

The first 'women's studies' courses in the UK are now usually identified as the range of courses for women which were offered in the various sectors of adult education from the early 1970s. In fact, they were the largest group of courses listed in Hartnett's guide, although this point is not mentioned in her book. Women were the majority of adult education students and staff, and ideas from the women's movement began to influence the courses offered through Local Educational Authorities, the Worker's Educational Association, and extramural courses in the universities (Klein, 1983; Hughes and Kennedy, 1983; Bird, 1980). They were popular and innovative, and described as 'the most dynamic and extensive area' of women's studies in the UK (Klein, 1983, p. 256; and Zmrczek and Duchen (1991) made a similar point nearly ten years later).

²It is academic convention to use lower case letters when referring to a subject area and capital letters when referring to a specific degree (such as an 'MA in Women's Studies'), which will be followed here. Many women's studies practitioners continue to use capital letters, however, in an attempt to construct boundaries around the subject and raise its visibility. It is somewhat interesting that even this seemingly unimportant factor can be a political choice.

The first courses in mainstream higher education were individual courses on undergraduate degree programmes which focused on research and scholarship 'on women by women for women' (see Hartnett & Rendel, 1975; Dixon, 1976; Rendel, 1980). These courses also developed from the early 1970s, with 'Women and Society' as a popular title, and most were based in social science faculties. The new areas of inquiry being developed by feminist sociologists provided much of the resources for these courses, with feminist theories in literary studies and history also beginning to make an impact. The first named women's studies degree programme in the UK was the MA in Women's Studies which started in 1980 at the University of Kent at Canterbury³. Several years later, the polytechnics were at the forefront of developing undergraduate degree programmes in women's studies, usually as minor 'pathways' or half degrees.

The emphasis on the study and visibility of women was, at the time, an important development within a higher education curriculum in which women had historically been marginalised. Diana Barker proposed that:

The objectives of Women's Studies are: to come to an increased awareness, knowledge and new (feminist) understanding of the relationships between the sexes in society, with special concentration on the position of women; and, insofar as we find the situation in our own society to be unsatisfactory, to seek ways to change it. (Barker, 1973, p. 1).

³Margherita Rendel has, however, claimed that the MA in Human Rights at the Institute of Education was the first Women's Studies degree programme in the UK: she published a 'triumphant' account of its development in an article provocatively titled 'The First MA in Women's Studies in Britain' (Rendel, 1978). Her claim is not acknowledged in the wider women's studies literature, and the Kent course is generally accepted as the first. After the Kent course began, other postgraduate degrees in women's studies were established at the University of Bradford in 1982, and Sheffield Polytechnic in 1983. Undergraduate programmes developed from 1986 in a few polytechnics, although the Open University began running its course 'The Changing Experience of Women' from 1983 as a half-unit undergraduate option for students from any faculty (Klein, 1983, p. 256).

Another early definition from Oonagh Hartnett argues that 'one of the aims of Women's Studies is to increase the visibility of women and to help them create and define their own reality' (Hartnett, 1974, p. 10). From the beginning, therefore, women's studies courses had an agenda which emphasised change.

The development of women's studies in the UK was influenced by the growing literature on women's studies in the US. This project has been designed to explore particular issues raised by the women's studies literature:

1. Women's studies has often been described as the 'academic arm of the women's liberation movement'. To what extent, and in what ways, has the development of women's studies in the UK been influenced by the women's movement of the 1970s?
2. One of the aims of the women's studies literature has been to promote women's studies as a new discipline (Klein, 1981), or new paradigm (Spender, 1978). What is the extent to which this has been realised in practice?
3. A main goal of women's studies has been to 'transform the academy' (Lees, 1991). What is the extent to which this has been realised in practice?
4. The women's studies literature has argued that women's studies should be an interdisciplinary subject area. How successful has this been in practice, and how has it related to other interdisciplinary developments?
5. Another characteristic of the women's studies literature has been the focus on feminist pedagogies. How have feminist academics in the UK developed feminist pedagogic strategies and how do these relate to other types of critical or radical pedagogies?

6. The women's studies literature has tended to gloss over issues of assessment. Why has this issue been avoided, and what are the implications?

The literature which has promoted the development of women's studies as a discipline has contributed to a culture which is marked by tensions and contradictions, and has been limited in its exploration of the wider higher education context. This culture is characterised by the 'great patriarchal metanarrative' (Luke & Gore, 1992), which locates women's studies as a feminist project in opposition to the masculine and androcentric culture of higher education. Furthermore, Gabriele Griffin has recently suggested that feminist academics have had a tendency to produce 'triumphant narratives' about the development of women's studies, which she perceives to be a defensive strategy in response to resistance to feminist interventions into higher education (Griffin, 1997). This thesis will critically analyse these 'triumphant', celebratory articles, and other tendencies in the women's studies literature which have portrayed feminist interventions into higher education as a challenge to the 'patriarchal' nature of the academy.

1.3 The Women's Studies Movement in the UK

The establishment of new feminist journals developed the Anglo-American connection which has been influential to women's studies in the UK. *Women's Studies International Quarterly* (later *Forum*) was the premiere women's studies journal which began publishing in 1978. Although it was British-based, many articles published in it throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s were about women's studies in the US (Freeman & Jones, 1980; Howe, 1981; Howe, 1982; Stafford, 1978; Thorne, 1978; Tobias, 1978)⁴. Dale Spender made a more direct link by comparing her experiences of both US and UK women's studies (Spender, 1978). A separate

⁴ Also appearing in 1978 were the British feminist journals *m/f* and *Feminist Review*, both of which were initially criticised for using inaccessible language and 'mystifying jargon' (see papers from the 1979 WRRC Feminist Summer School, Bradford).

journal published in New York, *Women's Studies Quarterly* also developed Anglo-American connections through the women's studies literature throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Another influential promoter of women's studies was Renate Klein, a biologist by training, but who went on to conduct research on women's studies in the US and the UK in the early 1980s, and published articles promoting women's studies as a discipline (Klein, 1981; Klein, 1984).

The literature began to generate a notion of women's studies as not only having particular aims and pedagogies, but was also making claims for the radical potential of the subject. As early as 1978, Sheila Tobias was arguing in the US that women's studies should challenge the androcentric bias of traditional disciplines as well as raise the consciousness of its students (Tobias, 1978). By 1982, a US women's studies practitioner was able to proclaim that 'What we (feminists) are doing is comparable to Copernicus shattering our geo-centrism, Darwin shattering our species-centrism. We are shattering andro-centrism, and the change is as fundamental, as dangerous and as exciting' (quoted in Klein, 1984, p. 9).

In the early 1980s several anthologies about feminist pedagogy and women's studies were published in the US which were also influential in the UK (Bowles & Duelli Klein, 1983; Bunch & Pollack, 1983; Culley & Portuges, 1985). A special issue of *Women's Studies International Forum* (1983) included several articles by UK academics and students on the first women's studies courses in the UK (Cholmeley, 1983; Evans, 1983; France, 1983; Hey, 1983), which argued in favour of the development of women's studies. As Hey suggested, 'I think it high time that the gains and achievements of the "institutionalization" of women's studies were acknowledged' (Hey, 1983, p. 300).

The published articles defending the development of women's studies have contributed to what I will call the women's studies 'movement': the purpose of which

is to promote and establish women's studies as a new discipline in the higher education system, often borrowing ideas about pedagogy, aims, and curriculum materials from the US. Identifying these published accounts as part of the women's studies 'movement' is an attempt to convey the narcissistic tendency in the promotion of women's studies as a discipline (in other words, more concerned with its own reproduction than applications outside it). The women's studies literature and other aspects of the women's studies movement are attempts to raise the visibility of women's studies and more firmly establish its boundaries within the higher education system.

One of the most significant challenges of this research has been to identify boundaries around women's studies, even though (and because), a characteristic of women's studies as a subject area in the UK, which contributes to its fragility, is that it has always been a highly divergent field. As Broughton suggests:

Historically, university women's studies in Britain has been the result of a felicitous, but essentially sporadic and *ad hoc*, series of encounters between academic women from various disciplines and various political outlooks, all interested in gender, or 'women', or sexuality, or feminism, or sexism, or equal opportunities, or oppression, or some aspect of culture's dealings with one of the above, and all looking for a legitimate context in which their concerns might be shared, supported, and developed. (Broughton, 1993, p. 73).

An example from one of the case studies illustrates the permeability of the boundaries around women's studies. Sussex University offered an MA in Women in Education for ten years, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven. This course was listed as a women's studies course in an article about women's studies in Europe (Zmrczek and Duchen 1991), but one of the women who designed the course was

reluctant to describe it in this way during her interview with me. She was also reluctant to identify her own interests with women's studies, and instead emphasised her disciplinary background. Christine Zmroczek and Claire Duchen, on the other hand, have been active within the women's studies community and were probably attempting to identify as many of the (relatively few) feminist interventions into the higher education curriculum that they could in an EU funded round up. Yet these ambiguities create difficulties in establishing the boundaries around the subject area and those associated with it. In fact, the title of their article is perhaps more appropriate than the authors realised: 'What are these women up to?' (Zmroczek and Duchen 1991). In other words, how can feminist academics, feminist knowledge and women's studies be identified and how should they be defined?

Whether or not a feminist course is a women's studies course is based on more than the course title alone. In terms of content, it is rather too simplistic (and could be misleading at times) to suggest that if the subject of the course is women, it is a women's studies course. In terms of processes, there have been a broad range of curriculum innovations which do not bear the title Women's Studies but which have a feminist perspective⁵ (for example, courses in cultural studies are often taught by feminist academics employing feminist pedagogical strategies). There are also difficulties with identifying what exactly is a feminist perspective, as the LSE case study will illustrate with relation to the Sociology of Sex and Gender Roles course (and it may be the case that some more recent women's studies and new gender studies courses are no longer particularly feminist). It may also be that there is a difference between the 'curriculum-as-delivered' and the 'curriculum-as-experienced'. The lecturer may have attempted to base the aims and teaching methods of the course

⁵The term 'feminist' can mean different things to different people, and I do not wish to imply that there is one 'feminist' perspective. There have been debates about the 'exclusionary politics' of assuming that both 'feminism' and 'women' are unifying categories (see, for example, Carby, 1982; (charles), 1992; hooks, 1984), which are ongoing and will be touched on throughout the thesis. The term 'feminism', as it refers to the recognition of inequalities based on gender differences, still has a great deal of potency within the context of this society, and particularly within higher education.

on feminist principles, but the students may be ambivalent, hostile, or even misinterpret these efforts.

These ambiguities necessitate a definition of women's studies and feminist knowledge which will inform the remainder of the thesis. Joanna de Groot and Mary Maynard (1993) provide a framework for understanding the processes of feminist knowledge production. They suggest that feminist knowledge was first of all a recuperative action: it aimed to challenge the silencing, stereotyping, marginalisation, and misrepresentation of women which was prevalent in academic knowledge. Secondly, it was reconstructive: feminist scholarship attempted to review and revise the methods and content of the established disciplines. Thirdly, it has been reflexive: questioning the differences between women, and particularly the white, Western, and heterosexual biases of both feminist scholarship and the women's movement. These three projects - recuperation, reconstruction and reflection - have had an uneven impact on academic knowledge and research and are still ongoing.

Raising the visibility of women in the academy, understanding women's experiences, attempting to not only alter the focus of research and scholarship but also to fundamentally reconstruct the foundations of the established disciplines, were projects that could be identified to varying degrees across the case study institutions. What is the relationship between these projects, women's studies courses and feminist courses?

Throughout the thesis the terms feminist knowledge and women's studies will be used, but these are not interchangeable terms. In using the term women's studies, I am describing a multi-disciplinary subject area and the courses which have used the term as their designated title. It perhaps most closely resembles, in the UK context, cultural studies and ethnic studies in terms of its development, orientation and status in the higher education curriculum. These subjects have usefully been described as

'domains of knowledge' by Trowler: areas of study 'oriented around a particular subject matter' which draw from a 'number of disciplines in the attempt to better understand it' (Trowler, 1998, p. 166). I prefer to use the terms 'subject' and 'subject areas' instead of 'domains of knowledge'.

Although I initially presumed that I would identify women's studies courses and feminist courses according to my respondents' own perspectives, I gradually realised that I sometimes had a different perspective of these courses from my respondents (similar to the problem noted in Zmroczek and Duchen above). Yet it was also clear that the respondents often spoke about women's studies as though it is a more convergent field than I have suggested: in other words, we often used the term women's studies during the interviews as though there is a consensus as to what we were referring. There have been developments which have helped establish the field and make it a recognisable subject area.

From 1980 to the present day, it became possible to take women's studies (and related) courses at approximately 100 higher education institutions in the UK. There are now five Professors of Women's Studies in the UK, a national network with over 400 members called the Women's Studies Network (UK) Association (or WSN for short), and there are a few graduates who obtain lecturing appointments in women's studies. There are textbooks written by UK academics designed specifically for women's studies students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels (e.g. Richardson & Robinson, 1993; Madoc-Jones & Coates, 1996) and readers in feminist knowledge (Evans, 1994; Humm, 1992; Jackson et al, 1993; Mirza, 1997) which suggest that a common curriculum is developing.

However, the qualifications to these achievements are quite substantial. The professorships are personal chairs rather than established posts, indicating a lack of commitment from the universities to ensure the continuation of women's studies, and

several personal chairs who could have chosen the title women's studies have not done so. Similarly, there are very few full-time lecturing posts in women's studies, and concerns that vacated posts are not being renewed (Madoc-Jones & Coates, 1996). The WSN, which was formed in 1987 by a number of feminist academics working in the area of women's studies, has suffered an almost unbelievable number of difficulties over the years and has on more than one occasion been perilously close to folding⁶. An attempt in 1996 to include women's studies in the Research Assessment Exercise as a sub-panel within Sociology was unsuccessful (Davies, Evans, & Humm, 1997). There have been recent concerns that student numbers are falling (Griffin, 1998; Jackson, 1999), and concerns that 'Women's Studies' is less often used as the title of degrees. One of the first Women's Studies undergraduate degree programmes, at the University of East London, has recently changed its title to 'Gender and Women's Studies'. Finally, it has become increasingly apparent that publishers are no longer producing 'Women's Studies' lists, and although feminist publications have proliferated over the past few decades, these are produced under other titles in cultural studies, or sociology, or the increasingly popular area of 'Gender Studies' (Evans, 1991).

The divergency and variety of projects associated with women's studies can be traced from the 1970s, when courses outside of the university sector in adult education, and the WEA in particular,⁷ were popular with feminists interested in the women's movement. There have also been important areas of feminist knowledge production which have not been part of the women's studies movement, as they have not had the aim of promoting women's studies as an autonomous subject area. For instance, feminist research in history, and feminist research in education, have both had varying degrees of impact on their respective fields and on women's studies programmes.

⁶As a member of the Executive Committee (1994-1997) and the Honorary Secretary (1995-1997) of the WSN, I have knowledge of some of these events from first-hand experience. In this thesis I sometimes refer to the 'women's studies community', and anecdotes told to me by members of this community: these are usually references to my experiences in the WSN.

⁷See, for example, Kennedy (1991) and Thompson (1983).

June Purvis, in women's history, has contributed to the women's studies movement through her involvement in the WSN and through publications in the women's studies literature. Similarly, Rosemary Deem, Pat Mahony, Madeleine Arnot and Diana Leonard have all developed feminist knowledge in the sociology of education but have also contributed to the women's studies movement through teaching on women's studies courses or publishing articles about women's studies. Are these feminist academics women's studies practitioners, or feminist historians and feminist sociologists? The divergence indicated through these cross-disciplinary links is a significant characteristic of the women's studies culture and will be further explored through the types of feminist academics described in Chapter Four.

To return to the question of how to identify women's studies, and what this term will refer to in the thesis, the fragility of women's studies is a significant factor. The term women's studies, as it will be used throughout the thesis, will refer to those aspects of scholarly output which strengthen the boundaries around the subject area. The choice of some academics to identify their research and teaching in women's studies, to publish in certain feminist journals, to use specific women's studies textbooks, and so on, are actions which make the subject area of women's studies more visible and identifiable (and are sometimes an attempt to promote women's studies as a discipline). The aim of raising the visibility of women's studies is to what the women's studies 'movement' refers.

Although this may seem to be a tautological argument (if it is women's studies, it is women's studies), one of the main goals of the women's studies movement has been to make women's studies a recognisable subject area, and by implication, to raise the visibility of women in the academy, not to lose it within mainstream disciplines. Similarly, ethnic and race studies have attempted to raise awareness of black and ethnic minority groups in higher education. Not all feminist research and teaching has been part of the women's studies movement. In order to distinguish these from the

women's studies movement, I have chosen to describe them as either feminist knowledge or feminist courses if they relate in some way to what de Groot and Maynard have described as feminist projects, i.e. recuperative, reconstructive or reflexive projects which take the marginalisation of women as their starting point.

This method of identifying those projects which have been a part of the women's studies movement helps to clarify some of the ambiguities in this research. The MA in Women in Education mentioned above, for example, will be described as a feminist course because the course leader was able to explain (as will be discussed in Chapter Seven) the recuperative and reconstructive projects the course was designed to fulfil, but not a women's studies course as raising the visibility of women's studies as a subject area was not a motivation behind the establishment of the course. Zmroczeck and Duchen's article is a contribution to the women's studies literature, and is part of the women's studies movement, as they are clearly attempting to make women's studies more visible. The fact that they cite the MA in Women in Education in their list of women's studies courses does not make that course a women's studies course for my purposes.

The use of the term women's studies movement, and the types of feminist academics and courses proposed later in the thesis, have all developed from an analysis of the data and my previous experiences of women's studies. Some of the ambiguities can be illustrated by my academic background. I hold a BSc degree in Radio, Television and Film from Northwestern University in the US, but I wrote many essays from a feminist perspective and took a few modules from the Women's Studies degree programme as electives. I also hold an MA in Gender and Society from Middlesex University in the UK, but I describe this as a women's studies course if I am speaking to women's studies practitioners, or a sociology course if I am describing it to non-feminists⁸. This PhD was registered in Education rather than Women's Studies, as it

⁸I have many times stopped a conversation by telling a new acquaintance (male or female) that I am studying women's studies. Reactions range from awkwardness to hostility, which other students of

is not possible to register for a PhD in Women's Studies at the Institute of Education. One of the most difficult questions many of my informants in this research asked me was what subject I had studied, and the answer could be any combination of 'women's studies', 'media studies', 'education', 'sociology', or I could describe myself as a 'hybrid'. The answer depended on who the questioner was: I choose to identify my academic interests with women's studies according to the context and whether I feel it is necessary or desirable to make the subject visible.

Similarly, feminist academics can choose to identify their scholarship with women's studies whether or not they have a lecturing post in women's studies (and they usually do not). As Judith Allen argues, women's studies is different from the established disciplines because women may choose an association with women's studies as a form of feminist support and identity (Allen, 1997, p. 368). This choice often reflects more of a political investment rather than the reality of course titles and lecturing posts within the educational system. As will be discussed in later chapters, course titles are often a compromise or are a particular, political choice. Some feminist academics have specifically chosen not to call their courses women's studies courses, and have opted for titles which do not have the political connotations that women's studies signifies. In spite of (or perhaps because of) the diversity of feminist courses, the women's studies movement has promoted the development of women's studies as a recognisable, visible subject area in its own right.

1.4 Tendencies in the Women's Studies Movement Literature

The women's studies movement started this decade on a positive note: the 1991 volume of conference papers (the first volume the WSN published, following the 1990 annual conference) was optimistically titled *Out of the Margins* (Aaron & Walby,

women's studies also report (Griffin, 1994). People can become very defensive when the topic of feminism is raised, and students new to women's studies are often not prepared for this. Women's studies lecturers should be sensitive to the fact that their students may be coping with a changing perception of their identities and relationships with family and friends outside of the classroom (see Griffin, 1994 for a full discussion, and Jackson (1998) explores this in relation to working-class students in particular).

1991) A number of the early pioneers of women's studies in the UK contributed articles to this collection which described the successes of women's studies (Lees, Hanmer, Humm, Lubelska, Evans), portraying the development of the field, as in the title of Sue Lees' article, 'struggle, not incorporation'. Shortly afterwards, a different story began to emerge. Adkins and Leonard (1992), in their article 'From Academia to the Education Marketplace: United Kingdom Women's Studies in the 1990s', were less sanguine. Their perception of the current state of women's studies was much more about exploitation and restrictions than struggle, a view which was later explored through Bev Skeggs' (1995) article 'Women's Studies in Britain in the 1990s: Entitlement Cultures and Institutional Constraints'. Skeggs' article touched a nerve: it is often cited as proof of the institutional fragility of women's studies and feminist academics, and stands in stark contrast to the triumphalist narratives of 1991. The precarious state of women's studies is now so ingrained in the literature that even the textbooks present a view of the field as fragile (Madoc-Jones & Coates, 1996).

Yet this fragility is offset by the celebratory nature of much of the literature. There are several characteristics of the women's studies movement literature in the UK which will be introduced here and further explored throughout the thesis. Firstly, as mentioned above, the women's studies literature has tended to produce 'triumphant narratives' about its development (Griffin 1998). These articles usually begin with an account of the successes of women's studies: the number of courses, the extent of feminist scholarship, or the rapid increase of students during the 1980s. Griffin argues that this has been a defensive strategy, as women's studies is often derided by the wider academic community. Yet on the whole, the wider academic community has tended to ignore the development of women's studies. In fact, most of the criticisms of women's studies which have ended up in print have come from other feminists⁹.

⁹This is especially true in the US, where 'women's studies bashing' has found an audience (Allen, 1997, p. 359). These books are written by women who present themselves as former lecturers in women's studies who are disillusioned with the field, for instance Patai and Koertge's Professing Feminism: Cautionary Tales from the Strange World of Women's Studies. (New York: Basic Books, 1994)..

The triumphalist narratives have masked a great deal of tension between academics, and they have contributed to the perspective that women's studies is fragile because it is resisted by the 'patriarchal' institutions in which it is located.

Relatedly, there has been a parochial tendency which emphasises the micro-structural levels of women's studies, such as explorations of particular classroom experiences and theories about feminist pedagogies (for example, Evans, 1983; Humm, 1991; Humm, 1992; Hurstfield & Phillips, 1983; Kirkham & Taylor, 1983). These types of articles are often decontextualised: whilst the institution may be named there is little attempt to explore the implications of their particular location. Feminist pedagogies have become the privileged site of analysis within the women's studies literature, at the expense of other potential areas such as curriculum or assessment. Jennifer Gore argues that women's studies practitioners have focused too narrowly on teaching strategies within particular classrooms, and the women's studies literature has tended to have a limited perspective on the wider higher education context (Gore, 1993, p. 86). For instance, the classroom which Maggie Humm describes (in a former polytechnic in East London) will be significantly different from the classroom which Mary Evans describes (at the prosperous 1960s campus of the University of Kent at Canterbury), perhaps most importantly in the types of students recruited on to the courses.

Renate Klein makes this tendency to decontextualise more explicit when she argues that to be concerned with specific academic cultures is to miss the point of women's studies. She states that:

. . . the way a particular university structure helps or hinders the development of Women's Studies. . . these are not the main questions that concern me. . . such a research approach - however necessary - is, by definition of a

reactionary type: it assesses Women's Studies in relation to the obstacles created by male-dominated higher education. (Klein, 1986, p. 6)

Yet the women's studies classroom does not exist independently of the institution and wider educational context in which it has gained space. To claim that the classroom can be assessed in its own right creates a false assumption about the monolithic nature of the higher education system, and loses insights about how women's studies could transform that system. In some senses, the arguments to be made throughout this thesis are the antithesis of Klein's proposal: whilst she has portrayed women's studies as somehow existing outside of the dominant higher education culture, I am attempting to situate women's studies firmly within that culture. Her arguments have, however, been taken up to a great extent in the women's studies movement literature in the UK.

There is therefore a final and related tendency in some of the literature to be highly self-referential. These authors perhaps agree with Klein's suggestion that women's studies should be evaluated 'on its own terms and not against those dimensions it expressly rejects and defies: that is, heterorelational paradigms established in conventional androcentric disciplines' (Klein, 1986, p. 9). The self-referential nature of this literature arises from a tendency for the authors to cite each other's work, and is a practice which contributes to the overall narcissism of the women's studies movement. For instance, in *Out of the Margins*, there are seven chapters about women's studies in higher education in the UK by women who teach women's studies (Zmroczeck & Duchen, 1991; Lubelska, 1991; Humm, 1991; Evans, 1991; Klein, 1991; Lees, 1991; Hanmer, 1991). Only one of these chapters (Humm, 1991) is informed partially by educational theories (Bourdieu, Bernstein and Friere); and all are noted for their references to mainly feminist texts, women's studies texts from the US and to each other's previously published work.

These tendencies create an overall impression of an autonomous (and even oppositional) culture which positions women's studies and feminist knowledge as self-contained a challenge to academia. These authors attribute the resistance to women's studies as an outcome of the 'androcentric' nature of the higher education system. They have constructed what Luke and Gore suggest (1992) is a perspective based upon the 'great patriarchal metanarrative' of the higher education system (the quote marks are intended to convey a sense that this term exaggerates the case, although it points at an element of truth). In other words, the women's studies literature has privileged gender inequalities over other types of inequalities. The result is that these authors have produced an overdetermined interpretation of both the challenge from and resistance to women's studies: it is challenging because it is a feminist intervention into the academy, and it is resisted because it is a feminist intervention into the academy. This is to ignore the challenge from and resistance to, as other examples, critical and radical pedagogies, other interdisciplinary fields, and subject areas based on experiences of 'minority' groups in higher education (black studies and working class studies) and other 'knowledge domains' (cultural studies, media studies, peace studies, trade union studies). It also homogenises women's studies, creating a culture in which all women's studies courses must be defended from potential criticism, even if they might not necessarily deserve that defence. Perhaps most importantly, however, it is also to ignore those instances in women's studies where power relations are reproduced rather than challenged.

The women's studies literature has established certain boundaries around the subject area, yet a central concern of this thesis will be to illustrate how these boundaries are fragile and have been constantly contested. This fragility has been a significant characteristic of the culture of women's studies, and it seems to have been generally accepted that fragility is an outcome of a direct resistance to women's studies (or even an anti-feminism within higher education). The thesis will attempt to construct a more complex understanding of how the wider higher education context, specific

institutional cultures, the political context, and the variety of women's academic and activist experiences and perspectives are enmeshed in complicated ways. The low status and precarious position of women's studies is not simply, as I initially thought, an indication of anti-feminism in the academy. Although there is certainly enough evidence of the masculine, or phallocentric, culture of higher education, the 'great patriarchal metanarrative' alone does not explain the fragility of women's studies.

1.5 Theoretical Framework of the Research

An analysis which starts from the assumption that women's studies may have a particular culture locates the theoretical framework of this research within other studies of higher education. Sociological and anthropological studies of disciplinary cultures have become fashionable in recent years (for an overview see Huber, 1990). Women's studies may be, especially in the UK, an academic subject area rather than an established discipline, but the use of the term culture is productive in conveying the notion that there is a general consensus about the values, aims and methods of women's studies amongst its practitioners. As Huber has argued, 'culture' is a concept

sufficiently wide and complex to cover all the relevant traits from everyday life to cognitive and social structures in the disciplines, and it is almost 'naturally' linked to a concept of socialisation as the development of basic dispositions to act which are specific for a given group, produced in and reproducing its culture (Huber, 1990, p. 241).

Although the feminist academics who developed women's studies have been implicitly concerned with the higher education culture, there has been relatively little cross-fertilisation between the women's studies literature in the UK and sociological theories of education. Two recent studies have made fruitful connections in this respect. Ann Brooks (1997) has studied feminist academics in the UK and New Zealand through a

Foucauldian framework, and uses discourse theory to analyse the positioning of women in academia. She explains that 'the term "discourse", as used within feminist poststructuralist analysis, facilitates an understanding of the different responses of the academy in both challenging, resisting and, in some cases, accepting the sexism of the academy' (Brooks, 1997, p. 5). Louise Morley (1998) has drawn from Stephen Ball's work on micropolitics to analyse the culture of higher education through interviews with women's studies lecturers and feminist academics in the UK, Sweden and Greece. Her concern is not so much the way power is possessed as how it is expressed, and she focuses on the subtle nature of sexist and racist practices in higher education. As she argues, 'In a postmodern world, power is used and structured into social relations so that it does not appear to be used at all' (Morley, 1997, p. 10). It is clear, then, that both writers have combined a feminist postmodernist or poststructuralist framework with contemporary educational theory to construct a framework for analysing (gendered) power relations in higher education.

Another feminist theorist who engages with education theory is, as mentioned above, Jennifer Gore (1993). She also adopts a Foucauldian framework for analysing feminist pedagogies as 'regimes of truth'. Her work has influenced the approach to be taken here, and will inform in particular the analysis of feminist pedagogies in Chapter Nine. Her criticism that feminist pedagogical theory has been unreflexive is one with which I would concur. She has shown how feminist pedagogues have blamed 'patriarchy' for educational practices which are oppressive, and has argued that this has led to a limited analysis. Yet, somewhat paradoxically, she does not follow her own advice for finding a more fruitful theoretical framework. She states that 'the authority exercised by teachers over students might not be located solely in some external power relations such as "patriarchy" or "feminism", but also in the "pedagogical device" (Bernstein, 1990) itself. An exploration of the pedagogical device would, she argues, lead to more reflexive theories which encompass what she sees as the main purposes of feminist pedagogies: social vision and educational

instruction. Yet her analysis does not engage with the pedagogical device as developed by Bernstein. She instead uses Foucault's notion of 'regimes of truth' to focus on oppressive discourses, which is more consistent with her poststructuralist critique.

This research starts from the assumption that knowledge production is socially mediated, and as such it is possible to examine the 'culture' of the disciplines as they have been produced and reproduced by social actors in higher education. The idea that disciplinary groupings have their own cultures suggests that the culture is reproduced through socialisation into the shared practices and values of the group. Successful students must learn not just the theoretical and practical knowledge of the discipline, but also the social rules and cultural values of that discipline, what Gerholm has called 'tacit knowledge' (Gerholm, 1990, p. 263). There are two main types of studies of disciplinary cultures which can be loosely identified as descriptive studies and critical studies. In descriptive accounts of academic cultures, the different academic practices (lecturer's attitudes towards teaching, relationships between academics and students, collaborative research, the use of citations and so on) are shown to vary between subjects. In more critical studies, a focus on the shared political and cultural values of the members of the disciplines describe how these vary unequally between disciplines, and are also reproduced through socialisation processes for new members to the group.

Becher's *Academic Tribes and Territories* (1989) is the most substantive, descriptive study of academic cultures in higher education. The main purpose of his book is not to be critical of the inequalities perpetuated through social reproduction, but to reveal how different academic communities mark out their territories and find collective identities. He describes the formation of academic subject areas through a sociological perspective, drawing from a wide range of literature mainly from the sociology of knowledge. Although he is not concerned with a gendered analysis of subject areas,

his work is illuminating for women's studies in so far as it reveals how similar the development of women's studies in the UK has been to other new subject areas.

For instance, he describes the 'evolution' of subject areas in phases which closely follow the development of women's studies (Becher, 1989, p. 68). The first phase is a 'disorganised, spontaneous growth of interest in a new development', around which networks begin to coalesce. Secondly, a more systematic structure of communication, recruitment and training develops and external boundaries are staked out. Thirdly, the subject area becomes institutionalised and routine. Even the brief summary of the development of women's studies in the UK provided above illustrates some of the similarities of women's studies to Becher's evolutionary phases.

Another aspect of Becher's work which is useful for women's studies is his development of Kolb's knowledge domains of hard/soft and pure/applied. These domains form a basic framework for illuminating disciplinary differences and hierarchies of subjects. Within the four knowledge domains as he defines them, women's studies would be categorised as a 'soft-pure' subject area, which is the domain of the humanities and social sciences. The characteristics of this knowledge domain are that it is interpretive and reflective, personal and value-laden, with weak borders and a diversity of criteria. It also has low status as a 'divergent' subject area: the wider academic community values convergent knowledge domains which have strong boundaries. Again, these characteristics would be familiar to anyone who has taught or studied women's studies, suggesting that the field is not as unique as some authors have claimed.

The question as to what extent disciplinary cultures are social products has stimulated an interesting debate (Huber 1990; Becher 1990; Evans 1990). Trowler (1998) presents an overview of this debate in his argument against an 'epistemological essentialism': the notion that disciplines have certain *implicit* characteristics which

determine their academic cultures. He puts forward the idea, based on Evans' research (1990), that members of different academic cultures are 'in a kind of dialogue with a hypothetical world of coherent, bounded entities, placing themselves in a relationship of perceived consonance or dissonance with them' (Trowler, 1998, p. 64). From this perspective, he suggests, Becher's 'tribes' are important in a 'virtual' sense. This 'virtuality' resonates with the data in this study, as the ways in which the informants discussed their perspectives seemed at times to suggest a 'virtual world of women's studies' with which they either defended or criticised. The characteristics of this 'virtual culture' will be described in more detail throughout the following chapters. Trowler suggests that whether or not these cultures are real or imagined does not matter as much as the fact that they are important to academics and influence their perspectives.

The study of academic cultures, however, can be motivated by more than an anthropological curiousness, an attempt to 'make the familiar strange' (Hammersley, 1984; Delamont, 1996), but also by a concern to understand academic (particularly élite) reproduction. Although this is not the primary motivation for Becher, other researchers certainly are influenced by a concern over the exclusivity of the higher education system. Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, and the four realms of economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital, offer the means of exploring how status and power are acquired and maintained.

Bourdieu's *Homo Academicus* (1984), a study of French academics, is an important part of his work over three decades in which he developed the influential concepts of cultural capital and *habitus*. His work has been adopted by a few feminist academics: Delamont (1989b) uses *habitus* in a study of women scientists, and again in a study of postgraduate science students and their supervisors (1998); Heward *et al* (1995) also adopt the concept in their research on professors in Law and Biology; and Reay (1998) discusses the higher education *habitus* and the difficulties for working class

women to assimilate into that culture. Huber (1990) applies the four realms of capital to German academics and asks whether new members to disciplinary cultures are selected or are self-selecting. He argues, through a review of both critical and descriptive studies of academic cultures, that the external factors relating to students' choice of discipline are much stronger than is implied through descriptive studies. Descriptive studies tend to emphasise the internal characteristics of the discipline and give the impression that academic cultures are created within academia, whereas Huber finds that the socio-economic background of students is an indication of which subjects they might be likely to select. Underlying this rather crude simplification of his argument are several important issues which have relevance to women and feminist interventions in higher education.

The first issue is that of gatekeeping. Heward *et al* (1995) explore promotion procedures in higher education, and use the concept of *habitus* to explain the slow promotion rates of women and ethnic minorities in higher education. They describe a phenomenon that has been a trend for decades in a higher education system based on élitist principles. The study of academic cultures can be a study of exclusion as much as inclusion, even though those who are excluded are the 'missing voices' of much of the research.

The second, and related issue, is that of segregation. In so far as studies of academic cultures or disciplinary communities are concerned with inequality, however obliquely, they can reveal how 'tribes' can sometimes best be described by their differences from each other. Kim Thomas (1990), for example, has studied subject choice in higher education in relation to gender. She illuminates the gendered nature of academic disciplines (an analysis which is sorely lacking in Becher's study), and through this perspective it is not difficult to understand why certain students select certain subjects.

The study of academic cultures, then, can be more than a navel-gazing exercise leading to clever insider jokes about disparate groups united by common grievances over car parking (a joke first made by Clark Kerr and often repeated (Squires, 1987)). In so far as these studies are concerned with the reproduction of social inequalities, no matter how tenuously, they can have relevance for feminist theorists. Although both Foucault's and Bourdieu's theories have been used to bridge a gap between feminist theories and the sociology of higher education, the analytic framework proposed in this study will draw primarily from Bernstein. The reasons why are answered partly by Bernstein himself: 'It is often considered that the voice of the working-class is absent from the pedagogic discourse, but we shall argue here that what is absent from pedagogic discourse is its own voice' (Bernstein, 1990, p. 165). In other words, what Bourdieu identifies are the boundaries which lead to social exclusion, but what he overlooks are the underlying principles supporting different forms of exclusion. Bourdieu's theories are more concerned with the messages of the dominant group, and how power relations are carried by the system, but not with how these messages are constructed (Bernstein, 1990). Bernstein's theories of the pedagogic discourse and educational knowledge codes will be used throughout the analysis of the data, and his three 'message systems' are the focus of Chapters Nine, Ten and Eleven (curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation).

The relevance of Bernstein to feminist theories of education, partly acknowledged by Gore, is his analysis of power. He argues that 'between power and knowledge and knowledge and forms of consciousness is always the pedagogic device' (Bernstein, 1986, p. 208). He differentiates between the pedagogic discourse and the pedagogic device: the pedagogic device provides the intrinsic grammar of the pedagogic discourse (Bernstein, 1990, p. 180). The pedagogic device is made up of three inter-related rules: distributive rules, recontextualising rules, and evaluative rules (Bernstein, 1996, p. 117). The pedagogic discourse is described as a rule which embeds two discourses: the instructional discourse and the regulative discourse. The

instructional discourse 'creates specialised skills' and is concerned with academic competencies and contents, while the regulative discourse is a 'moral discourse' which 'creates order, relations, and identity' (Bernstein, 1996). The regulative discourse gives rise to the character, conduct and manner of social actors within particular contexts, and it is more fundamental than the instructional discourse. The pedagogic discourse is the principle through which an 'actual' discourse is transformed into an 'imaginary' discourse: for example, Bernstein notes that at home he practised carpentry, while at school he studied 'woodwork'. These rules and principles which support the pedagogic discourse are a fundamental aspect of power in higher education. As Edwards explains, the relationship between transmitters and acquirers of knowledge is 'essentially and intrinsically assymetrical' because the transmitter has the power to determine what is learned (Edwards, 1995, p. 104).

Ivor Goodson, who writes extensively on the curriculum, remembers how his discovery of Bernstein's theories enabled him to understand how power is inherent in the education system. He writes: 'To experience what 'could be' in terms of social science scholarship was also then to learn what was 'not allowed to be'. To learn what 'could be' in terms of pedagogic discourse and relationships was to be shown with unforgettable clarity how curriculum, culture, and class were irrevocably enmeshed' (Goodson, 1995, p. 124). Therefore, the selection, recontextualisation, and evaluation of knowledge are exercises of power. As Goodson implies, it is the control over 'what is thinkable' and 'who can think it' which forms the basis of power relations in the academy. This seems to offer a solid foundation for a feminist analysis.

It must be acknowledged that Bernstein has not shown much interest in gendered aspects of power. He has devoted most of his theories to an analysis of inequalities through social class, but they could equally be applied to a gendered analysis of power. Two of the few feminist theorists who have used Bernstein's theories of the

pedagogic discourse are Anne Diamond (1991) and Parlo Singh (1993)¹⁰. To summarise, Diamond argues that gender relations are integral to the regulative discourses of education, and so the instructional discourse reflects the gendered organisation of the academy. The regulative discourses of the academy reflect power and authority relations in which there are strong boundaries around notions of masculinity and femininity. She also adopts Bernstein's educational knowledge codes to explain the classification and framing of masculinities and femininities in schools. Singh similarly analyses the dominance of masculine discourses in education, and in particular the marginalisation of girls within these discourses.

The theoretical framework for this research will not be concerned as much with the strength of the classification of masculine and feminine discourses in higher education. The women's studies literature has suggested that the dominant discourse of the academy is a masculine discourse, yet it will be argued that this is ultimately a limited analysis of the higher education system. The pedagogic discourse is constructed through exercises of power which are more complicated than the masculine/feminine dichotomy suggests. As mentioned above, the 'great patriarchal metanarrative' has concentrated on a gendered analysis of higher education, neglecting the ways in which inequalities are reproduced in relation to social class, race and sexualities. Felly Nkweto Simmonds poses an important challenge when she asks:

Who in reality has access to teaching Women's Studies in Britain today? How does this reflect what is taught, how it is taught, what books/theories are put forward, who is left out in both the teaching and learning? (Simmonds, 1991, p. 58).

¹⁰ Sue Middleton (1987), Sara Delamont (1989) and Madeleine Arnot (1995) have also been influenced by Bernstein. Arnot has been concerned with generally bridging the gap between Bernstein and feminist theories of education, whilst Delamont adopts his theories of classification and framing in her work on women scientists and girls' public schools. Middleton's analysis of women's studies using Bernstein's theories of educational knowledge codes will be discussed in later chapters.

This is a challenge rarely acknowledged in the women's studies literature. Deborah Steinberg partly provides the answer : 'The dominant constituency of Women's Studies reproduces dominant relations of inequality (mostly white, mostly middle-class)' (Steinberg, 1997, p. 203). It is against this background that the development of women's studies will be explored in the following chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

A STUDY OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FEMINIST AND WOMEN'S STUDIES COURSES

2.1 Introduction

This study aims to develop an understanding of how feminist and women's studies courses were established in higher education in England from 1970 to 1990, and to explore some of the factors which led to a variety of feminist curriculum innovations, and to some efforts to change the curriculum being resisted. The data used can be classified into four main types: primary sources gathered from archives and personal collections; secondary sources consisting of published accounts of this period in history; semi-structured interviews from four case study institutions; and personal correspondence with informants. In general this data was gathered in stages so that the first type of data informed the second and so on as the historical events were explored and uncovered. However, there was considerable overlap in the ways in which it was collected. The time spent on data collection (over four years) led to a process of feeding new information back into the research questions, and developing new hypotheses which could be incorporated into interviews and the analysis of historical documentation.

This type of simultaneous collection and analysis of data is common within qualitative research (Burgess, 1984; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983), and all the methods used in this study were broadly informed by the qualitative tradition of the social sciences. It was my intention from the outset that the research project would also be informed by feminist methodologies.

Not all feminists agree as to what constitutes a feminist approach to research, and there have been substantial critiques of some accounts of feminist methodology. However, as the data collection progressed, and especially as difficulties gaining access to interviews were encountered, my initial feminist approach became problematised in ways in which the literature did not seem to address. Before discussing the interviews and the difficulties in positioning this project within a feminist methodological framework, the following sections will describe the data collection.

2.2 Data Collection

2.2.1 Primary Sources

The first stage of data collection was carried out through reviewing feminist newsletters and publications from the Women's Liberation Movement published in the 1970s and early 1980s in order to understand the political context and references to women's studies during this time. These included, among others, *Women Speaking*, *Women's Report*, *Catcall Newsletter*, *The WEA Women's Studies Newsletter*, *WIRES*, and the *Revolutionary and Radical Feminist Newsletter*. They provided two main sources of data: course listings of the first feminist courses in higher education institutions and early articles about women's studies. Although a great deal of archival material was surveyed, the main sources of information about women in higher education were two newsletters: *The WRRN Newsletter*¹ and the *Women and Education Newsletter*.

The WRRN Newsletter was the most useful in providing dates and course titles of early feminist courses, as the editors set aside a space in the Newsletter for listings. The *Women and Education Newsletter* provided early articles about conferences and debates in which the practicalities of setting up women's studies courses were discussed. All

¹The Women's Research and Resources Centre was organised in 1975 by women involved in the BSA women's caucus (the caucus will be discussed in Chapter Three). It is now the Feminist Library in London. Eve Setch published a brief history of the WRRC/Feminist Library in the Feminist Library Newsletter, Summer 1998. She notes that by 1985 there were 1800 subscribers to the Newsletter, which was published by the collective who ran the library on a voluntary basis.

information gathered about early courses was put into a database, from which it was possible to easily extract information about the first types of courses offered: when they began, where they were offered, and what subjects they covered. The other newsletters were more oriented towards specific political groups and some of these carried debates about whether women's studies courses in higher education were worth establishing. These early articles indicated that the links between feminist activism and feminism in the academy were sites of contestation as much as co-operation.

The other main source of data came through conference papers in archives and personal papers of the informants. The Feminist Library in London was a useful source of papers which had been in circulation during the 1970s, which were mostly written by feminist political groups and presented to conferences (such as papers by the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group). Visits to the Fawcett Library in London and also the Feminist Archive at the University of Bradford provided other historical documents. Several informants provided copies of relevant articles, course listings, and other papers from their personal files. From these archival materials, it was possible to gain an understanding of the background and context of the time period, key informants were targeted, and questions were written for the interview schedules.

2.2.2 Secondary Sources

The secondary sources were marked by a move from the 'ephemeral' documents produced in the context of the women's movement into the more mainstream world of academic publishing. A useful source of information on the debates about the nature and purpose of women's studies were the new academic, feminist journals. The establishment of academic feminist journals was a significant turning point in the development of women's studies as an academic subject area. These journals included *Women's Studies Quarterly* (from 1981), *Women's Studies International Quarterly* (from 1978), and *Feminist Review* (from 1978). They provided an introduction to the early concerns of feminist academics at the time: what were the objectives of such

courses, who was involved, what difficulties were encountered, and was the course a success? As these courses were new to the UK, there was an effort by feminist academics to share resources. There are early journal articles which provide examples of a syllabus or reading list (e.g. Rendel, 1978; Spender, 1978; Edwards, 1978).

The secondary sources were also useful later as background material to the case studies. Some women academics in the selected case studies had published articles about their experiences (Evans, 1983; McLuskie, 1983; Lees, 1991) and so had a few students (Cholmeley, 1983; Hey, 1983; Maconachie, 1989). These articles were also used to inform the interview schedules. The published material available in journals provided data which could then be triangulated with the interview transcripts and historical documents.

2.2.3 Case Studies

The next stage of the research, after sufficient background material had been collected, was to select the case study institutions. As the development of feminist knowledge and women's studies in the UK has been a broad social movement, it was felt that case studies would bring detail and depth to the research. Reinhartz suggests that case studies offer multiple possibilities for exploring data:

Feminists write case studies for the same reasons that nonfeminist scholars write them - to illustrate an idea, to explain the process of development over time, to show the limits of generalizations, to explore uncharted issues by starting with a limited case, and to pose provocative questions (Reinhartz, 1992, p. 167).

One of the most important considerations when adopting a case study approach is the selection of the cases. The four case studies were not selected randomly but were chosen for specific reasons to do with prior knowledge of their histories. Practical

considerations, such as their location² and the likely number of potential interviewees, were also important deciding factors.

There were two main considerations in the selection of the case studies which were based on the initial research questions. Firstly, it was necessary to select universities from the different types of higher education institutions in the UK: an old university (the London School of Economics) two universities established in the 1960s (The University of Sussex and the University of Kent at Canterbury), and a former polytechnic (presently the University of North London). This consideration was based on an initial hypothesis that different types of higher education institutions would provide different contexts for the development of women's studies or feminist knowledge. Secondly, prior knowledge of the case studies was considered and it was decided that their specific histories would provide the types of data which might allow certain questions to be explored within the research. For instance, it was known that neither Sussex nor the LSE, though known as 'radical' institutions, were at the forefront of the development of women's studies degree programmes. One of the main research proposals was to focus on factors which led to the resistance of women's studies, so these were felt to provide suitable sites for explorations of these research questions. Similarly, as Kent offered the first MA degree programme in Women's Studies in England, it was thought useful to contrast it with another 1960s university, Sussex, which did not have an established women's studies programme. This contrast of similar institutions with different histories of feminist interventions in the curriculum was intended to explore the variety of factors which have influenced the development of women's studies courses. As no polytechnics had women's studies degree programmes in the early 1980s³, North London was selected because it was local, and

²Although this project was funded by an ESRC studentship, I had insufficient funds to enable a case study in the North of England, Scotland or Northern Ireland to be undertaken. Some of the informants were no longer employed at the case study institutions, and I travelled all over the country for interviews. However, most were still in the general area, and being in close proximity to the chosen case studies was important as academics are extremely pressed for time and often re-arranged appointments, gave me little time to prepare, or scheduled them for months later. I actually waited nearly a year for one interview.

³The Polytechnic of Central London, however, developed a Diploma in Women's Studies in 1977.

established a prominent Women's Studies half-degree programme in 1986. The particular histories of each institution are discussed in the main section on the case studies.

Various types of data were collected from the case studies. Historical documentation from the institutions was collected where available. The LSE offered the most archival and historical material, especially through the yearly reports (School Calendars) on the School during the time period studied. These provided information on the courses offered, new developments, staff, staff publications, and student graduates. The Archives of the library also contained some valuable information. The other case studies did not offer as much in the way of historical documentation, but all four institutions have had various types of historical accounts published about them.

In each case I attempted to acquire any documentation about feminist courses, such as early course outlines. Some informants provided material from their files, and at Kent I was allowed access to past student records which was used not only to identify potential student informants but also to gain an understanding of the types of students who were admitted onto the course.

As perhaps a result of the length of the fieldwork, it became clear that my impressions of the case study institutions had been formulated through a variety of sources. My visits to each campus formed impressions about each institution which I recorded in my field notes: I jotted down incidents which occurred while arranging appointments, travelling, conducting interviews, and corresponding with informants. I was initially unsure of the value of the data recorded in my field notes, as I perceived the purposes of my visits were to conduct interviews about historical events. However, I came to view the case studies through my visits as having very different academic climates or cultures, and I also began to compare these field note impressions with other sources of data. Browsing through the posh looking, purple, hardback tome *LSE: A History of*

the London School of Economics and Political Science 1895-1995 (Dahrendorf, 1995) was a much different experience from reading the small, poorly written 'black paper' called *Rape of Reason: the Corruption of the PNL* (Jacka, Cox, & Marks, 1975). Connections with emerging themes from my data were experienced physically by my visits: for instance, many informants from the University of Kent talked about the isolation they felt not only from politics in London but even from conservative Canterbury. This was reinforced by my difficulties getting to and from the campus by public transport. Therefore, my concept of 'historical' (albeit recent) research was altered during the course of my fieldwork and I have drawn on my fieldnotes and experiences as much as possible.

2.2.4 Interviews

The use of semi-structured interviews has become the principal means by which feminists have sought to achieve the active involvement of their respondents in the construction of data about their lives. (Graham, 1984, p. 112)

The main source of data collection was through semi-structured interviews. Most interviews followed a general format; that is they lasted around one hour, were recorded and then transcribed, and were based upon a broad interview schedule which was designed to cover a wide range of topics (see appendix for examples of interview schedules). In addition, a fieldwork diary was kept in which concerns and particular questions before the interview were noted, and impressions and notes immediately after the interview were recorded. Several times people gave me information after the 'interview' was over: by talking to me informally if we happened to meet in a different context, or through subsequent correspondence, or by chatting to me less formally after the tape recorder had been switched off. Due to difficulties gaining access, which will be discussed in more detail below, I also conducted one interview over the telephone and one without a tape recorder. I have counted these as interviews even though they

do not follow the general format, and I have viewed all contact with informants as potential sources of data, so that the distinction between 'interview' data and other types of data is somewhat blurred.

The initial informants were contacted according to the degree of knowledge it was assumed they would have about a particular case study. After initial contacts were made, the list of potential informants would generally snowball as each person recommended further contacts. Usually, the informants were recommended for a certain reason, such as knowledge of historical events or opinions which may prove interesting. The informants have been categorised, and will be identified throughout, according to the reason they were contacted and their location in the institution. The first category of informants are the *key feminist informants*; that is, academics who were employed by the case study institution during the time period studied and are self-identified feminists. Their stories formed the background to the case study and were treated as historical information which was uncovered through a process similar to oral history accounts. The second category consisted of *observer informants* to these historical events. These informants were women and men academics who were employed at the institution during the relevant time period and who had some knowledge of the events being studied even though they may not have actively participated in them. The third category consisted of *student informants* at the institutions during the time period studied. Students, especially feminist students, were a crucial influence in the development of academic feminism as they were often the instigators of courses and were also actively involved in defining the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment of such courses. The fourth and final category were *other informants* who were not directly employed or studying at the case study institutions but have a longstanding investment in the field of academic feminism. They usually also knew many of the key informants and were actively involved in seminars, conferences and the networks of academics under study.

A breakdown of the types of informants interviewed is as follows:

	LSE	Kent	Sussex	PNL	Other
Feminist Informants	5	7	3	7	
Observer Informants	4	1	3	1	
Student Informants	4	8	3	2	
Other informants					2
Totals	13	16	9	10	2

2.3 Analysis of Data

All interviews were personally transcribed shortly after the interview had taken place. Each informant was offered a copy of the interview transcript. Only a few informants replied to this offer, and each one that did subsequently sent correspondence to me concerning their interview. These informants added comments to what they had said in the interview which clarified certain points or expanded on others, and these comments have been incorporated into my data analysis⁴. Many interviews focused on historical data; however, most informants were willing to discuss more personally their opinions of women's studies, and their own interpretations of events. As the interviews progressed, my interview schedules became more refined and focused, as my

⁴The 'politics' of transcribing interviews became very apparent to me as a result of this process. I typed verbatim from the audio tapes, and would include hesitations in speech such as 'um' and 'you know', simply because I type quickly and accurately. I did not 'clean up' the transcripts (correcting grammar and removing 'ums') before sending them to the informants. This was a mistake: one informant read her transcript and sent me a hostile e-mail message, stating that it was a pity I had not tried to make more sense of what was being said rather than including "all those ridiculous 'ums'", and asking to be withdrawn from the project. After what had seemed a very relaxed and friendly interview I was taken aback by her tone, and it had a profound impact on my confidence for quite some time after the incident. In retrospect, I should have slightly 'cleaned up' the transcript in order to protect the informant from feeling somewhat inarticulate, which may have caused the problem.

familiarity with the data allowed emerging themes to be analysed and fed back into the interviews.

Analysis of the data was conducted by using the software programme NUD*IST, a widely used software package enabling the code-and-retrieve system of data management. All transcripts were imported into the NUD*IST programme and were coded. The first advantage to using NUD*IST related to the practical consideration of efficiently organising a large data set. NUD*IST also allowed the coding of the data to evolve in ways which refined the codes as more interviews were coded. The coding (or 'indexing') system in NUD*IST is based on a hierarchy of codes (which is represented by a tree in the programme). This allowed for general codes to become more focused as the coding was in process; or codes could easily be shifted, deleted, or subsumed into other codes as the themes in the data emerged. Another advantage of using this programme was that data was quickly retrieved: not only was it possible to instantly access all the data for a certain code, but questions could also be asked of the data concerning, for example, which codes were frequently cross-referenced with each other, or which themes were discussed the most.

This system of moving from open coding to focused coding is common in qualitative research, and is based upon the principles of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Instead of using the data to test theory, the theory is expected to emerge from the data. However, it is not the case that I began the research in a theoretical vacuum: I had started from the premise that gender is a 'fundamental organizer of social life' (Kelly, 1992, p. 156). This orientation was re-affirmed by several of the early interviews at the London School of Economics, which was the first case study I undertook, and in which unequal gendered relations were a significant aspect of the culture at the time. However, as the interviews progressed the focus began to shift, and new themes emerged around the topics of curriculum, pedagogy and academic cultures. The emerging thesis is a very different project from the one I started in 1993,

and this fact owes much to research methods which encouraged me to listen to the data rather than impose my own interpretation.

The types of feminist academics described in Chapter Four emerged from the coding and analysis of the data, and had not originally been an aim of the research. They were initially motivated as a response to Klein's thesis on women's studies (1986), which I read before conducting the fieldwork. As the interviews progressed, I realised that her categorisation of different types of women's studies lecturers did not resonate with my data. This can partly be explained through the different informants in our research, as she focused on women's studies lecturers and their perceptions of women's studies courses rather than the variety of academics and feminist curriculum interventions that I found in my case studies. More importantly, however, my interests in higher education studies, the sociology of education, and theories of the higher education curriculum motivated my focus on institutional cultures and disciplinary differences. My analysis was informed by this literature, and the types of feminist academics are intended to illustrate the importance of disciplinary and institutional contexts. Klein's thesis is virtually a rebuttal of these influences.

Renate Klein is a biologist by training who has devoted many publications (1981, 1983a, 1983b, 1984, 1991; Bowles and Klein 1983) to arguing for the development of women's studies as a discipline. She was influenced by her involvement in women's studies programmes in the US (with Gloria Bowles), and gained her PhD from the Institute of Education under the tutelage of one of my supervisors. She also conducted fieldwork at one of my case study institutions. The similarities between us are therefore notable, and were remarked on by some of my informants who remembered being interviewed by Klein a decade ago. Yet the differences in our theoretical approaches are substantial, and speculating on why this may be so has inadvertently informed the development of my analytic framework. With a background in the sciences, Klein would have undoubtedly found it difficult to 'do feminism' in her

discipline. Although she has published in feminist journals on scientific issues such as reproduction and reproductive technology, she would have encountered difficulties in establishing a career as a feminist scientist. In fact, only two of my informants were interested in the sciences, and they both taught on autonomous women's studies programmes. The development of women's studies has provided a space for some - but very few - feminist academics in the sciences to establish their careers.

This is not to suggest that she promoted women's studies simply in order to have a 'home' in the academy, but disciplinary differences are one factor which explains the perspectives of feminist academics on the desirability of autonomous women's studies programmes. The motivations behind the informants' responses to my questions about women's studies became a preoccupation in the analysis of data and the rationale for the different types. Although there is always a danger of 'placing' interpretations on the informants' perspectives, the idea that knowledge production is socially mediated was influential to this analysis. For example, one of the informants was a professor at the LSE, and she distanced herself from women's studies by describing it as not 'real man's work' or 'proper sociology'. Her high-status position at an élite institution could be a factor in (or result of) her decision not to pursue feminist research or teaching. The institutional and disciplinary contexts came to represent to me what Trowler (1998) suggests are 'stories' about these cultures which academics place themselves within or against. Klein has been instrumental in shaping the 'virtual' culture of women's studies, which she is very much within, whilst others have set themselves against it.

2.4 Feminist Methodological Approaches to Interviewing

Once the interviewing stage had begun I became more concerned with how feminist methodologies would inform my approach. Early feminist theories about feminist methodology generally posited a rejection of quantitative methods in favour of more qualitative, subjective and collaborative data collecting methods (Jayaratne & Stewart,

1991). However, this position was subjected to critiques that quantitative data could be feminist and that a feminist methodology was much more to do with the perspectives of the researcher. For instance, Kelly argues that feminist research is distinctive because of 'the questions we have asked, the way we locate ourselves within our questions, and the purpose of our work' (1988, p. 6), rather than the methods used. Harding (1987) makes a similar argument when she outlines three major aspects of feminist research which distinguish it as a new form of inquiry: focusing on women's experiences as a resource; designing research so that women's lives can benefit from it; and adopting a more subjective approach which allows for the researcher's own experiences to shape the study and interpretations of the research.

Perhaps a more insightful framework is suggested by Liz Stanley and Sue Wise (1990), who argue that the debate is fundamentally about a feminist epistemology rather than methodology. Stanley and Wise, in a review of feminist debates on methodology, point out that a concern with epistemology moves the arguments to a more fundamental level, as epistemology is concerned with 'who can be a "knower", what can be known, what constitutes and validates knowledge, and what the relationship is or should be between knowing and being' (Stanley & Wise, 1990, p. 26). They adopt four epistemological positions for feminist research to illustrate a possible feminist epistemological position: 'all knowledge is socially constructed; the dominant ideology is that of the ruling group; there is no such thing as a value-free science and the social sciences so far have served and reflected men's interests; and because people's perspective varies systematically with their position in society, the perspectives of men and women differ' (Stanley & Wise, 1990, p. 38).

In taking up these points in relation to this research, I will first outline how my project engages with feminist methodologies, and then discuss how it departs from these precepts. My experiences and difficulties of attempting to use feminist methodologies to inform my methods will lead to a critique of certain assumptions within feminist

methodologies. I will mainly focus on power relationships in interviews, which became a major concern within my own fieldwork.

To begin with, in terms of designing research projects which are for and about women, it was intended that this research would focus mainly on a particular aspect of women's history. Although clearly men are a part of this research and a part of this history, it is the women's efforts and actions which were the main impetus behind the development of academic feminism and who were therefore the focus of the research. My view of this research as a project about women's history led to certain decisions being made; in particular, decisions concerning how far to include men in the collaborative process were influenced by the intention to focus on women. In terms of the purpose of the work, or designing research so that women can derive some benefit from it, it has been the intention from the outset that historical data gathered will be put back into the feminist community as a resource. It has also been intended that areas uncovered as particularly problematic to the development of academic feminism will be disseminated as part of the literature concerned with women's position and feminism in higher education.

As a feminist researcher, I felt it was necessary to understand my own position in relation to the research. Feminists have argued that all researchers must be aware, and reflect upon, their own locations within the research and in relation to the researched. This reflexivity should lead to an awareness of how the interviews, and the information provided by the interviewees, could have been influenced by the ways in which the interviewees have positioned the researcher. At first, I understood this in relatively simplistic terms (as a white, relatively young, US citizen but with an investment in UK women's studies as a student and active member of the Executive Committee of the WSN). The fact that I was not an active participant in the events that I was researching, and that I did not grow up in the UK but in the USA, were important indications that I had no firsthand knowledge of what my informants were discussing with me. This

'outsider' status made it imperative that I gathered as much data as possible from various sites in order to corroborate stories and clarify events. Sometimes published accounts could help in this respect, and it was also possible to ask other informants.

However, the feeling of being an 'outsider' (a young researcher from overseas asking questions about the past) was quickly replaced by a much more complicated positioning as I began to conduct interviews. Most of the women and men who became informants in this research project were in positions of greater status or power than myself. Many of them had training in the social sciences and even if they were not employed as academics they all at least had a postgraduate degree. Apart from one student informant who is Asian, the informants are all white (bringing to mind Steinberg's quote about the 'dominant constituency of women's studies' (1997) mentioned in the previous chapter), and quite a few of them are well-known academics. I interviewed senior university administrators, professors, lecturers, and researchers. Most of the informants are feminists, and some of them have made their careers through their academic contribution to feminist scholarship. In the beginning, I felt that the research would be a way of celebrating their achievements, and anticipated co-operation as we collaborated on the research project in a 'sisterly' manner. Before elaborating on how this perception altered, it is first necessary to detail the difficulties encountered obtaining interviews.

2.4.1 Difficulties gaining access

I contacted nearly 70 potential informants by letter requesting interviews, and met with 47 women as a result of these letters. A further two informants were invited to the interview without my prior knowledge by informants I had arranged to meet (a student from Kent and an academic at Sussex), and another woman was interviewed over the telephone. Although the success rate could be considered fairly high, the patterns of response to my initial contact, the non-responses and reasons for refusal all became part

of the data for the research and also led to a questioning of the way I was being located by potential informants.

The most successful responses were from the academics and former students from the MA in Women's Studies at Kent. Out of the initial 15 letters sent, I received a 100% response rate, and one informant was invited to an arranged interview without my prior knowledge. The letters to academics at the University of North London were slightly less successful: out of 9 initial letters only 4 academics responded positively, another 4 responded to a subsequent second letter, and one academic replied that she was on sabbatical and unable to see me. I sent 7 letters to former students on the Women's Studies degree programme, and of these only 2 responded. The responses from staff and students at LSE were varied. Out of 17 initial letters, only 10 positive responses were received, and several of these were qualified with statements such as 'I don't think I will be much help'. The quickest and most favourable responses came from feminists who are no longer working or studying at the LSE. One academic, still at LSE, wrote to say she would not be much help, but if I really wanted to see her I should telephone her in a few weeks. When I rang she told me she could only spare a half hour that afternoon, and was particularly unhelpful during the interview. Another 2 academics responded after the second letter. Three academics did not respond to the initial letter and were eventually dropped from the sample, one academic responded that she was too busy, and a former student agreed only to speak with me on the telephone.

The response rate from the academics and former students at Sussex was the lowest. Out of 21 initial letters, only 9 responded positively. I received no responses from 8 initial letters, and a further lack of response from 3 subsequent letters to academics I considered to be key informants out of that group of 8. I received refusals from 3 initial letters; 2 on the grounds that they did not have enough historical knowledge to be useful, and one on the grounds that she thought I should speak to another academic first. However, the academic she suggested was one of the key informants who had

not responded to two letters. One academic still lecturing at Sussex initially telephoned and refused to see me, stating that she would not be able to talk to me if I had any plans to publish the research. After another letter and a lengthy telephone conversation she reluctantly agreed to be interviewed, with the stipulations that I did not mention her by name, that she could have a copy of her interview transcript, and that she could see any of her quotes used prior to publication. One academic saw me for what seemed to be more of an informal chat than an interview (we sat outside and I did not record our conversation), and suggested I did not use Sussex as a case study.

The above patterns of response have helped inform my understandings of the different academic cultures of the case studies as well as the histories of the case studies, and this will be discussed in later chapters of the thesis. For the purposes of this chapter, the cooperation and non-cooperation of informants will inform an analysis of power relations within an interviewing situation.

2.4.2 Power Relationships in the Interviews

Feminist researchers have been influential in highlighting the exploitative nature of traditional social research. My previous experience in feminist research was for a Masters thesis on students of women's studies (Bignell, 1993). My approach to the interviewing process for that research was influenced by feminist ideas about the different nature of research by women, about women (usually relatively powerless women) and on behalf of women. Feminist researchers initially attempted to transform the research process through a growing awareness of the interview situation as a potential site of unequal power relations. As most feminists would argue that feminist research should not produce inequalities between women, it was argued that feminist research should be non-hierarchical and non-exploitative, allowing women to speak about, and make sense of, their own experiences. For instance, I was interested in research that adopted such feminist methods as 'reciprocity' in terms of answering their questions honestly as well as asking for feedback on the written project, 'conscious

'partiality' in terms of a reflective identification with those whom I interviewed, and an attempt to create a non-hierarchical atmosphere between the researcher and the researched (Mies, 1993, p. 68).

The above preoccupations within the feminist research literature largely stemmed from the fact that many feminist researchers were 'researching down'; that is, they were conducting research on women in positions of less power and status which made the academic and intellectual authority of the researcher apparent. Feminist researchers became concerned that they were entering into hierarchical relations with the women they were studying. Methods of equalising the power relations of the research situation were proposed (see Mies, 1983; Reinharz, 1983). These concerns led some feminists to believe that feminist researchers should not claim any type of intellectual authority over the researched (Stanley and Wise, 1983), because all women 'know' their experiences and can define reality for themselves. All that the researcher can do is try to gain insight into their experiences and interpretations of it.

More recently, this type of approach has been criticised for its broad assumptions about the nature of feminist research. Some of the criticisms which are now emerging are based on an awareness that power relationships are complex. One aspect of this criticism has been to suggest that women should interview people in powerful positions. This strategy is an attempt to widen debates about how issues of social justice can best be researched, with the view that interviewing 'up' is an important aspect of understanding how power operates (i.e. Siraj-Blatchford, 1994; Neal, 1995a & b). There has also been research which demonstrates how interviewing men can result in an understanding of gender inequalities and how these are played out within the interview situation (McKee & O'Brien, 1983; Scott & Porter, 1984; Riddell, 1989). There are also criticisms of the feminist fashion for giving voice to 'powerless' women through an awareness that academic women do have power and privilege which can not easily be suspended during the research process, and that attempting to

establish rapport and 'honesty' within the interview can lead to exploitation just as within a traditional, distanced approach (Finch, 1993). Eisenstein has pointed out that feminist research based on simplistic notions of power has led to a rather ironic outcome:

. . . as women's studies practitioners, we write about most women and characterise how they are, and they are quite remarkably uniform in their characteristics. They are all extremely nurturant and affiliative and loving and good at interpersonal relations. . . they are very expressive, but the implication is that they are not very rational. The only exceptions to this rule are the women in academic positions who are writing about other women. These academics are remarkably different in that they are all highly intellectual and rational and seem to have all those male characteristics (like tenure). (Eisenstein, 1993, p. 2).

Her observations, although they are somewhat of a caricature, became more relevant to me as my fieldwork progressed; initially as I began to understand that it can be patronising to maintain a simplistic view of power relations in the research process. However, she also suggests that academic (feminist) women do claim an authoritative voice, and indeed do hold positions of status within academia. It is this latter point which I wish to take up in some detail.

The first, basic concern with power relations in interviews resulted from difficulties gaining access. When I first started the fieldwork I felt some trepidation about contacting the more senior academics, but was generally under the impression that at least the feminist academics would probably respond favourably and helpfully. As the research continued, and especially as I moved onto the Sussex case study, my initial worries were replaced by a greater concern about gaining enough positive responses to make the case study viable. As a response to this difficulty, I increasingly spent many

anxious hours deciding how I would approach potential informants, in an attempt to gain favourable responses. For instance, at times I wrote letters implying I wanted to discuss their opinions on academic feminism and at others I implied I wanted more of an oral history on their personal achievements. More subtly, I presented my research in various ways as I saw appropriate, sometimes emphasising my interests in the higher education curriculum over women's studies specifically. Maintaining a distance was not always an easy position to adopt, both because informants sometimes made comments about feminist politics with which I disagreed, and also because this strategy seemed to undermine my (perhaps naive) notions about establishing rapport and honesty within the interview situation.

Sarah Neal, who has also conducted research as a PhD student with senior university administrators and academics, found the same difficulties. She wrote:

Increasingly I reverted to an uneasy and ironic adoption of a traditional, 'malestream', academic persona, presenting myself as neutral, rational, and objective in order that I could command the respect (power) I felt I needed to conduct interviews with Vice-Chancellors, Pro-Vice Chancellors, Registrars, Deans, General Secretaries (of unions) etc. (Neal, 1995b, p. 524).

Neal's main concern is that as a researcher interested in social justice issues it is difficult to stifle the ideological basis of the research when confronted with interviewees who are sexist or racist in their comments (see also Ozga and Gewirtz, 1994). However, I found that distancing myself from informants, or managing the information I gave to them, even more of a personal dilemma when interviewing other feminists. The reality of the situation, which I had to confront, was that feminist academics do have authority, and as such had the power to gain control over the interview situation. This is relatively uncharted territory within the feminist methodology literature, although it is a growing area of concern. Cotterill, as one example, has discussed in

particular the complexities of age which is relevant also to differences in sex, experience, and status:

There can be very real problems for the younger woman interviewing older women, particularly if they occupy and originate from a higher class position than her own. The older woman may set boundaries for the interview which are difficult, if not impossible, for the younger woman to cross, and thereby questions the nature of hierarchical research relationships which presume the dominant position of the researcher (Cotterill, 1992, p. 600).

The 'boundaries' which can be set by informants in greater power positions are numerous. Most commonly, my power to control the interview was (slightly) reduced by academics who made it clear that I would not be given much time, took phone calls and personal enquiries during the interview without attempts to limit these interruptions, arrived very late to appointments, and answered questions in an uncommonly cursory manner. One striking example was an encounter with a very well known feminist academic. She arrived a half hour late to the appointment and immediately informed me she could only speak to me for ten minutes. I asked to reschedule the appointment to a more convenient time but she insisted that we go ahead with it then. As my interview schedules were designed for at least a half hour discussion, beginning with general lead-in questions about the informants' academic histories and interests, it was extremely difficult to make a decision on the spot about how to get any useful data out of a ten minute interview. I asked a general question about the women's studies course at her institution, and she launched into a lengthy digression which continued for nearly 45 minutes and during which time I barely spoke. In effect, she had ensured that she had most of the control over the agenda of the interview (although fortunately her comments were extremely useful).

Another, perhaps more subtle, power exchange occurred when informants made explicit references to the research process itself. In probably the majority of social science research, the researcher is at an advantage because the processes of conducting research are unknown to the researched, and the informants therefore 'trust' the researcher and ask relatively few questions or interfere with the way in which the research is being conducted. Interviewing academics who have experience doing interviews themselves raises different problems. The ability to turn the interview into a 'normal' conversation and thereby achieve rapport is reduced when the interviewee makes explicit references to the fact that an interview is taking place. As examples, one informant was alarmed when she noticed I relied on the batteries in my tape recorder rather than plugging it into an outlet. She informed me that she never relied on batteries, and this comment had the unfortunate effect of reducing my feelings of control over the interview situation (compounded by the fact that I worried the entire time that my batteries would not last the duration of the interview).

In another instance, an informant suddenly decided to telephone a colleague in order to ask him a question which I was asking her (about basic information concerning the staff at their institution), and thereby discovered I had already received the information from him in a previous interview. I listened to her discussing with her colleague on the phone that I had attempted a 'double blind check'. As a senior sociologist, she was obviously enjoying having the tables turned. At the beginning of the interview she had helped me find the correct position for my tape recorder. As I usually attempted to achieve rapport by making every encounter as much like a natural conversation as possible, these attempts to suddenly foreground the interview process and render it transparent were disconcerting. Furthermore, they made explicit the greater experience in conducting research that these informants have.

The other difficulty with interviewing academic men and women is that they are often interested in the theoretical framework of the study, or the rationale behind it and the

approach taken. Giving too much information about this could introduce bias into the interviews. However, as Jennifer Platt pointed out after she interviewed academics: 'To succeed, as textbooks usually suggest, in concealing one's specific hypotheses is to place oneself in the academically embarrassing situation of possibly appearing to have none' (Platt, 1981, p. 79). Rather than concealing the broader aims of my research, I usually revealed some information but often implied that whatever hypotheses I had were tentative, and any opinions on these would be welcome. In other words, I appealed to the informants' academic authority. This type of exchange was part of a collaborative process and rather than bias the answers given by the informants the discussion tended to become more analytical, and therefore quite valuable to the research. It was also the case that informants would sometimes disagree with my hypotheses, and this type of response seems to further suggest that I was not introducing bias.

The above examples illustrate that interviewing academics highlights the complexities of power relationships and knowledge production within the interview process. They also highlight the need for understandings of power relations in interviews which do not rely on a zero-sum concept of power. In each of the above instances, there were exchanges of power but in no case did I lose complete control (which I suppose would be recognisable by not having obtained any productive data). However, I wish to return to the dilemmas I faced when interviewing *feminist* academics, as these instances questioned some of the foundations of certain feminist methodologies.

2.4.3 Power Relations in Interviews with Feminists

Feminist researchers who have attempted to widen the debates about feminist methodologies through accounts of their own empirical work have been useful but limited in their application to the situation when interviewing feminists. Riddell, for example, pointed out the ways in which her male interviewees undermined her power

by commenting on her appearance or avoiding her questions (she judged the women interviewees to be more cooperative). She found this positioning raised difficulties:

I feel that ethical issues are bound up in the way in which the researcher deals with these attempts by men to control the terms of the interaction. She can either acquiesce and hope that she will be perceived as non-threatening, or she can challenge what is happening and thereby risk being told nothing at all. (Riddell, 1989, p. 89).

Sue Scott and Mary Porter, who interviewed academics, also found that the women they interviewed were more cooperative, whilst the men (and more senior women academics) were sometimes able to control the interview in some of the same ways my informants did. They use these examples to discuss gender and status within sociological research (Scott & Porter, 1984). Riddell, and Scott and Porter, are justifiably concerned about principles within the framework of social science research. These issues seem more acute within a feminist methodological framework.

When reading the above examples from the literature, it was all too easy for me to identify and relate to some of the instances recounted by the authors. When Riddell writes about men commenting on her appearance and how this undermined her status, I remembered comments from feminist academics about the ways in which younger feminists misinterpreted 'their' history. When Scott and Porter discuss a male academic who would only see them for 15 minutes, and then used that time to speak to his own agenda, I wondered if the well known feminist academic I interviewed had read that article and found it a useful technique. When Neal (1995a) discusses how uncomfortable she felt sitting in the large, posh offices of male, senior university administrators being brought cups of tea by their secretaries, I reflected on the time I interviewed a female senior university administrator in her large, posh office but was told I could not have a cup of coffee as her secretary had not yet arrived. These authors

were using examples of interactions within interviews, their own discomfort, and their feelings of being undermined within interview situations, to ask questions about a research process which can reproduce gendered inequalities. It is difficult, after all, to be working within an emancipatory framework but to feel the need to submit to, rather than challenge, oppressive relations during the research process for the good of the research.

Important questions have been raised through these articles about ethical issues in research, gender and power in the field of sociology, and the inadequacies of social science methods for researching powerful people. I initially perceived myself to be engaged in a feminist research process which operated somehow beyond the bounds of normal power relations in social research, and I would have preferred to have been able to maintain that perspective. When I started the research, I was intimidated by some of the more senior feminist academics but tried to convince myself there was no reason to be nervous. In some cases, as it turned out, there were reasons to be nervous which stemmed from the material positions of greater power which some of these women occupy. An alternative perspective would be that my own feelings of 'internalised oppression' led to my discomfort with senior women as Louise Morley concluded, (1997); however, I find it difficult to accept that the brusque behaviour of certain informants was a problem created by my own awareness of my inferior status. Admitting to some of these feelings of inadequacy has not been undertaken lightly even though there seems to be somewhat of a trend now for researchers (usually young and inexperienced) to relate examples of interview difficulties in order to point out where the standard social science textbooks have inadequately prepared them. This practice of 'confessing' has, however, recently been criticised (Paechter, 1996) as contributing to a culture of surveillance within social science research methods and re-inforcing status and power within the field.

The above authors used the 'confessional' mode in order to raise questions about ethical issues in research, power and gender within sociology, and the inadequacies of traditional social science methods when researching 'up'. I have entered into my own 'confessional' mode with a great deal of caution, not only because of Paechter's criticisms of the exercise, but also because the questions that arise out of this reflexivity present a challenge to the more prescriptive aspects of feminist methodologies. Neal felt that she was inadequately prepared to maintain authority in an interview situation when she was in intimidating surroundings, often trying to balance a cup of tea on her knee during interviews with senior academics: whilst sympathetic to her discomfort when confronted with hierarchical power relations due to her gender and student status, I can only add that researching feminists would not guarantee her a cozy retreat. Feminist methods of equalising power relations and establishing rapport can sometimes still be difficult when the women being interviewed are powerful, senior women - even if they are self-identified feminists.

To follow from Hammersley's critique of feminist methodologies (Hammersley, 1995), it is important to remember that each research situation is different, and that prescriptive rules about the interview process itself have only a limited function. Hammersley suggests that feminist methodologies are based on ideas 'to be found in the non-feminist literature' (Hammersley, 1995, p. 65). However, it may also be the case the feminist methodologies have sometimes been appropriated without acknowledgement. In either case, these tendencies will create obstacles to further debate. If one of the main tenets of feminist methodologies is that non-hierarchical relations within research are the most desirable, I have to return to the question of what relation my research has to feminist methodologies. At the outset of this chapter I argued that my research was feminist as it is largely a research project by, for and about women. Where it may be argued that I have diverged from a feminist methodological framework is that I do not have specifically emancipatory aims in mind. My informants were not all 'victims' of an oppressive reality and they did not have false

consciousnesses that needed to be enlightened. Rather, they are powerful women whose achievements I wished in some senses to celebrate, but have found that initial desire more problematic as the research has progressed. A large part of this change in my own perception of the project is a result of difficult power relations in the negotiation and carrying out of interviews with feminist academics.

I have implicitly suggested that some feminist researchers have over-interpreted the power relations in research situations as being all about male power and female lack of power, and I have to be equally cautious not to over-interpret the power relations in my interviews. Academics are very busy people, and I know there were genuine cases of my letters being left buried under piles of other work, and good intentions to participate thwarted by other demands on time. However, I am equally certain that *some* women derived *some* pleasure from taking control over the interview situation. Pointing this fact out is simply to add a reflexive criticism to prescriptive research methodologies which do not engage with complex notions of power relations. It has also been my intention to draw attention to the fact that, although many informants discussed with me the difficulties of being a woman in academia, there are now women who have gained power and privilege through their careers in academia. Put simply, I would have preferred *not* to have discovered that some of them were able to use this power in ways which seemed to militate against the intentions of feminist methodological research approaches.

CHAPTER THREE

THE HISTORY OF THE SECOND WAVE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

3.1 Introduction

Students new to women's studies in the UK are likely to encounter a version of its history in their textbooks such as the following:

In Britain, women involved with left politics and the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s began to set up Women's Studies courses within higher education [. . .] The women's movement of the 60s and 70s in the Western world had a fundamental impact on the establishment of Women's Studies courses in adult and higher education. This connection of the academic world to a social movement meant that the setting up and teaching of such courses was a profoundly political act. (Robinson, 1993, p. 3-4)

It has been suggested that women's studies is the 'address' of the women's movement, and, more commonly, the 'academic arm' of the women's liberation movement. This proposal was made as early as the mid-1970s (see, for example, Dixon, 1976) and has become a standard phrase in women's studies textbooks and articles. It is therefore somewhat surprising that historical accounts of the second wave women's movement do not generally portray women's studies as a significant contribution to the movement (Coote & Campbell 1987; Rowbotham, 1989). As Judith Allen argues: 'the professional needs of the field cannot be assessed or adequately provided for. . . without a preliminary and eventually a thoroughgoing interrogation of the founding catchphrase of women's studies as the "academic arm of the women's movement"' (Allen, 1997, p. 360).

Allen's analysis of women's studies in the US is a rare attempt to situate the subject within the wider higher education context. She suggests that there has been undue emphasis in the women's studies literature on the influence of the women's movement, and asks why it is not the case that 'feminist judges, lawyers, workers in various echelons of the criminal and civil justice system are the "justice arm of the women's movement" or that other feminists are the "medical arm" or the "mass media arm" and so forth' (Allen, 1997, p. 371-2). There has been a great deal of pressure for feminists in the academy to be responsible, and somehow in service, to feminists outside of the academy. One of the problems with this supposition is that it is based on a dichotomy: feminists are either inside the academy or outside. This chapter will follow from Allen's argument, that 'outside is inside' (Allen, 1997, p. 371). The organisation of feminist academic networks, and the subsequent integration of feminist knowledge into the curriculum, was fundamentally a political struggle. The groups which were formed in the 1970s by feminist academics interested in studying women within their disciplines were a form of feminist activism. Yet the majority of the popular histories of the women's movement do not include these groups or the development of women's studies as contributing to the movement.

This chapter will explore the relationship of women's studies to the women's movement by tracing the history of the second wave women's movement. Central to this history is the argument that the 'outside/inside' dichotomy needs to be deconstructed. The activities of women's movement organisations, including academic pressure groups such as the BSA women's caucus, were all part of the second wave women's liberation movement. The decision to present the history of the movement in this way is not only academic, but a political decision as well.

The history that you could write of Women's Studies belongs also to the movement; it is not a metalanguage, and will act either as a conservative

moment or a subversive moment. There is no theoretically neuter interpretation of the history of Women's Studies. The history will have a performative part in it. (Derrida, 1984, quoted in Scott, 1991)

Joan Scott, in her account of what she calls the women's history movement, uses the above quote from Derrida to illustrate the politics of writing history (Scott, 1991). The conventional account of the development of the women's history movement requires critical reflection, she argues, as it is usually portrayed as a linear development. She writes:

In one of the conventional narratives of the origins of this field, feminist politics are a starting point. These accounts locate the origin of the field in the 1960s, when feminist activists called for a history that would provide heroines, proof of women's agency, and explanations of oppression and inspiration for action. (Scott, 1991, p. 42)

This narrative is similar to Robinson's account at the start of this chapter: it implies that the rise of second wave feminism led to a demand for knowledge about women. Scott points out, however, that women's history was produced through a dynamic relationship between politics and knowledge production which was not necessarily linear. Furthermore, Scott's article in general highlights the need to clarify the relationship between the women's history movement and women's studies. Although the differences between feminists have historically been categorised according to ideological differences, the significance of *disciplinary* differences will be emphasised throughout this chapter.

3.2 The Second Wave Women's Movement

The history of the second wave women's movement in the UK has a starting point in trade union activity. Several accounts of the history of the women's movement cite as

an influential event the Dagenham strike in 1968 led by women sewing-machinists at the Ford Motor Company (Humm, 1987; Coote & Campbell, 1987; Rowbotham, 1983; Rowe, 1982; Carter, 1988). The strike raised the issue of equal pay for women and also brought to public attention the capability of women to organise and campaign effectively on an issue which had implications for many women across the country. The strike at Dagenham led to further trade union activism, as Rowbotham writes: 'There followed a period of industrial militancy among women workers which has only been sporadically chronicled in the socialist press and has never been seriously studied' (Rowbotham, 1983, p. 34). Some of these campaigns were a strike led by London women lavatory cleaners, a demand by bus conductresses to become bus drivers, a campaign to unionise nightcleaners, and the campaign in Hull led by wives of trawermen for better safety on the trawlers (Carter, 1988). As a result of the Dagenham strike and the increased publicity of women's activism, the National Joint Action Committee for Women's Equal Rights was organised in 1969 and began to call on the TUC to address equal pay. A rally for equal pay was held in Trafalgar Square in 1969 (Coote and Campbell, 1987; Rowbotham, 1971).

The organisation of women in trade unions should be understood in relation to the political and economic situation of women at the time. During the 1950s-1970s women were on average earning half the amount of men. Women were horizontally and vertically segregated in the labour market much more markedly than today. For example, in 1968 the Ministry of Labour conducted a survey of the manufacturing industry and found that only 4% of the managers were women, whilst 91% of the canteen staff and 62% of the clerical staff were women. The Dagenham strike was not only about equal pay but was also a demand that women be admitted into the higher grades of skilled production work which were at the time reserved for men. The increased visibility of women's inequality at work was a result of the great numbers of women who entered the workforce between 1950-1970. Although the numbers of women in the workforce increased by 2 million during this period, the opportunities

available to them did not widen (Carter, 1988). As women's inequality in the workforce became more apparent, their involvement in the trade unions increased.

From late 1960s, however, the prominence of working-class women's political activism was overshadowed by emerging social movements from various left-wing ideological groups. The growing participation of middle-class women within the movement began to have an impact on the issues women centralised as part of the feminist struggle. Women were politically active in, amongst others, the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, International Socialism, the Communist Party, and the Gay Liberation Front. An early group that contributed to the public visibility of the movement was the Women's Liberation Workshop. The WLW consisted of small, local groups who met regularly and communicated with other groups through newsletters. The London Women's Liberation Workshop started a newsletter in 1969, which was circulated to the regional groups once a week and listed events and news from the groups. In Issue 4, which was simply titled 'Bird' (August 1969)¹, Janet Williams from the Peckham Rye group wrote an article about the formation of the group. Her account illustrates a growing feminist awareness many groups probably followed. The Peckham group grew out of a one o'clock club. At the first three meetings, some of their husbands attended and they largely discussed problems with childcare. At the fourth meeting Juliet Mitchell came to speak about women's oppression. After this the group decided to exclude men and change the focus of their discussions from child care to more general theorising about women's oppression. Several of the members decided to disrupt a public meeting at Goldsmiths College:

It had been advertised as an open debate on revolutionary ideas, with the participation of left-wing underground personalities. . . we stood up and demanded the meeting should hear us on, and then discuss, the oppression of

¹One of the difficulties with presenting material from the women's movement is that authors are often not named, page numbers can be missing, and sometimes even dates. Another potential problem is that some early material was marked 'for women only'. I have not (knowingly) quoted directly from any document that is intended to be read by women only.

women. We were booed loudly and asked to strip, told we needed a good fuck, etc. However, we went on to hold the 300 people in the hall to our subject for over an hour. (Williams, 1969)

The fact that Juliet Mitchell, a prominent feminist academic, influenced these (not necessarily academic-related) women to disrupt a meeting at a higher education institution, illustrates the shift away from working-class, trade union activities towards more middle-class concerns and locations.

Perhaps the single most important event for the cross-fertilisation between activism and academia was the informal gathering of women at Ruskin College, Oxford during a workshop on working class history. Some of the women present suggested they organise a weekend conference for women. Subsequently, in February 1970 the first National Women's Liberation Conference took place at Ruskin College. Attendance far exceeded expectations, and 600 women and men from various political backgrounds and differing commitments to activism were brought together for what was initially called a 'Women's Weekend'. The letter to all participants stated that 'this conference was conceived as an opportunity for women concerned about women's oppression in this society to come together to discuss this common situation.'²

The success of this conference gave women the opportunity to attempt to set up a structure for the movement. It was decided to create a Women's National Co-ordinating Committee (WNCC) which would meet regularly and make decisions about the activities of the movement, and help organise the following national conferences. This was the very start of the large, nationally recognised movement, which the term Women's Liberation Movement has become associated. The papers from this time

²Anna Davin's personal papers (1970), in the Fawcett Library in London.

indicate that feminist ideas and awareness were also at a starting point. For example, the questionnaire circulated to participants at the conference asked such questions as:

If you don't have an orgasm during sexual intercourse, do you a) pretend you have b) feel angry with the man . .

Freud felt all women suffered from penis envy. Do you feel this is your problem?

Have you read *The Second Sex, The Feminine Mystique*?³

Some of the abstracts of the papers presented also seem indicative of a very early feminist consciousness. A sample of titles reveal a pre-occupation with family and motherhood: 'Reflections on politics and the family', 'Child-rearing and women's liberation', 'Children and the family'. This focus on heterosexuality and motherhood has subsequently been challenged. However, many women attending the conference had found their experiences of motherhood to be the impetus behind their growing feminist awareness, as illustrated by the Peckham one o'clock club. Books which explored the constraints of women's social roles and motherhood, such as the *Feminine Mystique* (Freidan 1963), were seriously transgressive at the time. This is evident in the fact that the press were showing such an interest in the crèche provided at the conference, which was staffed by men, that the organisers decided to hold a press conference on that subject alone⁴.

The papers from this first conference indicate that consciousness-raising was based on women's personal experience, hence the personal questions on women's experiences of motherhood. The practice of consciousness-raising (CR) was an important aspect of the early women's movement, and several informants discussed the influence of CR groups on their interest in feminism. When the first women's studies and feminist courses were established, the links between consciousness-raising and education were

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

explored through encouraging women students to reflect on their personal experiences. This has subsequently become a fundamental aspect of feminist pedagogies, but not without problems. Like many other feminist principles, CR has not made a straightforward transition into an academic environment, and these tensions will be further discussed in Chapter Nine.

On 6 March 1971 the burgeoning movement organised a demonstration. On the placards for the demonstration were written the 'Four Demands' of the Movement: Equal Pay Now, Equal Education and Job Opportunities, Free 24 hour Nurseries, and Free Contraception and Abortion on Demand. This march was the first large-scale women's demonstration since the Suffragettes. The second National Women's Liberation Conference was held at Skegness, and in the meantime the Women's Liberation Workshop groups were expanding. In 1971 there were almost 70 local groups which were networked through the Workshop. In order to further the exchange of information between each other they produced the newsletter *Shrew* which each group took turns editing.

One edition of *Shrew* (Vol. 3, No. 9, 1971) contains a report from the Skegness conference written by the Leamington WLW group. At the Skegness conference the newly established Women's National Co-ordinating Committee was abolished, apparently from protests that the women present at the conference wanted the power to make decisions rather than leaving it to the WNCC. The Leamington group wrote about their concern over the 'violence' at the conference and also reported:

We were worried by the widespread opposition that there seemed to be to any form of organisation at all. This seemed to be part-and-parcel of a repudiation of intellectualism. Organisation and intellectual analysis are too simply seen as authoritarian and therefore masculine; hence bad. (1971, p. iv)

Therefore the WLM from the beginning attempted to structure itself with as little formal organisation as possible. This is summarised in a 'directory' to the movement:

The Women's Liberation Movement has constantly sought to be non-authoritarian, believing that women could work and campaign together co-operatively without the need for arbitrary rules and officials. The Women's Liberation Movement is not an organization you can join, it doesn't have a head office, a president or a book of rules... you don't have to be in a group to be 'in' the Women's Liberation Movement; if you are a woman who supports its aims, you are part of it already. (Collins, 1978, p. 226)

The lack of structure of the movement was based on powerful, feminist principles. Any woman could feel as though she 'belonged' to the movement, which means that any woman academic who supported these aims also 'belonged' and was not 'outside' of it. However, when many of the women who had experienced these principles in action in feminist groups enrolled on women's studies courses, they expected similar principles to be operating. These expectations were problematic in a social institution based on principles of exclusion and hierarchies.

The national conferences were only one form of social movement organisation contributing to the women's movement, yet their significance in the 1970s is evident in the attendance figures. In July 1973 the fifth National Conference took place at Bristol University with 800 women present. In April 1976 at Newcastle there were 1,500 women registered. By April 1977, 3,000 women attended the conference held at City of London Polytechnic. The last conference took place in 1978 in Birmingham, and ended on a note of intense acrimony (Coote & Campbell, 1987). The major debates were over the proposal of further 'demands' concerned with male violence and women's sexualities: some of the feminists with socialist and communist backgrounds argued against these issues on the grounds that they distracted from the

importance of social class and divided men and women in the class struggle. The scale of the event had grown to such an extent that organisation was becoming increasingly difficult, and combined with the bitterness of the last conference it is not surprising that no one volunteered to organise another conference.

The fragmentation of the movement has historically been constructed through the ideological splits which divided women. This narrative has only recently begun to be challenged⁵. Throughout the 1980s, the conservative government and the rise of the New Right were successful in destroying much of the political activism of the 1960s and 1970s. As will be discussed in later chapters, these factors also had a profound influence on the higher education system. Before the backlash against feminism and left-wing activism, however, various political groups formed in the late 1960s which influenced feminist interventions into the academy. One of the most important links between feminist activism and academia, although rarely acknowledged as such, was through students.

3.3 The Student Movement

The student movement of the late 1960s was similar to the women's movement in that it was divergent and international. Juliet Mitchell locates the women's movement in an international context and argues that the 'coincidence of women's liberation groups clearly bears analogy with the international nature of the student movement' (Mitchell, 1971, p. 11). Fraser suggests that many of the women who founded the Women's Liberation Movement had backgrounds in student activism:

It seems undeniable that in many countries, women radicalised by their involvement in the student movements brought a new cutting edge to the

⁵Eve Setch, for instance, is currently writing a PhD thesis (University of London) on the history of the women's movement in the UK. She illustrates how the movement demised more through practical problems with organising, such as lack of funds, rather than through ideological splits.

women's movement, and in some instances were among the instigators of its resurgence. (Fraser, 1988, p. 340)

The higher education system in the late 1960s was a significant forum for the feminist activism which influenced the development of women's studies. Many feminist activists who had been students in the late 1960s and early 1970s were involved in the student movement. As Carter has explained: 'The generation of women emerging from the universities and polytechnics by 1970 had experienced exceptional radicalism, and were receptive to feminist ideas' (Carter, 1988, p. 49).

Some of the women who took part in the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign demonstrations and other student political activities became disillusioned by the domination of men in the groups. Elisabeth Tailor, who was a student at the University of Kent, recalled:

These demos were organised as ego-trips by men who wanted to be at the front, get their pictures in the paper, and prove they were 'prolier' (more proletarian) than thou. The arrogance of a small elite, thinking they were leading the revolution and telling the working class what to do! They controlled the language - their Marxism was always better than yours - and made women feel like idiots. (Fraser, 1988, p. 280)

Sheila Rowbotham, the feminist historian, was also a student activist. In Fraser's book *1968* she recalled how her feminist awareness grew:

The only way you could be accepted, as a politically active woman, was if you became like a man. I refused to become this sort of asexual political cardboard person. And yet I noticed that it was almost impossible for me to get any of my ideas accepted by men. To begin with, I didn't think it was

because they were *men*.. And then an American, whose wife was involved in the women's movement, pointed out to me after a meeting in 1968 that it was the men who constantly blocked my proposals. Suddenly the scales fell from my eyes. (quoted in Fraser, 1988, p. 341)

The political activities of students on campuses became an arena for feminist meetings and organisations. The examples of feminist activities in higher education which influenced the development of the women's movement are sometimes referred to in published accounts, and were mentioned anecdotally in some of the interviews⁶. However, it is difficult to put together a complete picture of what was a mushrooming social movement. As examples, the Revolutionary Students' Federation was organised after student protests at the LSE, and this group began holding women's meetings (Coote and Campbell, 1987). In 1969, Essex University arranged a discussion of women's liberation during a revolutionary festival. Juliet Mitchell ran a course at the Anti-University entitled 'The Role of Women in Society'. Some of the women who attended her class helped establish the Women's Liberation Workshop. Sheila Rowbotham published the pamphlet 'Women's Liberation and the New Politics' in 1969.

These fragments of activity are indications of the connection between academia and activism, and students have been instrumental in both the women's movement and the establishment of women's studies courses. Significantly, it was students in the social science subjects who were more likely to be left-wing. A survey of the students at LSE in 1967, the year the first sit-in and boycott was staged by students (Blackstone et al, 1970) revealed that 72% of students in anthropology, social psychology and sociology supported left-wing politics. Fraser suggests:

⁶One informant memorably described witnessing a feminist group meeting at the University of Sussex in which the women were all lying on the floor learning how to examine their cervixes with speculums!

Not surprisingly, perhaps, sociology students were often at the forefront of the new unrest, for sociology was widely seen as the key not only to understanding contemporary society but to transforming it. (Fraser, 1988, p. 96)

This disciplinary distinction also seems to be the case with academics. Women's studies in the UK first became popular in sociology degrees, largely due to the activism of feminist sociologists. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that sociology has been described as the *enfant terrible* of academia (Becher *et al*, 1994, p. 76). The following section will summarise the academic networks which formed the basis of feminist activism in the academy.

3.4 Academic Pressure Groups, Women's Caucuses, and Women's Organisations

In the early 1970s, many academic groups for women with an interest in feminism began to form. Several informants discussed their involvement in these groups, as both students and academics. The first, and most influential, group to become formally established was the British Sociological Association's women's caucus, which was established during the 1974 annual conference (see Allen and Leonard, 1996 for this history). The conference was organised by Diana Leonard and Sheila Allen on the theme Sexual Divisions and Society, and is now considered to be a watershed in British feminist sociology (Stanley, 1992). In the opening chapter to one of the volumes of conference papers subsequently published, the editors refer to the connection between the women's movement and feminist scholarship:

It is, of course, not as yet respectable for most sociologists to concern themselves with the far reaching questions that have been raised in what might be broadly termed as women's liberation or gay liberation literature; but this means that sociology taught on many courses lags behind the level of

consciousness of these issues already reached by the students themselves. Those who write here owe a heavy debt to sources outside accepted sociological circles. (Allen and Leonard, 1976, p. 3)

As will be discussed in the next few chapters, students were instrumental in the attempts to integrate feminist knowledge into the mainstream curriculum, yet it is rare for this type of acknowledgement to be made.

The women's caucus was formed with broader objectives than just feminist knowledge production. Margherita Rendel presented a paper to the conference outlining the role of what she called 'academic pressure groups' as already established in the US. As she explained, 'they existed to draw attention to the inadequate representations of women in their various subjects and to promote the interests of their members within them' (Rendel, 1974, p. 14). She provided the BSA with information about the advances made by women within the American Sociological Association, who had produced a survey about the sociology profession in 1969: the 'result was that the ASA adopted "in spirit" and without opposition 10 resolutions recording the Association's opposition to sex discrimination' (Rendel, 1974, p. 14). These women's groups in the USA were also active by the late 1960s within psychology, political science and history, and in the early 1970s they were formed within mathematics, anthropology, philosophy of education (Rendel, 1974, p. 13).

The BSA women's caucus was concerned with discrimination against women in the disciplines. One year after it had formed, an article by Mary McIntosh in the BSA women's caucus newsletter defined their role in political rather than academic terms:

The struggle of women is not one for equality, like the struggle of blacks, but for a change in career and work conditions for themselves and for men. This is a political struggle and it requires that women be politically organized around

their own interests and develop an analysis of their own situation and how to improve it. Before, we had no way of knowing what women sociologists want: - crèches vs. chances to work part-time? women's studies courses vs. concern with sexual divisions in other courses? (McIntosh, 1975)

The BSA women's caucus, perhaps influenced by the success of the women's caucus in the ASA, formed a working party on the status of women in sociology, produced a survey of the sociology profession, and submitted four recommendations to the Executive Committee: a) the BSA should ask sociologists to eliminate all enquiries relating to the applicant's personal life during the interview; b) Sociology department heads should review their staffing position and appointment procedures; c) the BSA should encourage systematic research on the position of women in general and the profession in particular; d) the Executive Committee should seek appropriate machinery to ensure that close attention continues to be paid to research and action taken to eliminate the present inequalities between men and women sociologists (McIntosh, 1975).

As far as the sociology profession was concerned, the women's caucus was hugely influential in raising awareness about women sociologists, and changing the practices of the BSA. Several of the informants in this research had been active in the women's caucus, and one informant recalled how one year they 'took over' the Executive Committee by nominating so many women candidates that all those elected were women. It is interesting to note that men were involved in the working parties from the beginning, at the insistence of the BSA. Yet this summary of their successes is not to suggest that these women were engaged in a peaceful struggle. At the 1975 BSA conference, a few men tried to attend the women's caucus meeting and refused to leave when asked. The women moved to another room and refused to let them through the door (Allen and Leonard, 1995). An informant from the LSE also admitted that the Sociology department was divided over the issue. He said a few men

were supportive, but 'there was another small group of definite anti-feminists who thought the sociology of women was basically absurd and just a bunch of raving, totally unscientific researchers who captured the BSA and so on. . . '

In terms of feminist knowledge production, a Study Group on Sexual Divisions and Society was formed after the conference, and various reading groups around sexualities and feminism have met ever since. One informant said she remembered an informal agreement within the BSA women's caucus in the 1970s that they would not work towards developing autonomous women's studies programmes, as it was felt that to do so would eventually de-politicise feminist scholarship (as she said, 'you only had to look at what had happened to Marxism'). The article by McIntosh (1975), as implied in the above quote, indicates that the issue was debated in 'either/or' terms: either integration of feminist theories within sociology, or autonomous women's studies programmes. Although this division could have undermined the subsequent women's studies movement, many of the women who established women's studies programmes from the 1980s were feminist sociologists. In 1976, the BSA women's caucus held a conference on women's studies, which indicates feminist sociologists were also at the forefront of the early debates about women's studies.

Other groups were formed throughout the 1970s and 1980s, although their histories are not documented in any systematic way⁷. Klein (1983) states that there were two early discipline-based, women's organisations called the Political Scientists, and Women in Education. Groups that were mentioned to me by informants were the London Women's Anthropology Group, Women in Philosophy, a feminist group within the National Association for the Teaching of English, and the Brighton Women's Science Group (which met between 1976-1980). Zmroczeck and Duchen (1991), in their article about the development of women's studies in Europe, state that in the UK the Women Teaching French group formed in 1987, and Women and

⁷The history of the BSA women's caucus is currently being researched by Bev Barstow at the University of Sussex for a PhD thesis.

Psychology formed in 1990. Two women's organisations published early feminist texts thanks to the Virago press in London: *Half the Sky: An Introduction to Women's Studies* (1979) was edited by the Bristol Women's Studies Group and *Alice Through the Microscope* (1980), by the Brighton Women and Science Group. The Women's History Network was founded in 1991 (Brown, 1999).

June Purvis has published an account of women's history in the *European Journal of Women's Studies* (Purvis, 1995) in which she does not discuss academic pressure groups, but instead focuses on (mainly socialist) feminist knowledge production in history. The women's history movement was clearly different from the feminist sociology movement, and mainstream history has remained largely male-dominated in the UK. Purvis makes connections between feminist history and feminist activism through individuals rather than groups. She argues:

In Britain, then, the growth of women's history in the 1970s was intertwined with the feminist politics of the Women's Liberation Movement, and especially with socialist feminist historians such as Sheila Rowbotham, Sally Alexander, Anna Davin, Barbara Taylor, Jill Norris and Jill Liddington who at that time were not employed full-time in higher education (Purvis, 1995, p. 10).

Some of these are the women also listed in Warwick and Auchmuty's (1995) article on women's studies and feminist activism (discussed below), yet Purvis does not relate them to the development of women's studies as they do. She argues instead that radical feminists who published in the field of women's history, such as Dale Spender and Sheila Jeffreys, have been more influential in shaping the field of women's studies than women's history, and notes that radical feminism has been a 'minority voice' in women's history (Purvis, 1995, p.13). These different perspectives on who was influential in which field, and which ideology was more influential, are part of the politics of writing a history of women's studies. However, both papers seem to agree

that the significance of these women is that they were activists 'outside' the academy. If this lack of employment is to be interpreted in any way, could it be indicative of the general resistance in the élite discipline of history to the integration of feminist knowledge, rather than an indication that these women were first and foremost activists? Purvis seems to be suggesting the latter.

Purvis also reifies the significance of the 'Big Three' (as she calls them) feminist ideologies (liberal, socialist, radical), and her version is as follows:

While the 'Big Three' divisions were regarded as convenient and useful for many purposes, the limitations of such labelling also became increasingly apparent. In particular, Black and lesbian feminists raised key questions about racism and heterosexuality, pointing out how their experiences as women had been marginalised in both feminist theory and practice. At the same time that this fragmentation was taking place, women's studies was becoming a major growth area in higher education - although women's history was much less rarely taught and often located within women's studies and sociology courses. But as the differences between women began to be voiced, women's studies and women's history became much more separate from feminist political struggles than had been the case earlier when the commonalities that all women shared were emphasized. (Purvis, 1995, p. 14).

For an historian, she presents a very ambiguous account of the development of women's studies (although not an uncommon account). She seems to imply that Black and lesbian feminist theories were responsible for the fragmentation of the movement and the depoliticization of women's studies. While this may support her argument against a postmodernist deconstruction of 'woman' as a political category, she has in the process constructed a problematic account of the history of women's studies. The outside/inside distinction and the reification of the 'Big Three' are

tendencies which are not unique to Purvis, and have led to a limited understanding of the link between academia and activism and the significance of disciplinary differences over ideological differences. This has implications in two main ways.

Firstly, the fact that Sheila Rowbotham, Sally Alexander, Anna Davin, Barbara Taylor, Jill Norris and Jill Liddington were historians may be more significant to the development of the women's studies curriculum than the fact that they were socialists. As Purvis acknowledges but does not develop further, women's history has not been a strong influence on the women's studies curriculum, although sociology has (she even briefly suggests that women's history was subsumed into sociology). If these suggestion had been explored further, a better understanding of the integration of feminist knowledge into the higher education curriculum could have been facilitated. For instance, the fact that the women she mentions found it so difficult to gain full-time employment in higher education may be more of an indictment of the élitist nature of history as a discipline, than an indication of the links between academia and activism. As Leonard noted in the early 1980s, 'few feminists have academic jobs in history' (Leonard, 1982, p. 10). These feminist academics were marginal to mainstream history, and as such history has remained relatively unreconstructed by feminism compared with sociology.

Secondly, her argument also makes a distinction between Black and lesbian feminists, and socialist and radical feminists, implying that, for example, Black women could not be radical feminists or lesbian feminists could not be socialists. These limitations are serious problems for the women's studies literature which uncrtically reproduces these tendencies in historical accounts of the way the subject developed. They have also led to a women's studies curriculum which emphasises ideological divisions, and is not as interdisciplinary as some women's studies practitioners suggest. The construction of this curriculum will be further explored in Chapter Eight.

3.5 The Women's Movement as Portrayed in the Women's Studies Literature

These tendencies can be further explored in other examples from the women's studies literature, which have presented a rather uncomplicated and even distorted view of the relationship between women's studies and the women's movement, and between feminist academics and feminist activists. A few published accounts of the relationship between the women's movement and academia in the UK make a strong case for feminist academics to be considered feminist activists, and for feminist forms of education to be valued as important contributions to the wider women's movement, as a way of 'educating for change' (Lowe & Benston, 1991, p. 48; and see also, for example, (Spender, 1981; Evans, 1982; Currie & Kazl, 1987; Warwick & Auchmuty, 1995). That this argument needed to be made at all suggests that the criticisms from the women's movement were touching a nerve. For example, as late as 1991, Sue Lees argued 'Isn't it time the connection between Women's Studies and the Women's Movement is fully recognised?' (Lees, 1991, p. 91). She identifies an 'anti-intellectualism' which has characterised much of the debate. Her plea for the recognition of the connections between the movement and women's studies in the academy is indicative of a defensive attitude in the women's studies literature. She argues (implying that there is much disagreement over this issue) that women's studies cannot be separated from the women's movement, as it 'did not develop solely or even predominantly from within the academic establishment but in response to demands made by women's groups and the Women's Liberation Movement' (Lees, 1991, p. 90).

This statement is similar to other conventional narratives, as Scott points out in her analysis of the women's history movement, and requires closer examination. An account which suggests that activists demanded knowledge, and women's studies courses were the response, overlooks the fact that some activists were highly critical of feminists in the academy. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven, the

establishment of the Women's Studies programme at PNL was not entirely the result of activists' demands, but rather an opportunity created by substantial funds from the GLC and ILEA. Furthermore, Lees' suggestion that there were women's groups *and* a Women's Liberation Movement is misleading: in fact, women's groups *were* the Women's Liberation Movement. This is important because the representation of a homogenous Women's Liberation Movement has been the subject of much debate, and enables the type of divisiveness Purvis describes.

The 'conventional narratives' which present women's studies as the academic arm of the women's movement have also tended to emphasise the 'Big Three' ideological strands. The ideological distinctions between feminists (both in the academy and outside of it) have become a common framework for introducing feminist theories to students who are new to feminist ideas. Some feminist theorists have, however, recently argued against this type of categorisation, partly because the development of postmodern theory has encouraged analyses which move beyond 'grand narratives', but also because these categorisations are criticised for being overly simplistic and prone to creating stereotypes. Some introductory texts to feminist theories, as mentioned above, have constructed an account which suggests that liberal, socialist and radical feminist theories were 'challenged' by black and lesbian theories. This type of categorisation positions lesbian and black feminisms as theories of the 'other', rather than as a theoretical analysis which should be central to all feminist theories. It also marginalises the perspectives of, for example, Black lesbian radical feminists. Barbara Ryan (1992) points out in her analysis of the US movement that the emphasis on the 'Big Three' has led to a limited understanding of the ways in which the goals and objectives of activists change over time.

Another tension in the women's studies literature has been created by the tendency to avoid emphasising the importance of individual contributions. An article by Alex Warwick and Rosemary Auchmuty (1995) is a rare effort to identify key women in the

development of women's studies. A footnote in the article presents the following facts:

The first Women's Studies class in Britain is believed to have been taught by Juliet Mitchell at the anti-university in 1968-1969. Other women who were both prominent in the Women's Liberation Movement and taught Women's Studies in the early years were Sheila Rowbotham, Sally Alexander, Anna Davin and Barbara Taylor. (Warwick & Auchmuty, 1995, p. 191).

What is interesting about this account is that the women they identify (most of whom are also mentioned by Purvis above) were not directly involved in the women's studies movement in the UK. They are feminist historians (apart from Juliet Mitchell, who left her university post in 1970 to become a freelance lecturer and psychoanalyst), and have taught feminist courses, but they have not argued for the establishment of women's studies as a discipline in the women's studies literature. In fact, their names do not appear in the list of the nearly 80 early, feminist courses I compiled from feminist newsletters in the 1970s and 1980s. This is not to say that they were not contributing to feminist education in the academy, but rather that their role in the development of women's studies as a discipline has been limited. The 'Founding Mothers' of women's studies are not these activists/academics. This is also true of other feminist activists and academics who published texts widely used on women's studies courses such as Elizabeth Wilson, Anna Coote, Ann Oakley, Lynne Segal and Germaine Greer (although Beatrix Campbell has participated in several of the Women's Studies Network (UK) Association conferences, and Greer was a keynote speaker in 1999). The women's studies movement has also at times been undermined by feminist academics who have not chosen to identify themselves with it, but have promoted feminist knowledge production in other subject areas instead.

It is interesting that the development of women's studies as an autonomous subject area is given short shrift in the authoritatively titled volume *British Feminist Thought* (1990) edited by Terry Lovell. In contrast to the triumphalist narratives of the early 1990s, Lovell portrays women's studies as under-resourced and 'incorporated', rather unfavourably comparing the undergraduate and postgraduate options on disciplinary degrees with the success of autonomous cultural studies programmes, such as CCCS at Birmingham (Lovell, 1990, p. 274). The impact of women's studies for Lovell is negligible when compared with the feminist theoretical developments in cultural studies. Clearly, an historical account of women's studies is needed which takes into account these differences in the choice to identify with women's studies or not. Individual contributions were also significant, in spite of a dislike of 'stars' and 'experts' which seems peculiar to British feminism.

In the history of higher education in the UK there has been in general a tension between political activism and academia that is not unique to feminism. Halsey's survey of the academic profession in the 1970s found that the majority of academics were middle-class Labour supporters (Halsey & Trow, 1971). The type of academic as a social critic who is broadly left of the centre and concerned with issues of social justice, and at the same time is middle class and part of the establishment, creates a pervasive tension in much of the academic profession. As Neale notes:

On the one hand, academics share the characteristics of the radicalized faction of the middle classes and the related notions of progressive political thinking, yet on the other, academics may subscribe to a middle-class ideology which is dominated by such concerns as individualism, careerism and competitiveness (increasingly so within the market-orientated shifts in higher education) and academics may be engaged in the production of knowledge which the state is able to use to legitimize its own discourses and activities (Neale, 1998, p. 50-51).

Russell Jacoby (1997) traces academic political consciousness over the past several decades, and notes that in the 1960s and 1970s Marxists were critical of academics as 'lackeys of the bourgeoisie'. He engages with these tensions in his critique of the 'tenured radical', and argues that 'oppositional' intellectuals are now very much part of the establishment in spite of their portrayal of themselves as 'outsiders'. His targets include prominent, feminist academics such as Gayatri Spivak and bell hooks, who write of their marginality while flying first class to international conferences as keynote speakers. Jacoby's arguments draw attention away from the very real discrimination against women, and black women in particular, in the academy. However, his historical account of the 'tenured radical' is useful in establishing a context for the 'anti-intellectualism' which characterised some of the reactions of certain feminists to feminist academics. Although social class was one of the key issues that initially motivated the women's movement through debates over the relevance of Marxism and socialism to feminist theory, the divisiveness of social class differences between women has recently been constructed as a 'forgotten' or marginalised discourse within women's studies courses (Reay, 1998; Jackson, 1998). The theoretical debates were initially perhaps not informed by the realities of social class differences between women in the movement and in the academy.

The history of the relationship between the women's movement and women's studies is much more complex than the conventional narratives suggest. The conventional narratives have been unhelpful in so far as they have relied on dichotomies: 'one' movement vs. ideological factions, and activism as 'outside' the academy vs. academics 'inside'. In exploring the claim that women's studies is the academic arm of the women's movement, it has become apparent that much of the criticism of feminist interventions into the academy initially came from a group of feminists who published in feminist newsletters and identified themselves as feminist activists. Although the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, for example, were highly critical

of feminist academics, some of the members of the Group were actually PhD students⁸. The conventional account of the development of women's studies as a response to demands from activists is problematised through articles which are highly critical of feminism in the academy. The divisions were probably related more to issues of social class than the dichotomy 'activists vs academics' suggests.

3.6 The Impact of Social Class

The debates over the development of feminism in the academy began as early as the mid-1970s, and were mostly published in the feminist newsletters of women's movement organisations. An important publication for the women's studies movement was the 'Women's Studies in the UK' (Hartnett & Rendel, 1975) booklet which compiled details for the first time of the growing number of feminist courses in universities. Even this seemingly innocuous publication was criticised. In the *Women and Education Newsletter* (No. 8, 1976, p. 4), a reviewer disparagingly notes that the booklet focuses on women's studies courses in universities. She writes: 'The impression given of w.s., by the language as much as the details, is of an academic, remote activity, concerned with respectability rather more than experience' ('Judith', 1976, p. 4). Similar discontent about the academic nature of women's studies was voiced after the Women's Studies Conference in Manchester on 11th and 12th December 1976. The *Women and Education Newsletter* reports that whilst Margherita Rendel was celebrating women's studies as a threat to conventional academia, Jo Sinclair was criticising women's studies for its irrelevance to political struggle (1976, p. 16). A report of this conference in the *Women and Education Newsletter* provides a flavour:

If Women's Studies are to mean anything, we have to fight against respectability and leading from the top in acquiring and disseminating

⁸One of my supervisors, Diana Leonard, has first-hand knowledge of the women's movement, and she suggested that this group had PhD students in it. I am grateful to her for many illuminating conversations about her experiences.

knowledge and understanding; we have to reject a hierarchy of knowledge and skills which suggests that some kinds of information are somehow superior, or that theory must be developed in a prescribed way, in the 'right' language. (Judith, 1976, p. 16)

This point is raised again in an article appearing in the September/October 1976 issue of *Catcall* (a newsletter for discussion and exchange of ideas for women in the women's movement) entitled 'Why Women's Studies?' by Jane Dixon:

My initial reaction to the question 'Why Women's Studies?' was 'Because it is a good thing!' The whole question, however, is a far broader and more complex one than this simplistic answer allows. It is a question which must be argued within feminist theory and within the aims of the Women's Liberation Movement. Women's Studies could genuinely contribute to the liberation of women. It could as easily become a mere liberal diversion from the real aims of the movement. (Dixon, 1976, p. 14)

She goes on to argue that 'to ensure that a substantial gap does not occur between the Movement and Women's Studies is going to make the whole question of the setting up and running of Women's Studies a major area of debate' (Dixon, 1976, p. 16).

By the end of the 1970s, Dixon's prediction had come true and the hostility was more evident. A vitriolic attack on feminist academics, written by the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, was presented at the WRRC Summer School in 1979 in a paper entitled 'Academic Women in the WLM: Every Single Academic Feminist Owes her Livelihood to the WLM'. In this provocative paper, the authors state their case against feminist academics:

We are angry because no credit is being given to non-academic women; because ideas of ours are being published outside the Women's Liberation Movement when they were not intended for that; because men are in this way being given access to our talents. . .(LRFG, 1979, p. 1)

The Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group may not be representative of the entire women's movement, but they were at least one group who did not perceive feminist academics to be in service to the movement. In fact, they clearly argue that 'activists' were developing the knowledge from which 'academics' were benefiting. Their paper goes on to criticise the BSA women's caucus in particular for including men in their discussions (LRFG, 1979, p. 1). One response to this attack indicates that the paper caused a great deal of debate at the Summer School:

One of the underlying issues at the conference was the relationship between academic and non-academic feminists within the WLM. Unfortunately most of the discussion on this took place in plenary meetings which generated more heat than light. But clearly it is an important issue. Many lay women felt resentful of the way academics can use feminist ideas to further their careers by writing and lecturing to an elite audience with little apparent commitment to making their theories or research results available to the movement in readily comprehensible language. (Kelly, 1979, p. 10)

The continuing concern over elite, academic language was given impetus through social class differences between women. Evelyn Tenison's article, 'You don't need a degree to read the writing on the wall' (1981), makes this explicit. She lambastes 'Ms Steptoe PhD', and sends a clear message to feminist academics:

It is nothing to do with intelligence. IT IS PRIVILEGE. I would like to burn that phrase into the brain of every middle-class woman and every working-

class woman who's been co-opted so far as to think she's 'made it' because of her superior intelligence (Tenison, 1981, p. 84).

However, it seems that most of the resistance feminist academics faced has been written out of the literature of the women's studies movement and replaced with the rather uncomplicated notion that women's studies has always been part of, and somehow in service to, the women's movement. Perhaps the fact that these feminists were themselves sometimes connected to the academy made it difficult to respond, as the issue was really not about 'activism' vs 'academia', but about the privilege that some middle-class women had. As Leonard suggests, the division between 'those who have, and those who do not have jobs has added to the . . . anti-elitism in the movement' (Leonard, 1982, p. 8).

The hostility of the above articles may not be indicative of the entire debate, as other published material suggests more disappointment than anger. After the establishment of named degree programmes in Women's Studies in the early 1980s, the concern about links to the WLM prompted some women within women's studies to respond to continuing criticisms from feminist activists (Evans, 1982; Hey, 1983; France, 1983). As Fildes acknowledged, 'there remains within the feminist movement a powerful undercurrent of hostility against women's studies generally and theoretical endeavours in particular' (Fildes, 1983, p. 62). After the early 1980s, this debate took a back seat in the women's studies movement literature for two understandable reasons. Firstly, as women's studies courses became established across the UK it became more difficult to argue that they should not exist. Secondly, as the WLM became much less visible throughout the 1980s (as did many political movements) the feminist newsletters of the movement slowly stopped being produced.

The criticisms from certain feminists were perhaps more pronounced in the UK than in the US. The movement in the UK was divided by debates over the use of Marxist

theory, which could have led to a distrust of theory in general by some feminist activists and the greater uneasiness around class divisions between women. Furthermore, the higher education system in the UK has a more élite tradition, which led many feminist activists to question the viability of incorporating feminist ideas into this exclusionary environment. This was compounded by what may be a peculiarly British anti-intellectualism, or anti-institutionalism, which is less common in the US. As Hey notes: 'British feminists have always exhibited a vigilant hostility to established structures and it is this context which casts most light upon the pallid reception given by sister feminists to the creation of WS courses in Higher Education' (Hey, 1983, p. 299).

These divisions between women have led to the types of feminist academics to be described in the next chapter. The interviews and historical data collected have suggested that an analysis is needed to describe women's perspectives which are not based on an activist-academic divide and which shift the focus away from ideological differences between women. As has been shown, the history of women's studies is much more complicated than the linear narrative which suggests that the women's movement demanded knowledge and women's studies provided it. Furthermore, the notion that black and lesbian feminisms challenged the 'Big Three' ideological strands and fragmented the movement needs to be problematised. Women's studies textbooks have sometimes reified this account by presenting the different ideological strands in these terms. This narrative is also beginning to be deconstructed, in order to illustrate how the women's studies curriculum has marginalised black and lesbian feminist theories (see Stacey, 1993; Bhavnani, 1993; Wilton, 1993). The differences between feminists to be highlighted in the next chapter focus instead on different views about where feminist interventions can be located within the higher education system.

CHAPTER FOUR

WOMEN'S STUDIES PRACTITIONERS AND FEMINIST ACADEMICS

4.1 Introduction

The preceding overview of the women's movement illustrated some of the debates over the desirability of developing women's studies as an academic subject area. Although the women's studies literature continues to emphasise the relationship of the women's movement to women's studies, on closer examination it is apparent that this relationship has been fraught with difficulties. The fact that there have been substantial criticisms of feminism in the academy from women involved in the movement raises questions about the women's studies movement itself: how much of a consensus has there been amongst feminist academics to develop women's studies as a way of integrating feminist knowledge into the curriculum? This question also became significant during the fieldwork for this research. My initial assumption that certain feminist academics considered themselves to be women's studies practitioners turned out to be wrong on several occasions. For instance, one well known feminist academic, whose books are widely read on women's studies courses, surprised me by making negative comments about women's studies. Her insistence that she didn't 'do' women's studies was perplexing, and led me to reconsider the different perspectives of feminist academics. She is only one of many feminist academics who seem to distance themselves from women's studies, both in this fieldwork and in the wider feminist literature.

As mentioned before, the choice to identify with women's studies is often a political choice. It could be the case that these same feminist academics chose to identify their work with women's studies in other contexts. Yet the question still remains as to why they sometimes do not, and whether or not this has any relevance to the status and structure of the development of women's studies as a subject area. The interviews indicated that there is a lack of consensus amongst feminist academics as to the development of autonomous women's studies courses and their position within the higher education curriculum, and that there are many feminist academics who do not always identify their interests with women's studies.

An issue in the literature which helps explain these perspectives is the integration/autonomy debate. The concern that the development of women's studies courses would lead to a 'ghettoisation' of feminist courses, leaving the mainstream curriculum unexamined, has been an important issue. However, the differences in view between academics concerned to integrate any type of feminist intervention into the curriculum go beyond this dichotomy. Renate Klein (1986) developed categories of women's studies lecturers in her research which allowed for a more sophisticated analysis, and her categories will be summarised below. Yet beyond this, there is little information on the differences between women who lecture on women's studies courses and their perceptions of the ways in which feminists can most usefully intervene in the mainstream curriculum.

4.2 Differences between Feminist Academics in the Literature

4.2.1 The Integration/Autonomy Debate

The integration/autonomy debate was first mooted in feminist literature in the US in the early years of the development of women's studies courses. Bowles and Klein (1983) raised the issue in their seminal collection of articles about women's studies courses and the potential for their development in the future. A few years later, the issue had gone beyond what ideally could be developed within the curriculum, to the

merits of various feminist projects which had been carried out in universities in the US. An entire issue of *Signs* (a feminist, academic journal) was devoted to this debate, with several contributors describing projects which were externally funded and which revised the mainstream curriculum from a feminist perspective, and/or educated non-feminist lecturers on new feminist theories within their disciplines (Aiken & Anderson, 1987; Andersen, 1987). The debate concerned whether or not the limited time and funding available to feminist academics should be devoted to revision of the mainstream curriculum or the development of autonomous women's studies programmes. This discussion was not as important in the UK context, mostly because external funding for feminist projects for transforming the mainstream curriculum was simply not made available to the extent that it was in the US¹.

Feminist academics in the UK in the 1980s were limited in many cases to what could practically be achieved given the constraints of resources and the specialised degree programmes in the UK which militated against the development of interdisciplinary programmes. However, the integration/autonomy debate was still an issue raised by informants in this study. Some feminist academics argued, for example, that teaching on a women's studies course was 'preaching to the converted', and that it was preferable to 'sneak' feminist theories into a mainstream course where students would not normally be exposed to it. The word 'ghetto' was frequently raised in the interviews, yet it has negative connotations which suggest, whether intentionally or not, a derisive attitude towards women's studies². It is difficult to ignore the negativity which some feminist academics apparently feel towards women's studies. On the other hand, the feminist informants who established autonomous women's studies degree programmes, or who were highly involved with the women's studies courses

¹The Ford Foundation in the US devoted substantial funds for a number of curriculum transformation projects. These are described in Fiol-Matta & Chamberlain, 1994, and focused on the integration of literature by 'women of color' into women's studies and mainstream curricula.

²The term 'ghetto' was usually used in the interviews in a way which implied it was undesirable. Another way of perceiving the term could be that it is an enforced position, and as such a political identity which reflects the resistance to women's studies. The informants in this research did not appropriate the term in this way.

at their institutions, were more likely to emphasise the necessity for a 'space' for feminist theories to be developed and taught outside of the mainstream curriculum. The distinction between these two perspectives is significant, however, it is not the only difference between feminist academics.

The women's studies movement literature was initially influenced by feminist academics with strong ties to women's studies in the US, who encouraged the development of autonomous women's studies in the UK. Dale Spender wrote an early article (1978) in *Women's Studies International Quarterly* titled 'Notes on the Organisation of Women's Studies', which overviewed the development of women's studies courses in the US and encouraged feminist academics in the UK to follow. Renate Klein (1981) added to this literature with her article 'A Case for Women's Studies as a Field of its own in Higher Education' in the *WRRC Newsletter*. Once women's studies courses had been established in the UK, the feminist academics involved in developing them were able to contribute. Mary Evans, for example, raised the visibility of women's studies with her article 'In praise of theory: the case for Women's Studies' in *Feminist Review*, published in 1982. It is obvious even from the title of these articles that they were in favour of developing women's studies as a recognisable and autonomous subject area. Yet from the women's studies literature it is difficult to ascertain how many feminist academics were in favour of integration rather than autonomy, or were able to do both.

4.2.2 Klein's Categories

The most substantive piece of research on women's studies in the UK in the 1980s was Renate Klein's (1986) PhD thesis. She interviewed feminist academics in the UK, and although she did not find a consensus in their views, she was only concerned with feminist academics who were already involved with teaching women's studies courses. However, it is useful to summarise the different perspectives that she identified. Klein categorised her informants into four groups (A, B, C and D), and

these categories were broadly based on the extent to which she perceived these academics argued for 'women-centred' women's studies courses. To briefly summarise:

Group A: these feminist academics agreed that acknowledging power differentials in women's studies is more honest than pretending to create a pseudo-egalitarian environment in a women's studies classroom, and assume that good teachers will impart the right knowledge rather than developing specifically feminist teaching practices. For them, women's studies is the logical conclusion to their demands for social justice and their project is to introduce and defend knowledge about women. Their main goal is to add the experiences and perspectives of women into the traditional curriculum, rather than to fundamentally challenge knowledge.

Group B: these feminist academics are more likely reflect on their teaching practices but in a general way. For them, feminist scholarship has made a strong impact on the construction of knowledge and society at large. Their feminist project is also remedial but more influential in changing other disciplines.

Group C: these academics have a strong women-centred viewpoint. They believe in a women-centred environment which is empowering in a political way. Their goal is more towards the production of women-centred knowledge.

Group D: these educators create a feminist environment and actively discourage men from participating. They are sceptical about the success of women's studies but find women-centred environments rewarding personally and are less concerned about changing higher education than Group C academics. Their feminist project is working towards an autonomous women's studies and outside contacts are not sought.

Klein has provocatively argued that 'There is no room for men in women's studies, none whatsoever' (Klein, 1983, p. 413). Although in her thesis and elsewhere (1981; 1983; 1984; 1994) she has argued for the development of women-centred, autonomous women's studies programmes, she identified fewer Group C and D academics than the others. In fact, there have been relatively few feminist academics who have publicly made the case for women-centred women's studies programmes, seeking to exclude men as far as possible and concentrating their energies on creating feminist spaces in women-only classrooms. Although Klein may perceive this to be the ideal, it is nearly impossible to achieve in practice in the context of higher education in the UK. Men can not legally be prohibited from enrolling on women's studies courses in universities, although they can be subtly discouraged from taking courses if they are interviewed when applying for the course (especially at postgraduate level). This is a practice which has been anecdotally discussed in the literature (Philips and Westland, 1992).

However, the criterion of 'women-centredness' as developed by Klein is a limited approach in the context of this research. None of the informants in this study admitted to discouraging male students, although many did acknowledge that their classes were often women-only because men simply did not enrol on them. This was a situation which was probably more common in the early years of women's studies than it is now. Women-only spaces may have been welcomed, and often led the course tutors to re-examine their teaching strategies (or at least raised an awareness of differences between women-only and mixed classrooms) but it was not argued for in the interviews as an essential aspect of women's studies. Several informants had actively sought out male colleagues as contributors to courses, and discussed the necessity of educating male students.

Klein's categories are a useful background to this analysis, however, as she offers a more sophisticated approach to the integration/autonomy debate and whether or not to

challenge and transform the mainstream curriculum. These were issues which were significant within the interviews, and require an analysis which describes the different perspectives. Before discussing the types to be proposed in this study, however, it is necessary to summarise other differences between feminist academics and their perspectives on the location of women's studies in the curriculum.

4.2.3 The Big Three?

The historical background summarised in Chapter Three raised the issue of political differences between feminists, and noted that the ideological distinctions which are emphasised in feminist theories have undermined the disciplinary differences between feminists. One possible way of describing differences between feminist academics would be to categorise them according to their ideological orientations, usually liberal, socialist or radical feminists. These categories have been a common way of explaining feminist theories and the different perspectives of feminist theorists. Most of the academic informants from the Kent case study, for example, defined themselves as socialist feminists in the early 1980s, but no longer considered this label appropriate. This was also noted by the students, particularly the radical feminist students who thought the course content was biased as a result of the socialist politics of the lecturers. Significantly, what they all argued is that these ideological categories are no longer as clear cut and diametrically opposed. In the early 1980s, a feminist who identified herself with radical feminism would be aligning herself with certain opinions and concerns with which a socialist feminist may completely disagree, or see as less important for women's rights. For example, several informants noted that the radical feminist students wanted to discuss pornography, which (they argued) was resisted by the course leaders. However, these same informants implied that their politics have since moved on.

The ideological distinctions between feminists were a significant aspect of the women's movement, in the early 1980s in particular. Although these categories have

changed and developed over the last three decades they still have relevance. For the purposes of this research, however, it would be difficult to categorise the informants through ideological or political leanings. Firstly, many feminists reject such labels, and do not orientate their work towards a particular ideology. As Stacey argues, these categorisations can lead to stereotyping: 'radical feminists are dismissed as essentialist, lesbians are all assumed to be radical feminists, socialist feminists are assumed to be uninterested in sexuality, and liberal feminists are seen as naively reformist' (Stacey, 1993, p. 52).

Secondly, as mentioned in Chapter Three, these categories have been criticised and contested, particularly through the influence of postmodernism (Middleton, 1993, for example, discusses this in relation to feminist theories in the sociology of education). Most importantly, though, to categorise women's studies lecturers through these political groupings would not tell us very much about women's studies and its place in the higher education curriculum. There may still be feminist academics who consider their political orientation to be a factor in whether or not they choose to identify their scholarship with women's studies. For instance, a radical feminist may be more likely to have a women-centred perspective, whereas a socialist feminist may not privilege a gendered perspective. However, the informants in this case study did not emphasise these issues.

The types described here are an attempt to conceptualise the different perspectives of feminist academics which incorporates the domain of the higher education curriculum into Klein's women-centred categories. They are intended to expand and clarify the different perspectives of feminist academics with regard to women's studies. These types also reflect the historical development of women's studies in the UK: the first group were influential in terms of advancing feminist knowledge in the 1970s, and the last are almost so recent as to fall outside the time period of this study.

4.3 The Different Perspectives of Feminist Academics

a) Independent feminists. This first group refers to feminists who have been perceived to be more associated with activism than academia. These women may not have been employed full-time within a particular higher education institution, and/or were more involved with developing feminist education within adult education. As Warwick and Auchmuty argue, 'as long as Women's Studies stayed at community level, Women's Studies teachers could be defined as activists' (1995, p. 183). Only one of the informants in this case study would fall into this category, as she was highly involved in women's studies in adult education, extra-mural provision, and the WEA. However, several informants did begin their careers by teaching women's studies in adult education. Examples of Independent feminists are also identified by Susan Sheridan (1990), who notes that 'most of the early women's liberation analyses of women's condition as one of oppression were produced outside of the academy' (Sheridan, 1990, p. 41). These feminists published books which were widely used on many early women's studies courses: for example, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1971), Anne Oakley's *Housewives*, and Juliet Mitchell's *Women's Estate* (1971).

A sub-category within this group is comprised of what I will call Feminist agitators, who published criticisms of feminist academics in the women's movement newsletters. Some of these women were also students and academics, but as they usually published anonymously it is difficult to identify individuals. Their attacks on women's studies led to debates in the early women's studies literature which have since been written out of the conventional accounts of the history of women's studies. The defensive attitude which is apparent in some of the women's studies movement literature testifies to these individual's ability to agitate. It is arguable that the 'outside/inside' dichotomy was created mainly through the debates initiated by the Feminist agitators (which is ironic considering that some of them were 'inside': hence the need to deconstruct the outside/inside dichotomy).

b) Disciplined feminists. The second group of feminist academics developed feminist knowledge within a limited range of disciplines (such as sociology, anthropology, literature, psychology or history). The Women's History Network, the BSA women's caucus, and the London Women's Anthropology Group are examples of organisations which created a space for feminist knowledge to be developed (alongside an academic type of activism) within a disciplinary framework. Most of the informants would be identified with this category. Their aims are for revision of the mainstream disciplines through feminist perspectives, but also include the integration of feminist principles into the activities of academics within these disciplines. The BSA women's caucus, for example, organised study days for women, published a non-sexist guide for academic writing, and reviewed the promotion rates and careers of women sociologists. Many of these academics have contributed to women's studies courses by offering modules on feminist perspectives in their discipline.

c) Women's studies practitioners. The third category are feminist academics who argued for the development of women's studies as a discipline or separate subject area within higher education. Renate Klein has perhaps been the most prolific writer in this category in the UK, but Maggie Humm, Mary Evans, Chris Zmroczek, Cathy Lubelska and Sue Lees all also published articles arguing for the development of autonomous women's studies programmes (and several were able to establish women's studies programmes in higher education institutions). Most of these feminist academics were associated with a particular higher education institution, and are arguably the true 'founding mothers' of women's studies, mainly through their course leadership in a particular institution (Humm at East London, Evans at Kent, and Lees at North London)³.

³It should perhaps be noted that further research on the history of women's studies in the UK could focus on these Women's studies practitioners. This research does not centralise their histories as one of the aims of the study was to understand resistance to women's studies and feminist courses in different types of higher education institutions. As such, it was felt that a case study approach was more appropriate, even though this leaves out the voices of several Women's studies practitioners who

d) Indisciplined feminists. The final category of feminists are academics who work within an interdisciplinary framework outside of formal women's studies course programmes, and who do not necessarily privilege a gendered analysis in their research. Recent theoretical developments in the general field of cultural studies are a common area for these feminist academics. Several informants fell into this category, and most of them argued against women-only classes and referred to the dangers of the women's studies 'ghetto'. Examples include Elizabeth Wilson, Debbie Epstein and Trevor Broughton. These feminists teach on women's studies courses, and arguably have developed their interdisciplinary interests because of women's studies. In other words, it was the opportunity to cross disciplinary boundaries through teaching women's studies that led to their current research interests (Broughton (1993) argues this point in her article 'Cross Purposes: Literature, (In)discipline and Women's Studies', as does Rosemary Deem (1996) in 'Border Territories'). Recent developments in the field of 'gender studies' would also place some feminists into this category.

As with any attempt to categorise, these types do not have unpermeable boundaries, and they are more of a description of different perspectives than an attempt to impose labels. There are also influential feminists who do not neatly fall into one particular category for various reasons. Some feminists might argue that it is possible to be a Women's studies practitioner and a Disciplined or Indisciplined feminist at the same time. Diana Leonard, for example, may perceive herself as a feminist sociologist, and therefore a Disciplined feminist, but her leadership of the women's studies course at the Institute of Education and her publications and extensive work within the field of women's studies would place her partly in the third category. Relatedly, there are perhaps a few feminists who would almost fit into all four categories if their entire career was taken into account (Bev Skeggs, for example). Yet these perspectives

were not employed at the case study institutions (although their publications are a major contribution to this research).

contribute to an understanding of the development of women's studies which has not yet been evident in the women's studies literature in several ways.

Firstly, the integration/autonomy debate constructed a dichotomy which in practice has not been relevant in the UK context. Many Disciplined feminists also contributed to women's studies by offering modules on women's studies courses based on feminist perspectives in their fields. They do not identify themselves as Women's studies practitioners, but they have been willing to teach on women's studies courses if they have the opportunity. Their contribution to women's studies has often resulted in multidisciplinary women's studies courses, consisting of various modules depending on the disciplinary backgrounds of the academics. Women's studies practitioners, on the other hand, have argued for the development of women's studies as an autonomous, interdisciplinary subject area. They are not necessarily against integration in the disciplines, but they have been able to develop, for a variety of reasons, autonomous women's studies courses and have obtained (or created) lecturing posts in Women's Studies. There are many more Disciplined feminists in higher education than Women's studies practitioners.

Secondly, these descriptions of different perspectives allow for the fact that there have always been feminist academics who have not identified their interests with women's studies. Some of the Independent feminists in the early 1970s, as mentioned in the previous chapter, have been described in the women's studies literature as virtually the 'founding mothers' of women's studies. This account is somewhat misleading. Although they produced texts which were widely used on women's studies courses, they have not directly contributed to the development of autonomous women's studies programmes in higher education institutions. The Feminist agitators, on the other hand, have been ignored in the women's studies literature. The attempts of some Women's studies practitioners to defend women's studies in the literature were often an indirect response to their criticisms, but there has not been a sustained engagement

with their concerns (and considering the vitriol of their attacks this is partly understandable). However, some of the points they raised about exclusivity and impenetrable theory perhaps have deserved greater attention.

Two decades later, there is another group of feminist academics who do not argue for the necessity of women's studies as an autonomous subject area. Indisciplined feminists are deconstructing the category 'woman', and moving beyond gender as a privileged site of analysis. Although they may teach on women's studies courses, the motivation for their interdisciplinary approach is as likely to be 'race' as gender. These feminist academics, like the Independent feminists, have been important for the development of women's studies in so far as they have contributed to feminist knowledge production, and may teach various modules on women's studies courses. Yet they have not been at the forefront of developing autonomous women's studies programmes in higher education institutions. The integration/autonomy debate as constructed in the women's studies literature has not allowed for this diversity of perspectives of feminist academics.

Thirdly, and most importantly, one of the motivations for describing feminist academics in this way was the need to deconstruct some of the assumptions in the women's studies literature. The literature has tended to privilege the influence of the women's movement, and the different political ideologies of feminist academics. These factors are important, but women's studies has developed within the particular context of the higher education system, and the influence of this context deserves further analysis. Relatedly, there is a need to deconstruct the activist/academic and outside/inside dichotomies which has been reinforced in the literature. A central argument in relation to these types is that *all* of the women in these categories were, and still are, feminist activists. Independent feminists were not located 'outside' higher education in the same way that Women's studies practitioners were not 'outside' the women's movement. Feminist knowledge production, and feminist

methods of 'educating for change', have been significant contributions to the wider women's movement.

4.4 Summary

In general, however, the motivation for identifying these different perspectives was the large number of informants who described themselves in terms of their disciplinary backgrounds rather than discussing the necessity for autonomous women's studies programmes. The Disciplined feminists were the most common amongst the informants in this study. The range of disciplines in which they were working was limited: I interviewed sociologists, anthropologists, social psychologists, psychologists, philosophers, educationalists, and historians. A few others had backgrounds in social policy and administration, literary studies, and psychoanalysis. I also interviewed one feminist scientist, one feminist economist, one feminist in leisure and tourism studies, and one male academic in international relations and one in politics. The majority of the students I interviewed from all of the case studies had gone on to become academics. Only one of these became a Women's studies practitioner, and the others were Disciplined feminists mostly in the same areas as the above academics, and a few also taught on women's studies courses.

Although the women's studies literature often describes women's studies as an interdisciplinary subject area, there are not that many feminist academics who describe themselves as interdisciplinary specialists in women's studies. Most of the informants I interviewed described themselves as feminist sociologists, or feminist historians, and so on. Furthermore, only one of the students from a women's studies course became a Women's studies practitioner. The continuation of women's studies as an autonomous subject area depends in part on a new generation of Women's studies practitioners graduating from women's studies courses. Several times during the interviews the informants had to consult their university prospectuses in order to answer my questions about the availability of Women's Studies doctorates in their

institutions: in some cases these were technically possible but were not taken up. A few informants explained that not many women want a PhD in Women's Studies, even if they are able to obtain one. The number of women who obtain PhD's in Women's Studies in the UK has always been relatively small. This is partly due to the fact that there are simply not enough lecturing posts in Women's Studies, which may be somewhat of a Catch-22 situation, but it does have implications for the status and future development of the field.

The fact that many feminist academics did not, and do not, become Women's studies practitioners is a crucial issue for the development of women's studies as a subject area. Some of the criticisms of women's studies have already been discussed in relation to issues from the women's movement, and these debates may partly explain why some academics were reluctant to develop women's studies courses. However, it became apparent during the fieldwork that the institutional and disciplinary contexts in which these feminist academics were located varied significantly. The integration of feminist knowledge into the curriculum required different strategies in different contexts, and the challenges that these women faced varied in relation to the culture of the case study institutions. Once a space for feminist or women's studies courses had been created, the various approaches to the construction of the curriculum in these courses and the teaching methods used were influenced by the different disciplinary backgrounds and the cultures of the institutions.

The above different perspectives add to an understanding of why feminist and women's studies courses developed in the ways that they did, but it must be noted that in practice the decision whether to integrate or be autonomous was sometimes based more on what could realistically be achieved given the context of particular institutions. Autonomy is, in fact, an ambiguous term: by exploring in-depth the histories of feminist and women's studies courses in the case study institutions a more complex understanding of the status and location of women's studies as a

multidisciplinary subject area in higher education can be developed. The notion that autonomous women's studies courses can become a 'ghetto' has been popular, and contrasts with the notion that women's studies will transform the academy. Both ideas, however, have had little relevance to the realities of integrating feminist knowledge into the mainstream curriculum.

The case studies were chosen because of their different cultures, and accordingly the feminist and women's studies courses that developed differed in their structures, teaching methods, aims and curricula. In order to analyse the development of women's studies and feminist courses, then, it is necessary to understand the higher education context. Significantly, women's studies developed during a time of rapid and substantial changes in the higher education system. The following chapter overviews the shift from an élite to a mass system, and focuses on those changes which have had implications for the development of women's studies programmes.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT

5.1 Higher Education as a Social Institution

Sarah Neal recently argued that 'higher education has now to be viewed as the social institution it has always been' (Neal, 1995a, p. 2). Rather than being a novel development, the study of higher education as a social institution has been on the increase since the 1970s. The changes in the higher education system post-1963 have been well-documented, but it must be noted that a considerable frustration in this study is the overwhelmingly ungendered analysis offered in the mainstream higher education literature. The field of higher education studies in the UK has been male-dominated, and most of the literature offers only one chapter or section on women students and/or women academics (see, for example, Scott, 1984; Silver, 1990; Halsey, 1971, 1992; Pratt, 1997; NCIHE 1997), and perhaps even none (see Barnett, 1990; 1997b). This is a significant gap, and the impact of the changing demographics of higher education in terms of women's participation, especially in terms of the increase in women students, has yet to be fully understood.

It is somewhat encouraging, therefore, that Paul Trowler (1998) has chosen to develop an analysis of gender in his research on recent changes in higher education (Trowler, 1998). His ethnographic study of 'NewU' revealed that the 'New Higher Education' (modularisation, credit accumulation and transfer, semesterisation etc) had benefited women academics who used certain policy changes to their advantage. He shows how women's studies at NewU developed in stages from individual modules, to a recognised subject area, and eventually into a defined field. The development of women's studies courses not only made the subject area more visible, but it also enhanced the career

prospects of women academics who gained course leaderships and sometimes promotion as a result (Trowler, 1998). Trowler's study is significant not only because it is a contribution to the mainstream higher education literature which adopts a gendered perspective (and uncritically discusses the development of women's studies), but also because it reveals the ways in which the enormous changes in higher education can sometimes work to the advantage of women academics. Whilst women's studies has often been portrayed in the women's studies literature as challenging the higher education system, or even in opposition to the academy, there have been certain changes which facilitated its development. The 'great patriarchal metanarrative' needs to be re-examined, and understood perhaps as more of a process of negotiation and compromise, than simply opposition.

5.2 The Robbins Report

The purpose of higher education underwent a fundamental shift after the Robbins Report was published in 1963. It is at this point that higher education came under greater public scrutiny as a social institution accountable to wider needs of society than had previously been the case. Historically, the English idea of university education was based on a narrow set of values, which are characterised by notions of autonomy, intimacy, selectivity, and antiquity (Halsey & Trow, 1971; Middlehurst, 1993). The medieval universities of England and Scotland catered for a select group of 'cultivated men' who were seeking to attain the highest levels of knowledge, truth, and scholarship (Neale, 1998, p. 18-9). It was also 'paternalistic' (Martin, 1990) and had at its root a socialisation role to 'prepare young men for elite positions in society' (Halsey and Trow, 1971, p. 68). For instance, Newman was unapologetically overt in his description of the socialisation purpose of the university:

Students come from very different places, with widely different notions, and there is much to generalise, much to adjust, much to eliminate, there are inter relations to be defined, and conventional rules to be established in the process, by

which the whole assemblage is moulded together and gains one tone and one character. (Newman, 1852, quoted in Sutherland, 1990, p. 37).

The system began gradually to expand in the early part of this century, but it has been the extraordinarily rapid expansion from the 1960s onwards, and the creation of a stratified system, which characterises the time period of this study. This shift from an élite to a mass higher education system has profoundly re-shaped higher education. Since the 1960s, the higher education system has undergone a process of re-evaluating its aims and social worth (Wright, 1988).

The main argument of Robbins was that there was an 'untapped pool of ability' for whom the system should expand (Robbins, 1963). The purpose of expansion was to provide more graduates prepared to enter into, and satisfy the needs, of the labour market. The polytechnics were therefore a result of government policy in the 1960s, and the majority came into existence in the early 1970s. The 1966 White Paper designated 28 (later 30) technical and other public sector colleges to form the non-university sector as part of the binary policy on higher education. These polytechnics granted degrees which were accredited through the Council for National Academic Awards. The goal of the policy, outlined in the 1966 White Paper, was that 'as comprehensive academic communities they will be expected to cater for students at all levels of higher education', and it was envisaged that they would widen access to non-standard entry and other under-represented students in the university sector (Pratt, 1997). Above all, they were intended to provide the professional, vocational and industrial training that the universities had previously neglected.

5.3 The Binary Divide

It is common for higher education institutions to be identified through just two categories: the 'pre-1992' universities and the 'post-1992' universities (or 'chartered' and 'unchartered' universities respectively). This is an historical legacy from the binary

divide which categorised institutions according to whether they bore the title of university or polytechnic. In 1992, the Further and Higher Education Act abolished the CNAA, allowed polytechnics to acquire university status and award their own degrees (although polytechnics had been removed from the Local Authority sector after the 1988 Education Reform Act). The polytechnics were thus a short-lived 'experiment', as Pratt (1997) describes them, in the history of higher education in the UK. The 'success' of this experiment is open to speculation, and depends on whether the perspective is focusing on academics or students in terms of social class, gender or 'race'. Before assessing their impact on women's participation, it is necessary to first describe the characteristics of these two sectors.

Pratt (1997), in his history of the polytechnics, draws from Burgess (1977) in defining the 'two sectors' of the higher education system as consisting of the 'autonomous' tradition (the universities) and the 'service' tradition (the polytechnics). He describes the autonomous tradition as 'aloof, academic, conservative and exclusive' (ostensibly academically exclusive but likely to be socially exclusive), whilst the service tradition is characterised as 'responsive, vocational, innovative and open' (Pratt, 1997, p. 9). In more descriptive terms, the élite climate of the older universities with their gowns and ceremonies, 'dreaming spires', dons, and paternalistic tutorial systems have cultivated an atmosphere far removed from the urban polytechnics with their diverse student populations, scarce resources, tower blocks and large lecture halls. Yet these are descriptions of extreme ends of the stratified system, and are useful only to the extent that they provide a very general sense of the two cultures as popularly perceived.

Pratt's study, as one example from the higher education literature in the UK, presents a typically ungendered perspective of these cultures. It is necessary to 'read between the lines' for a feminist perspective. He describes the autonomous tradition as follows:

People devoted to developing the disciplines and solving the problems require protection from governments and social pressures, to pursue free inquiry and preserve bodies of knowledge. They emphasize the preservation, extension and dissemination of knowledge "for its own sake." Academics speak of pursuing truth or excellence and derive their justification from a discipline or body of knowledge.

(. . .) The tradition has tended to be educationally conservative. (Pratt, 1997, p. 9)

The service tradition, by contrast, tends to pursue knowledge not for its own sake but to meet the needs of the students and the local community, and tends to be vocational yet educationally innovative (Pratt, 1997, p. 10). As will be discussed further in Chapter Eight, the dominant discourses of the academy which value 'objectivity' and 'truth' are masculine discourses, and the conservative element he identifies could easily promote anti-feminist perspectives. The discourses of the service tradition, by contrast, are somewhat more amenable to women: the term 'local' is quite often a veiled reference to mature, women students who can not move to other regions to study due to childcare or other family responsibilities, and an 'open' and 'innovative' education implies a curriculum which may grant spaces for developments such as women's studies. However, this is not to imply that the polytechnics were created with the specific aim of increasing women's participation in higher education, although the number of women students has greatly increased since Robbins.

5.4 The Campus Universities

Yet the history of the stratified higher education system as so far described is too simplistic. The cultures of the Kent and Sussex case studies, while commonly designated pre-1992 universities, do not fit neatly into Pratt's 'two sectors'. Known as 'new' universities when they were founded in the 1960s as part of a government policy of expansion prior to Robbins, they have since been called 'Plateglass', 'Campus', or

'Greenfield' universities (they will be referred to here as the 'Campus Universities'). The other Campus Universities founded in the 1960s (initially called the 'Seven Sisters') were East Anglia, York, Essex, Warwick and Lancaster (Halsey, 1992, p. 65), of which York, Warwick, Essex and Lancaster have all had long-running, well-established Women's Studies degree programmes. Sussex has had a variety of feminist courses on offer with only a recently established postgraduate degree in Women's Studies, while Kent offered the first MA in Women's Studies in 1980.

The Campus Universities are perhaps most commonly characterised by their 'new maps of learning' (Briggs, 1964), or innovative curriculum developments. Michael Beloff, in his history of the Campus Universities, argues that 'a combination of social need and intellectual fashion determined the overall pattern of study at the Plateglass Universities' (Beloff, 1968, p. 40). In particular, they encouraged interdisciplinary studies in contrast to the specialist degrees at the old universities. The Campus Universities have been described as 'self-consciously modern' (Filmer, 1997, p. 50). Yet were not an entirely innovative break from the past, and some of them shared similarities with Oxbridge in terms of the curriculum (Halsey, 1992). Sussex has even been called 'Balliol-by-the-sea' (Trow, 1965, p. 163). In many ways, they embodied the philosophies of a liberal education, as defined by Goodlad:

A broad understanding of human nature, society and institutions, accompanied by a critical capacity to make choices and distinctions and to exercise, where necessary, a reasonable independence of mind (Goodlad, 1997, p. 13).

A liberal education is based on the pursuit of knowledge, the creation of an autonomous, free thinker, and a general education. Their physical locations, too, have been perceived to be an important defining aspect of their culture, as they were:

... located away from large centres of population, in the cathedral town-country estate setting that had become typical of elite schools. In these cases, physical form followed social and psychological function - the embodiment of an ideal of 'civilization' bound up with preindustrial, preurban models, forming an amalgam of an idealized medieval church and a similarly idealized 18th century aristocracy. (Weiner, 1981; quoted in Filmer, 1997, p. 50).

Social class has been one of the defining aspects of academic culture. Ainley (1998) compares their culture to 'finishing schools', and Halsey (1992) argued that their label of 'new' was 'meaningless' as their curriculum was based on an Oxbridge model. Although Kent and Sussex are similar in this aspect, they are distinctive in terms of their public reputation and perception of their cultures. Beloff reveals that Kent was seen to be in the pocket of the church and was often compared to the 'wanton' Sussex (Beloff, 1968, p. 134). His account of how these public reputations were formulated illuminate the (exaggerated) differences in cultures at these institutions: 'The most celebrated example of Plateglass *éposé* was a series published by the *Sunday Telegraph* at the end of 1965, depicting Sussex as a modern Babylon, and Kent as a cross between a monastery and a police state' (Beloff, 1968, p. 154). It is interesting to contemplate on the extent to which Kent's location on the outskirst of a cathedral town, and Sussex's location near the seaside town of Brighton, have influenced the academic life on their campuses.

Fulton suggests 'it is only realistic to recognise that the choice of site does exercise an important influence' because of whether or not 'men of great academic talent will go there' (Fulton, 1964, p. 13). Whether certain types of academics were drawn to Brighton, whilst others were drawn to Canterbury, is only a matter for speculation and is rendered nearly impossible by the fact that they are both (just) within commuting distance of London. Fulton's reference to 'men of great academic talent' illustrates again the need for a gendered analysis. A few academic informants from Kent said that they obtained their jobs after moving to Canterbury on the basis of their husband's

employment at the University. These social factors have been for the most part neglected in the higher education literature as worthy of serious consideration.

These different cultures of higher education institutions, and the dramatic changes in higher education post-1963, have had implications for the development of women's studies courses. On the most basic level of analysis, it has been women who have established these courses and women who have graduated from them, so the increase in women's participation in higher education is an important factor in the history of women's studies. This is perhaps a 'critical mass' theory of successful innovations in higher education, and as it is an important factor, it is necessary to explore the effects of the expansion of the higher education system.

5.5 Women Academics

The higher education climate is often described as 'chilly' for women academics¹, and in this respect the 'great patriarchal narrative' is not always an exaggeration of the situation. Halsey and Trow's major survey of the higher education profession in the UK gives scant regard to women academics, apart from acknowledging that they make up only 10% of the staff and are concentrated in the lower ranks (Halsey and Trow, 1971, p. 162). They provide an indication of the invisibility of women academics through the 'typical academic' resulting from their survey:

This fabricated creature emerges from the statistical tables as a scientist aged 36, married with two children and holding a lectureship at a major Redbrick University. He is at the top, or near the top, of the lecturing grade and is a candidate for promotion. . . he is comfortably inside the top 10% of earners, a secure member of the British middle classes (Halsey and Trow, 1971, p. 171).

¹Beck (1990) traces the origins of this term in the US, and it is also used by Green & Brec'had (1989) in the European context.

The typical academic was therefore a man; however, it should be noted that he was also middle class, heterosexual, from a scientific background, and presumably white. Women academics within this context were not the norm, and this became a cause for concern in the 1970s (Blackstone, 1975; Blackstone & Fulton, 1975). More recent figures reveal that little progress has been made since that time. Women are still disproportionately represented on the lowest grades. The Universities Statistical Record (1993) reported that 10% of senior level posts were held by academic women, and the Association of University Teachers (1992) conducted an audit which indicated that, overall, academic women in universities earned 16% less than men (see also Bagihole, 1993; Brooks, 1995; Heward, Taylor, & Vickers, 1995; Morley, 1994; West and Lyon, 1995). In 1997, only 8.1% of professors were women (THES, 3.7.98). Famously, the Hansard Society proclaimed that it was 'wholly unacceptable that British universities should remain bastions of male power and prestige' (Hansard Society, 1990).

Although the number of women academics has been an important factor for the development of women's studies, it has rarely been acknowledged that effective leadership can also be a criterion for successful innovations in higher education. This is no doubt related to feminist principles which reject hierarchies, and as discussed in Chapter Three, the women's movement was based on a structureless, leaderless form of organisation. Yet many of the most successful women's studies programmes in the UK are associated with the academics who established them. The development of women's studies has not entirely been a collective enterprise, as the structures of higher education institutions militate against this form of organisation. Conversely, it was anecdotally suggested to me that certain women have obstructed the establishment of women's studies courses in a few universities². Yet the power of individual women to either promote or resist the development of women's studies in institutions has not been a subject feminist academics are keen to explore, and certainly does not factor in the

²I was informed in several interviews (and heard anecdotally) that certain women had 'blocked' Women's Studies course proposals. This was usually attributed to the undesirability of being associated with a low status subject. On the other hand, some Women's studies practitioners were described as good leaders.

'triumphalist' narratives of women's studies. One of the other factors which receives scant attention is the impact of the number of women students in higher education.

5.6 Women Students

In general, the government policies for developing a stratified higher education system were motivated by both social and economic change (Neal, 1998). Shifts in the labour market created the need for a more widely trained workforce in science and technology, both of which have been traditionally masculine domains. New social demands also motivated change: post-war ideology emphasised meritocracy alongside increasing Welfare State provision. The creation of the polytechnics were an attempt to both broaden participation rates generally and offer professional and vocational training for a new workforce. This workforce was implicitly perceived to be male and working-class.

Rosemary Deem, in a paper presented to the 1977 British Sociological Association conference, was sceptical that the increase in the number of polytechnics would be beneficial to women. She argued that 'polytechnics at least were seen as being or becoming socially responsive institutions, although so far they have remained remarkably resistant to social change' (Deem, 1977, p. 10). Crosland's original speech on the idea of polytechnics emphasized 'opportunities for social mobility' but none of the 'policy declarations explicitly envisaged improving provision for women' (Deem, 1977, p.11). As Deem pointed out, a major objective of the polytechnics was the attempt to produce a more educated labour force, but the areas of employment traditionally occupied by women were not generally the jobs the polytechnics were educating students to do. Deem's paper was an early attempt to analyse the changing nature of the higher education system from a gendered perspective, and she presents an entirely pessimistic view of the opportunities for feminist interventions. Two decades on, her arguments seem overly pessimistic in some aspects. Trowler (1998), for example, found the polytechnics did offer women more opportunities, especially in terms of curriculum

interventions and career advancement (and Rosemary Deem's career perhaps corroborates this).

The analyses of changes in higher education post-1963 have been more concerned with issues of inequality in terms of social class than gender. As has been argued, 'understanding the polytechnics is impossible without an acknowledgement of British class structure and class prejudices' (Robinson, 1995; in Pratt, 1997). There has been a great deal of prejudice from the wider university sector concerning the status of polytechnics. Expansion has not necessarily been welcomed by the wider community, and has led to concerns that standards are being lowered. The *Sunday Times*, for example, argued in 1995 that universities were awarding 'dummy degrees' (Smith and Webster, 1997, p. 2). Allington and O'Shaughnessy (1992) have also argued that academic 'excellence' has been eroded by expansion. As will be explored in the next chapter, these debates have had an impact on the academic culture of PNL. The perspective that the increasing number of 'non-traditional' students were lowering standards was part of a wider 'discourse of derision' (Ball, 1990) which will be discussed further in Chapter Six.

In 1963, Robbins had shown that the proportion of working class students in higher education had remained consistent for the past 30 years: only one-quarter of students had a manual occupational background, although they represented two-thirds of the population (Pratt, 1997). Yet when national data was finally collected in 1991 concerning the socio-economic status of polytechnic students (national data on ethnicity was not collected), it was found that only 28% were from manual backgrounds (Pratt, 1997). It must be remembered, however, that the government policies did not explicitly and specifically argue for greater participation of students from working-class backgrounds. As Neal argues, 'that there are now routes of access into higher education for previously excluded groups has to be viewed as a by-product of these policies rather than their original or primary intention' (Neal, 1998, p. 24).

As a by-product, the increasing number of women students has been impressive. In 1962, women were only one quarter of the student population (Robbins, 1963); today they make up slightly more than half of the student population (West & Lyon, 1995). This increase has had an effect on the types of courses which are offered. Nationally, the number of technology and engineering courses has decreased while there has been a rise in the number of students on social science courses. The number of women students 'increased nearly ten-fold from 1970-1987' in the social sciences alone (Pratt, 1997, p. 61). In 1976/77, the UGC statistics indicated 65% of all undergraduate sociology students were female, and just under half of all postgraduate sociology students (Rendel, 1980, p. 4). Significantly, too, the social sciences have been a popular location for women's studies courses. Polytechnics have also been at the forefront of developing modular degree schemes, which have allowed for a flexibility in the integration of feminist courses. In general, the more lenient entry requirements, the flexible, part-time modular degree courses, and the funding policies designed to attract mature, non-standard students have all been significant factors in the development of women's studies programmes in the polytechnic sector. The Polytechnic of Central London offered, from 1977, the first Diploma in Women's Studies, and The Polytechnic of North London established in 1986 the first undergraduate part-time, evening, half-degree programme in Women's Studies. The first full-time undergraduate degrees in Women's Studies as single honours programmes are usually attributed to two former polytechnics, now the University of East London and the University of Lancaster.

Universities and polytechnics also found themselves adapting to a new student population with new demands: the student revolts in the late 1960s had initiated debates about the role of students, and there was a general shift from paternalistic attitudes towards students to an increasing acceptance of their input into administrative and curriculum matters. Many universities and polytechnics decided, post-1968, to allow students onto academic committees as representatives (Jacka, Cox and Marks, 1975),

and some students did demand that courses were added into the curriculum which reflected their political interests (Yeo, 1970). However, Deem's paper again presented a sceptical account of these changes, arguing that the student movement had 'failed, both inside and outside of the bureaucratic structures, to take account of the interests or concerns of its female members' (Deem, 1977, p. 6). She went on to predict that the student movement's 'fate' should provide an 'awful warning of what can happen to radical movements' in that students were co-opted, given token representation, and the student movement itself was 'defused' and 'contained' (Deem, 1977).

5.7 Feminist Transformation?

It is apparent that the culture of higher education has been through dramatic changes post-1963. Beyond the rapid increase of women undergraduate students, the benefits of these changes in terms of the development of women's studies are complex. Women's studies courses at undergraduate level increased in number throughout the late 1980s as they were seen to be economically viable in a system which was expanding without the necessary financial support (Adkins & Leonard, 1992). Women's studies courses could be established with little extra resources, and they initially attracted large numbers of motivated women students (and, significantly, large numbers of working-class, mature women students). The number of postgraduate courses also increased in the 1980s (Leonard, 1998), and again Masters programmes in women's studies could be offered by institutions aiming to recruit fee-paying students without dipping too far into the coffers. Yet women are still under-represented at the higher levels of education: they make up roughly one-third of all students registered for a doctorate and are mainly located in the Humanities and Social Sciences (Leonard, 1998). Women's studies at doctoral level has not been a major growth area, and as Allen (1997) suggests, this may have serious implications for the status of the subject.

In spite of the increasing awareness of women's marginalisation, and the growth of women's studies courses and feminist knowledge production, the academy has largely

remained unmoved and uncritical. There is a growing body of literature on feminist research into higher education, tackling issues such as sexual harrassment (Bagilhole & Woodward, 1995; Ramazanoglu, 1987), academic women (Morley, 1999; Brooks, 1995), feminist knowledge production (Spender, 1981; Belenky *et al.*, 1986), funding policy (Delamont, 1989a), and equal opportunities (West & Lyon, 1995; Heward, Taylor, & Vickers, 1995; Neal, 1998) to more recent studies of the consumer/market culture (Skeggs, 1995; Kenway & Langmead, forthcoming), to cite just a few. The 'transformatory' nature of women's studies is somewhat called into question by the overwhelming lack of response from male academics to feminist critiques.

However, the growing awareness of the extent of women's marginalisation in the academy, and the intransigence of this 'male bastion', has proved to be a major impetus for the development of courses which reflect and provide a space for women's experiences. Many feminist academics in the 1980s looked to the development of women's studies as a correction to male bias and the marginalisation of women. The following chapter will explore these changes in the case study institutions, particularly in terms of the impact of the increasing number of women students and academics.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CASE STUDY INSTITUTIONS

6.1 Introduction

Whilst mainstream higher education studies have tended to produce ungendered accounts of changes in higher education, the women's studies literature has tended to neglect the wider higher education context. Although some Women's studies practitioners have discussed the situation within their own institutions and some of their experiences teaching women's studies courses,¹ comparisons across institutions, or the impact of different institutional cultures, have not been explored.

In the following sections, each case study will be described through a summary of the origins of each institution and the social relations within the institution. As mentioned in Chapter Two, I also made visits to the institutions in order to search their archives and conduct interviews, and these visits impressed upon me the differences in environment in which students and academics were brought together. As most of the data is historical, the impressions I gained in the 1990s are perhaps of limited value. The historical and archival material uncovered did support my impressions, but more importantly it soon became apparent that in general the academic world of the 1960s and 1970s was very different to the present climate. At the most superficial level, the literature gave the impression that universities were 'communities', distinctive from other institutions or organisations in their structure, values and management (Lockwood 1980). The literature on the whole presents an ungendered analysis,

¹ See Mary Evans (1983) on the University of Kent at Canterbury; Rosalind Brunt *et al* (1983) on Sheffield City Polytechnic; Jalna Hanmer (1991) on the University of Bradford; Sue Lees (1991) on the Polytechnic of North London.

however, and the following sections will discuss the masculine culture of these academic communities as constructed in the historical material.

The data from the case studies is concerned with different decades and, accordingly, different political climates and shifting higher education policies. The LSE data focuses on the 1960s and 1970s, as the feminist informants I interviewed were discussing this particular period of expansion and increase in the number of women academics. They were all in their first academic posts during this time, but most of them had left the LSE by 1980 (and have gained senior posts elsewhere). The data from the Campus Universities will focus mainly on the 1970s and 1980s which were two very different decades in terms of changes in the higher education system as well as the women's movement: generally a period of transition for both from expansion and growth in the 1970s, to constraints and declining morale in the 1980s. The Polytechnic of North London data is mainly concentrated in the 1980s, when the political discourses and ideologies of higher education were entering a phase of conservative politics and Thatcherism, the rise of the New Right, and a backlash against 'political correctness' signified by GLC policies. The data from the case studies are therefore an overview of the history of each institution as well as a micro-study of three decades of transition in higher education.

6.2 The London School of Economics

6.2.1 Origins

Opinions about LSE differ widely: to some, it is a dangerous hotbed of Marxist revolutionaries; to others, the respectable academy of future Prime Ministers, economists, political scientists and financiers (Abse, 1977).

I had never been to the LSE prior to conducting the fieldwork. The buildings on Houghton Street are impressive, and although students are often crowding the streets

during term-time, the corridors inside can be strangely quiet and somewhat intimidating. An entry in my field diary written in November 1995 recounts my first visit to the LSE. I waited in a virtually empty corridor for nearly an hour outside my informant's office door (who turned out to be ill but had not got a message through to me). At one point a male academic from across the corridor, who had poked his head out several times, decided to ask me if I needed any help. His somewhat patronising manner suggested to me he thought I was an undergraduate student attempting to inconvenience a colleague. He told me to return during the informant's posted office hours. (I eventually found a secretary who explained my informant was ill and the appointment was rescheduled). This experience, as will become more clear, contrasted greatly with my experiences at the other case study institutions.

The LSE was chosen as a case study as an example of the élite, high-status, scholarly, established universities. These universities in the UK (Oxbridge, Durham, LSE and the other major London colleges) were all very late in developing any type of feminist research or teaching, and one of the objectives of this research is to explore the factors which led to a resistance to feminist scholarship in these types of institutions. The LSE has unique origins, however, and as the above quotation suggests, its history has been characterised by contradictions. The most comprehensive and authoritative history of LSE was published by Ralf Dahrendorf, director of the School from 1974-1984, in celebration of the School's centenary (1995). *LSE: A History* is an expensive and weighty book providing an invaluable insight into the culture of this internationally-renowned institution which earned its reputation mainly through the number of formidable, influential (male) scholars who have worked there over the years. University history books such as these are sociologically interesting in themselves: they are usually written by prominent male faculty and attempt to portray the inner life of these social institutions with a mixture of reverence for great scholars, gentle mockery of the more eccentric side to academic life, and a judicious account of the public controversies the university may have faced. This history of LSE will rely

heavily on Dahrendorf, although Joan Abse's *My LSE* (1977), an edited collection by former students and staff, was also a useful guide.

Dahrendorf relates the well-known story of the founding of the LSE. In 1894 Sidney Webb was the benefactor of £20,000 from a Fabian Society Member for furthering the causes of the Fabian Society and its Socialism. The LSE, part of the University of London since 1900, was established to promote research in the social sciences, which the Webbs preferred to be conducted in an environment untainted by vested interests in spite of their political leanings (Dahrendorf, 1995). Although the School is a specialist institution and was founded to pursue issues of social justice, which distinguishes it from the other élite institutions, it has always been divided between its scholarly and more practical inclinations. Dahrendorf surmises that the pure, academic school of thought has prevailed: in other words, it has 'drifted' into Burgess' autonomous tradition (1977) in spite of its origins.

The LSE was also considered to be an interesting case study because of what has popularly been called the 'Red Myth'. The reputation of LSE as a 'hotbed of revolution' was largely created by its Fabian origins, student unrest in the 1960s, and by its association with high-profile, left-wing public figures (the Webbs, Tawney, Beveridge, Attlee, and Laski). During the 1960s, the LSE had a 'very left-wing reputation, not altogether deserved' (Beloff, 1968). Indeed, many of the contributors to Abse's book are 'anxious to explode' the myth and emphasise its conservative nature (Abse, 1977, p. 9). In particular, Robert McKenzie notes that the School attempted to 'exorcise the Laski factor', and suggests that Dahrendorf was careful not to appoint academics with close ties to political parties (McKenzie 1977, p. 99-101). One academic informant noted that in the late 1960s and early 1970s the left-wing members of staff were in a minority, and were to some extent regarded with suspicion by their colleagues. In accordance with the autonomous tradition, some of the leaders of the LSE clearly wished to project an image of an institution 'untainted' by political

(especially left-wing) interests. In this respect, feminist academics were perhaps transgressing a boundary around politics and academia which the leadership of LSE wished to maintain.

6.2.2 Social Relations at LSE

'*Prima facie* LSE did well for women' Dahrendorf states towards the end of this book in the token paragraph concerning the status of women (Dahrendorf, 1995, p. 517). Dahrendorf's overall conclusion was reached after naming the few senior women who established themselves at LSE over the years, although he does note that some might disagree. He puts forward Hilary Rose as one example, who began her career as a mature student on the Diploma in Social Studies in the early 1960s and was a lecturer in the Department of Social Science and Administration until 1975. Dahrendorf relates that she published an obituary of Ruth Glass (*The Guardian* 17 March 1990) in which she 'pointed out academic and intellectual sexism' at LSE; this was challenged by Professor Terence Morris who wrote a letter in response saying her claims were 'outrageous' (30 March 1990). Clearly her statements ruffled a few feathers, and Dahrendorf's inclusion of this letter implies sympathy with Morris.

In relation to women at LSE, Dahrendorf writes proudly of the fact that there was a high incidence of staff marriages: usually senior male members of staff with female secretaries, graduate students, and junior lecturers (and Dahrendorf himself married a female lecturer). These heterosexual social relations are used as evidence of a tightly knit academic community which is likened to a 'family', and these relationships were often celebrated in the university histories I consulted. Similarly, Joan Abse notes that 'many LSE students believe that they belong to a special fraternity' (Abse, 1977, p. 9). Fraternity is an appropriate word: in 1967, 76% of all students were men (Blackstone *et al*, 1970). The gendered, hierarchical structure of social relations and stereotypes of masculinities and femininities in higher education are appropriately captured in these heterosexual discourses of 'family' and 'fraternity' (Aisenberg &

Harrington, 1988), and will be further explored throughout the following chapters. Suffice it to say here that Dahrendorf and Abse are proud to be members of the 'club'. The exclusiveness of these academic communities is not explicitly referred to in university histories, although the photographs give an indication as they are mostly pictures of older white men in suits.

An interesting feature within my sample, and one which was indicative of the time but is no longer common, were the several women employed at LSE after completing only their first degree. These three women were young, rather inexperienced, and were or became mothers during their careers at LSE. One informant, who was not in this position herself, told me that a particular department of LSE frequently employed young women who simply did not stay in their posts. She said, 'they appointed these bright, young, new PhD's, or not even PhD's, and somehow because they were young, I don't know, they moved out of that department altogether or they didn't come back to the LSE after having a family'. These young women were, perhaps, perceived to be non-threatening, temporary, and inexpensive additions to the academic staff at LSE.

To focus firstly on the aspect of being a young mother, it is worth the reminder that the stigma attached to working mothers was much more pervasive at the time. As one informant said, it was as if her male colleagues had all read Bowlby and were judging her accordingly. Another informant said she was 'heavily criticised' by friends, family, and even her GP, for being a working mother. These informants described how they took great pains to separate their 'private' lives from their working lives, as have many academic women over the past three decades (see Blackstone & Fulton, 1974; Leonard & Malina, 1994; Munn-Giddings, 1998). One woman said she felt compelled to return to work two weeks after giving birth ('completely exhausted'), as asking for maternity leave may have jeopardised other women's chances of being employed. Another woman discussed the subtle pressures on working mothers and

said 'you assumed perhaps wrongly that if you missed anything that they would see that you did it as a mother'. These women all said they supported each other through a sense of 'solidarity' by, for example, covering classes when a baby was ill.

Women who work in environments in which they are outnumbered by men often suffer from subtle forms of indirect discrimination as a result of being expected to conform to a working pattern based on the typical man's lifestyle (Acker, 1993). The typical academic man in the 1960s and 1970s had a wife who looked after the children and the house (and perhaps also performed some secretarial functions for him). These discrepancies in lifestyles led to more subtle forms of discrimination. One woman, for instance, even had difficulty articulating the feeling two decades later:

There was a sense, that we, there was a sense, is what I am trying to say, in which there was a kind of, you know, kind of, there weren't any words for it. I mean there was a kind of consciousness that - oh, couldn't miss it - that we were being picked on because we were working mothers and you weren't supposed to be a working mother, um, we were conscious in many ways that we didn't fit, um, the male norm. (Feminist Informant [3] LSE)

The idea of the 'male norm' was deeply embedded in the anecdotes the women recounted, and was so pervasive that academic men were in some ways beyond censure². One academic woman recounted anecdotes which illustrate the double standard men enjoyed. She remembered that an academic man on more than one occasion used the excuse that his wife was menstruating for his absences from the office. On another occasion, he accepted a telephone call from his daughter during an important meeting in his office and had a lengthy discussion with her concerning the fact that their cleaning lady had walked out that morning. The academic women, on the other hand, felt great pressure to keep their 'private' lives separate from their working

² An article in the journal *Gender and Education* (Coate, 1999) explores some of these issues further.

lives. Sue Lees' account of discovering a nappy pin on her jacket during a lecture and feeling her 'cover had been blown' is a similar sentiment (Lees, 1991, p. 99). One academic woman said there was 'a tacit understanding that you wouldn't make a fuss - you dealt with your problems'. The freedom to have personal problems, and for these problems to intrude into their working lives, was a significant privilege for academic men. Another woman stated: 'I do remember even then feeling that there was an injustice in that how you were treated as a woman having children was different from how you were treated as a man with personal problems'. The personal problems of women were viewed as a sign of weakness, although they bore no relation to the intellectual abilities these women possessed. Men's personal problems, such as divorces or complicated affairs (which were anecdotally discussed during some interviews), were regarded as irrelevant to their capabilities of doing the job.

As one woman academic said:

There was a kind of power thing that was threatening - after all they were making demands implicitly - I mean nobody actually said you are a woman, you have to do this, you are never to talk about this - but it was always there and you were slapped into place - not slapped literally but metaphorically if you were out of turn. But probably looking back they were scared, you know, because after all here they were in not a hugely well paid but prestigious occupation, overwhelmingly male and here were these young, very young women apparently able to do their job at work and be mothers and wives and partners as well. And I'm sure that must have seemed threatening. (Feminist Informant [2] LSE)

As mentioned, I did interview two women who were still employed by LSE at the time of the interview. Although they did not provide a particularly strong feminist critique of their situation, as the other women did, a closer analysis of the language they used

is revealing. For instance, one woman noticed how in the 1970s the academic women stood out:

There are some advantages to being a woman because you stand out in a sense, as being very good. . . there was a period also where if you were a woman you had to work five times as hard to show that wasn't all you were. And the first woman who was our head of studies was really seen as female rather than an academic. (Observer Informant [1] LSE)

There is an interesting slippage between the phrase academic and woman in this quote which implies that the term academic normally referred to men at LSE (academic was therefore a gendered term), and this created a necessity for academic women to prove that they were 'more than just women', whatever that might mean. Another academic man who also still works at LSE made the gendering of the term academic transparent when I asked him if there were ever any links between feminist activism and LSE. He replied:

There were no feminist outrages here. . . I mean there was one interesting case which was there was a physically attractive young woman lecturer [...] she was very sort of sexually provocative. People saw her as very sexually provocative and she wasn't um, didn't get tenure. Although I think she probably would have deserved tenure in terms of publications but she was not given tenure. Interestingly she wasn't a feminist, she didn't come across as a feminist, she came across as a woman . . . maybe if she had been a feminist that would have been different. That's the only case I can remember of sex and gender being a political issue. (Observer Informant [3] LSE)

The implication in this quote is that to be a woman was enough to cause a refusal of tenure. On a deeper level, however, the way in which this anecdote is phrased is

indicative of the strength of the dominant discourse: 'she came across as a woman' would not make sense if converted into 'he came across as a man'. Furthermore, women are more often perceived in sexual terms in the workplace than men, who are more likely to be perceived as asexual and natural inhabitants of the organisation in which they work (Gutek, 1989). A perception of women as sexual will often 'blot out' all other characteristics and the preoccupation with women's sexuality will sometimes take precedence over any work related abilities (Kanter, 1977). At the other extreme, one informant remembered that an academic woman was refused tenure after she insisted her name be included as a co-author of a book written with several male colleagues. She had transgressed a different boundary.

As will be discussed in the next chapter, the LSE environment was not particularly amenable to feminist interventions. The next case study, the University of Kent at Canterbury, was founded with a different ethos, and the feminist academics who established the MA in Women's Studies degree programme were able to draw from a different ideology in their attempts to integrate feminist knowledge.

6.3 The University of Kent at Canterbury

6.3.1 Origins

The new universities fondness for old ritual at least gives a clue that there is something continuous in the idea of a university that has survived into the Twentieth Century (Beloff, 1968, p. 186).

My visits to Kent were the least enjoyable in terms of travelling on public transport. The trips to the campus from London, as many students on the MA course made at least once a week, were long and tedious. On one visit, I arranged to interview an academic informant in her office on campus, and afterwards to travel into Canterbury to interview a former student in her home. The taxi company told me it would be at

least a half hour wait for a cab, which would make me late for the interview with the student. I telephoned her to apologise and we conducted the interview late, but she later referred to the incident to illustrate how the students felt 'stranded' on the Kent campus and out of touch with the real world. However, I did spend an enjoyable afternoon one day having a stroll around the Cathedral grounds, but it was easy to empathise with the students when they were critical of the conservative, homogenous, and 'small-town' environment of Canterbury. It did indeed seem a somewhat incongruous location for the first Women's Studies degree programme in the UK.

Although Kent was designated as a 'new' university in 1961, the first students did not arrive until 1965. The planning that went into the construction of Kent was considerable. Graham Martin, former Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Kent, has written a history (1990) which is remarkably similar in tone to Darhendorf's history of the LSE. He emphasises the ways in which Kent was designed to foster an academic community in a traditional sense. The site was chosen in part because of its long history of scholarship (St Augustine, no less), and because it would provide plenty of space for student accommodation (Martin, 1990). Martin writes that the 'Founding Fathers' (mostly Oxbridge dons) were 'seized with the importance of providing student accommodation on campus to develop a community spirit', and in order to achieve this community they designed Colleges which would each form a 'true community of masters and scholars' (Martin, 1990 p. 109). The Canterbury 'philosophy' was embodied in the 'College', which was intended to resemble a 'family home' and provided accommodation for both students and staff (Beloff, 1968, p. 133).

The location on the outskirts of Canterbury meant that many students moved away from home to live on campus: Kent was designed not so much to respond to the needs of the local community, but more to create its own community. As Anderson argued, Campus Universities were 'a striking triumph of the pastoral ideal' which

broke the links established by the civic universities with their localities (Anderson, 1992, p. 25). This 'pastoral ideal' certainly left a legacy: in particular the student informants in this study were critical of the way the atmosphere on campus seemed remote. Yet the maintenance of this tightly knit academic community was not as easy as the Founding Fathers would have perhaps liked, and it was the employment of fairly junior, non-Oxbridge members of staff in particular which to some extent disrupted the 'ideal'.

6.3.2 Social Relations at Kent

An indication of the number of women academics at Kent in the early years is provided by Martin's admission that the Colleges could not be single-sex as they would not have enough female academic members of staff to head the women's colleges. In 1964, the establishment of 'mixed' Colleges was a 'revolutionary proposal' (Martin, 1990, p. 115), but was based more on practicality than a change in moral values. Martin also acknowledges that the Deans of Faculties were initially appointed by private enquiry because they needed to find out 'Is he one of us?' (Martin, 1990, p. 47). It would be difficult to find a more blatant example of the 'Old Boys Network' in action, and Martin seems proud to acknowledge it. In fact, none of the appointees in the first round were women.

An academic informant discussed the status of women:

In those days, I mean especially in the early 70s, there weren't, and aren't, very many women in the universities anyway but I guess there were even fewer. I was the only woman in the department which I worked in. . .there have been women in the universities for quite some time but on the whole the model which they offered was simply a model of ignoring, disguising, really refusing gender specifically and just saying well here we are and we're all the same. I mean there was this kind of androgyny - but of course what that

didn't do was make men feminine, it was always used the other way round. It was always used to the effect of making women masculine. (Feminist Informant [6] UKC)

Other, more subtle indications of the early social relations at Kent are provided by Martin. He adds to the tradition of celebrating heterosexual discourses as a fundamental aspect of academic communities through his continual references to the number of marriages that took place between Kent colleagues. A rather sexist streak is revealed in at least one member of staff, the Dean of Humanities, who wished to respond to complaints that Kent was too paternalistic. He penned the following for the academic community's amusement: 'I take a good deal of trouble over my students; You are paternalistic; They (tutors in general) are a lot of fussy old women' (Martin, 1990, p. 117). Academic wit quite often targets feminine stereotypes (Ramazanoglu, 1987).

In Martin's obligatory, token paragraph on women at Kent he makes reference not to the first named degree programme in Women's Studies in the country, but to the University Wives Club, a social organisation intended to welcome and entertain the spouses of male faculty members. One academic informant, who was the wife of a Kent lecturer in the 1960s before establishing herself as an academic, was prompted by my discussion of Martin's history to recall the 'gowns' and 'high tables' of the early years of Kent. I also mentioned the Wives Club, and she said:

I remember that. I remember going to those first Wives Clubs and then after a bit there was a great debate about whether it was for [spouses] in which case husbands of female academics should be able to go or is it for women in which case female academics can go, and the decision was made, it should be for spouses. But that was rather, that was exactly Kent in the late 60s and early

70s. It still goes actually - it is quite nice for people who come from abroad - but it still goes, yes. (Observer Informant [1] UKC)

The academic 'community' is one of the defining characteristics of the institutional cultures of both Kent and Sussex. The residential nature of these institutions created social environments which women academics could not easily separate from their working lives. The influence that friendships had on the decisions that were made in course proposal meetings, on employment prospects for women and so on are not documented (as they take place 'under the stage' (Trowler, 1998), but in such a tightly knit community they were probably substantial influences. Several of the academic informants at Kent acknowledged that their husbands first gained employment at the university. The implication of this is that they may have found it easier to obtain a job as the wife of an established academic. The academic 'community', therefore, can be a powerful aspect of institutional culture³.

The patriarchal relations within the 'community' which characterised the early years of Kent were, however, disrupted by feminist discourses entering the margins through the employment of young, female members of staff. Most of the academic women who established the MA in Women's Studies were members of a women's group called 'Women on Campus' which formed in the mid-1970s (and which, typically, does not get a mention in Martin's history). These types of feminist, academic interest groups may have been a common origin of feminist and women's studies courses at many higher education institutions, yet they were not mentioned in any of the histories of universities I consulted. Their feminist, transformatory potential is somewhat called into question by this silence, but it could also indicate that resistance took the form of a refusal to engage with these challenges.

³It would be interesting to study the 'under the stage' decision-making aspects of the history of women's studies courses. It could be the case that friendships had an influence on how decisions were made. If academics socialise together as heterosexual couples they may have found it awkward to object, for example, to a colleague's wife who put forward a proposal for a new women's studies course. This is, of course, mostly speculation and would require an ethnographic study of some detail to uncover and analyse.

6.4 The University of Sussex

6.4.1 Origins

The Sussex campus is similar to the Kent campus, as both are located in the country and are within commuting distance from London. Travelling to Brighton was the most enjoyable part of the fieldwork, as I always made time to walk to the beach or wander through the streets full of shops, bars, cafes, and clubs. Brighton has a large gay community which contrasts greatly with the conservative environment of Canterbury. Although the campus is a few miles from Brighton, it was easy to imagine that the students and academics at Sussex had a very different experience from those at Kent. It was understandable, in comparison, that Sussex was described in the mainstream press as 'wanton'.

The University of Sussex was founded in 1960 and the first cohort of students (about 50) arrived in 1961 (Fulton, 1964). In terms of its early public reputation, according to Beloff, Sussex was the most famous, and perhaps relatedly, the most 'radical' of the Campus Universities (Beloff, 1968, p. 80). The 'radical' image of Sussex derives from its innovative curriculum design and its student population, who were politically active during the late 1960s. Like the other Campus Universities, Sussex's campus was relatively small and residential. The planners wanted to foster a sense of community, but were unable to build enough accommodation for students. Instead, they decided to develop a tutorial system modelled on Oxbridge, which the students attended in their first 2 years supplemented with voluntary lectures (Clark, 1995, p. 68; Fulton, 1964, p. 19). Maurice Hutt, a contributor to David Daiche's collection on the early years of Sussex (1964), argued that the tutorial system was intended to provide a sense of academic community.

Sussex is well-known for its innovative curriculum structure which is based on 'Schools' rather than discipline-based departments. Becher, however, points to the similarities of the undergraduate 2 year preliminary course (studied in a School rather

than a department) with the Oxbridge system (Becher, 1987). Each School offers 'Contextual Courses' which draw together the different disciplines of the faculty represented in the School. One academic informant explained that when she arrived at Sussex in the mid-1970s, 'the contextual courses in CCS (the School of Culture and Community Studies) were huge umbrella courses with titles like "Man and his Image in Nature" or "Individual and Society"'. Most of the informants acknowledged that they enjoyed the interaction with academics from other disciplines, but admitted that the structure was not as innovative in practice as it appeared. An unpublished PhD thesis (Lockwood, 1980) on the history of Sussex argues that many of the founding ideas were in practice difficult to achieve.

Asa Brigg's contribution to Daiche's collection, entitled 'Drawing a New Map of Learning', explains that the idea was to 'break free' from 'excessive specialisation'. So, for example, in the School of European Studies, students read history, languages and philosophy together. Corbett wrote, 'We are all to some extent prisoners of the academic classifications in which we are placed; it does us good to have to move outside them' (Corbett, 1964, p. 26). Similarly, Briggs notes 'We did not want to be confined to our own original territory even though the boundaries within it were being knocked down' (Briggs, 1964, p. 66). This discourse of territories and boundaries has more recently been described as 'spatial metaphors for pedagogy' by Edwards and Usher (1997), and are usually associated with emancipatory practices. These geographical metaphors have become familiar within feminist and critical discourses concerning pedagogies and interdisciplinarity. Although the founders of Sussex explicitly encouraged the 'breaking down of boundaries', Sussex did not develop a women's studies programme until an MA was established in the 1990s.

6.4.2 Social Relations at the University of Sussex

The academic informants had different opinions about whether Sussex 'did well for women'. It is perhaps not surprising that the academic women I interviewed who are

still at Sussex were the most positive. A male lecturer was less positive, saying 'it was rather ironic about Sussex having this reputation as being radical and innovative and all that' when quite a few of the best academic women at Sussex had failed to achieve promotion to professorship. In fact, there have been several prominent feminist academics at Sussex over the years, but some informants suggested they did not receive the promotions they deserved. The most negative view was expressed by a feminist academic who decided to leave Sussex partly because of what she perceived to be sex discrimination.

The reputation of the 'wanton' Sussex was promoted by the popular press who were intrigued with the new development of co-educational campus accommodation. Maurice Hutt was seemingly defensive about this image, and his article on 'Undergrads and their Problems' is an interesting historical piece. The arrival of women on UK campuses gave rise to new concerns about the role of universities to monitor the potential sexual activities of their students. The academic 'community' was suddenly under public scrutiny for unofficial, extra-curricular activities. He wrote:

Just as over-disciplined children run shouting, tumultuous out of school, so carefully segregated young people either become intoxicated with the sudden availability of accessible members of the opposite sex or, if their conditioning has been powerful enough, shrink away in embarrassment and confusion (Hutt, 1964, p. 43).

The paternalistic role that universities perceived to be forced upon them through the creation of co-educational campuses in the new universities created tensions. The new generation of students in the 1960s were beginning to question the authority of their academic superiors, including the particularly patronising attitude evident in Hutt's statement. In fact, the student revolt of the late 1960s had its origins in the sexual

politics of the French campuses. Mary Evans notes that it was the protest over men's access to women's accommodation at the new Sorbonne campus which sparked the revolt: 'Thus did sex and politics in the 1960s join together to form an explosive mix that radically destabilised both social institutions and social assumptions' (Evans, 1997, p. 7).

It was perhaps with a sense of prescience that Hutt described the difficulties the Sussex founders faced over this issue. He raises the question of whether the doors in the women's halls should have locks:

'For while doors with locks (and these do exist in certain women's halls in this country) do not guarantee the preservation of virginity, they certainly do guarantee a proper sense of resentment and can damage that sense of mutual trust between pupils and their mentors without which the tutorial system, and the informal education bred of casual contacts between undergraduate and tutor, simply cannot exist' (Hutt, 1964, p. 52-3)

The participation of women in higher education is again portrayed here in terms of their sexuality rather than their intellect. The idea that female students would want their tutors to have unlimited access to their rooms, and that universities should concern themselves with preserving the virginity of their students, illustrates how different the academic environment was in the 1960s. The arrival of women brought about rapid (and not always welcome) change.

6.5 The Polytechnic of North London

6.5.1 Origins

The final case study, the Polytechnic of North London,⁴ is the youngest of the four institutions and arguably the most welcoming of the increase in women students and

⁴Although it is now the University of North London, it will be referred to throughout as PNL both for brevity, and because this is how it was known during most of the time under discussion.

academics. The Women's Studies Unit, the Women's Studies degree programme, and the high-profile feminist research on violence against women and child abuse conducted at PNL have given a legitimacy to feminist scholarship not found to the same extent at the other institutions. Unfortunately for the women who have made many gains in the advancement of feminist scholarship there, PNL has suffered from public attacks of its academic credibility.

The large tower block building on Holloway Road is currently the location for the Women's Studies degree programme at PNL. An entry from October 1996 in my field diary records an experience which I immediately contrasted with my impressions of visits to the LSE in particular. During a visit to PNL to interview an academic informant, I was kept waiting in a very busy reception area traversed by a variety of chattering students of different ages and ethnicities. My informant arrived late, apologised profusely, and asked me to wait longer as she was in an important academic meeting in which the management had unexpectedly announced certain changes which would (negatively) affect their workloads. She eventually reappeared in a flustered state, and we packed ourselves into a lift full of students. My informant joked and chatted with a black male student on the way up.

PNL was considered likely to be an interesting case study because of its publicised reputation as a left-wing institution, and in this regard it is not necessarily representative of the entire polytechnic sector. PNL was created in February 1971, after a decision by the Department of Education and Science to amalgamate the Northern Polytechnic with the North Western Polytechnic. Although its origins are in the technical college tradition, the first Directorate attempted to steer the Polytechnic towards the autonomous tradition, in a manner which nearly renders the passivity implied by the term academic 'drift' inappropriate. PNL was granted university status in 1992.

Since its inception, it has received a great deal of negative publicity, not altogether deserved. The Department of Applied Social Studies and Sociology became the focus of much of this public controversy throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Campbell, 1975; Pratt, 1997). The Sociology students and staff were largely seen to be responsible for the political activism which disrupted the Polytechnic in the 1970s, and perhaps relatedly, the quality of the Sociology degree was called into question more than once. Although the Women's Studies degree was not based within the Department of Applied Social Studies and Sociology as many women's studies courses are (and in spite of the fact that the initial proposers of the degree were based there), the controversy provides an insight into general debates about politics and academia. In fact, it has been difficult to separate the history, social relations and curriculum into different areas of analysis, although I have attempted to do this for purposes of clarity. Yet these issues are all intertwined in complex ways, thereby powerfully illustrating the influence of politics and social mediation on knowledge production.

The Department of Applied Social Studies and Sociology was created in 1973, and from the beginning became the site of student political unrest. From historical documents, it is clear that a large number of the Sociology lecturers supported the student action. This led to public complaints, for example, that all the lecturers in the Sociology department were members of International Socialism, that they were 'bizarrely evangelical', and that there was a 'correct line on women's liberation' at PNL (Jacka, Cox, & Marks, 1975). In February 1973, the *THES* made the following report:

A group of sociologists within PNL was prepared to use sociology as a means of overthrowing the Polytechnic and as a training ground for the overthrow of society. Mr Miller, the Director, said "This is not a joke, I regard it as a serious business" - in private correspondence he said that "certain elements of

sociology do provide a peculiarly suitable vehicle for the transmission of subversive ideas" (quoted in Campbell, 1975, p. 15)

Campbell's booklet on the political troubles at PNL (High Command: The Making of an Oligarchy) in the early 1970s argues that the Directorate aggressively pursued a right-wing agenda by selectively appointing like-minded members of staff to serve on influential committees. The lecturers who complained about political bias in the sociology degree (Jacka, Cox and Marks) were all promoted or made members of influential committees by the Directorate. It is ironic that the Sociology students and staff who were implicated in these complaints were perceived to be disrupting 'academic freedom'.

Campbell's overview of these events may be partisan, but some of the documents he uncovered in his research give an indication of the academic culture at the time. He came into possession of a letter written by a Mathematics lecturer to the Director, explaining the ways in which he was attempting to strengthen the Head of Department's support of the Directorate in the face of student unrest. He wrote:

We have now got a coalition of 5 or 6 Principal Lecturers and above to help Dr Nutkins with her problem, which is femininity. She lacks the physical (and so moral) strength to cope with rowdy and brutal males like Povey and Hill [Student Union leaders]. We plan to supply it. We expect a great improvement (Campbell, 1975, p. 115).

This letter is indicative of other letters published by Campbell in terms of the exaggerated masculine culture that is implied through the tone. The 'battle' between left and right at PNL was often described in military terms (the Director at this time was an ex-colonial/military man and was allegedly appointed because of this

background). Femininity was perceived to be a 'problem' within this discourse of gender stereotypes.

The Sociology degree again came under public scrutiny in the early 1980s, when the Secretary of State, Sir Keith Joseph, received complaints of political bias and malpractice on the course. Joseph arranged an immediate HMI inspection as he already had doubts about the quality of the programme, and had a well-publicised dislike of sociology (the *enfant terrible* of academia (Becher *et al*, 1994)) which was not uncommon in the Conservative administration during the 1980s. The HMI Report was critical of student 'spoon feeding', casualness in attendance and inattention in lectures, 'academically bizarre' references in course booklets, and the narrow ('extreme left') viewpoints of some of the lecturers (Silver, 1990, p. 210; see also Parry, 1996). The popular press picked up on this report with headlines such as 'The degree that no one could possibly fail', and 'Marxist-bias Poly course condemned' (Pratt, 1997, p. 223). However, as the CNAA was impugned through these allegations, they issued their own report after a review of the course. The CNAA objected to the HMI report, and stated, among other refutations, that 'informality' could be a positive teaching technique (Silver, 1990, p. 211). In light of these debates, it is perhaps not surprising that the women who established the Women's Studies course decided it should not be based in the Department of Applied Social Studies and Sociology.

The reputation of PNL has not been constructed in the way that LSE and even the Campus Universities have managed: a history of 'great men', eminent scholars, designing a community for the pursuit of knowledge. Instead, PNL was embroiled in the left-right political battles of the 1980s (which were constructed through very different discourses to the left-right battles of the 1960s), and was known more for controversy than scholarship. Gareth Parry (1996) has suggested that the media and government responded to the widened access policies of the polytechnic with

'discourses of derision' (a term first proposed by Ball, 1990). The increased inclusion of social groups traditionally excluded from higher education created a debate in which non-traditional students were perceived to be a 'problem', and were described as a 'long tail of low achievers' by the HMI. Intervention was deemed to be necessary by the government. The highly political nature of access to higher education is evident in these actions and discourses, and resistance to the inclusion of more non-traditional students provides a context for the feminist interventions that were attempted.

6.4.2 Social Relations at PNL

In terms of the student population, Pratt explains that PNL 'had the explicit objective of increasing the number of students from ethnic minority groups'. This aim led to specific funding policies, and by 1988, 30% of the students were from ethnic minorities (Pratt, 1997, p. 63). The number of women students was also encouraging: by 1992, the ratio of men to women students was 45:55 (Pratt, 1997, p. 4). As at other polytechnics, the growth in the social sciences contributed to the increase in the number of women who entered higher education. Funding policies designed to encourage mature women and women with non-standard entry qualifications was also a major factor. As Pratt states:

One factor to which the polytechnics themselves contributed was the growth of alternative routes into higher education which valued maturity, recognised alternative experience, and accommodated the needs of mature women with families (Pratt, 1997, p. 61).

The academic informants had various perspectives on the status of women at PNL. Many of the informants pointed to the number of women in senior posts as a general indication that equal opportunities at PNL were worth more than the paper on which they were written. However, there were several indications that the equal

opportunities policy was not necessarily the product of a progressive institution. One academic informant explained that a group of women lobbied for an Equal Opportunities Committee to be established in the early 1980s, which managed to effectively operate over a few years, but in the end generated so much friction that the staff hired for the Equal Opportunities Unit were sacked. In another instance related to me by an academic informant, a memo to staff written by one of the Directorate stated that it was against the equal opportunities policy for a women-only group to meet in order to draft the proposal for the women's studies course. This seems to be a classic case of the appropriation of feminist arguments to serve a conservative agenda. In spite of these instances of resistance, the women involved in these campaigns were successful in demanding better provision in the nursery. Considering that an academic informant from LSE would not even take a minimal amount of maternity leave, let alone felt prepared to argue for nursery provision, this success indicates a certain amount of progress.

The policies and the funding provided by ILEA and the GLC may have enabled the Women's Studies Unit, the Equal Opportunities Committee, and the nursery to be established. However, this funding led to attacks from the right-wing press who associated the GLC and ILEA with implementing what would now be considered 'politically correct' policies. Although some of these funding practices led to the recruitment of local women who might have otherwise felt excluded from university education, PNL was still in many ways a difficult environment for women academics. An academic informant alleged that one Director sexually harassed women academics, and routinely promoted members of staff through indirect and covert channels (this practice was also alleged by other informants). She recalled one instance where a colleague went to this Director's office for a meeting:

[She] said she sat down and she was wearing this very short skirt. She's got this very glamorous persona and she said that she sat down and he came over

and said 'I hear you're chair of the equal opportunities committee' and, she said yes, and he just ran his hand right up the inside of her skirt! (Feminist Informant [5] PNL).

The extent of a feminist 'transformation' of PNL was therefore constrained by the different political discourses of the 1980s which have subsequently been identified as a 'backlash' against the women's movement (Faludi, 1992; Walby, 1993). Although liberal discourses of equal opportunities had entered the mainstream by this time, feminist interventions were resisted not through silence, but through a more explicit engagement with and rejection of their goals. They were also partly motivated by extra funding rather than a commitment to feminist principles, and the GLC and ILEA's generosity led to discourses of derision which the media enjoyed promoting. As Beatrix Campbell argues, feminism in the 1980s was full of ambiguity, of things which were 'both positive and negative' (Campbell, 1992, p. 13).

6.6 Summary

The 'bastions' of male power and privilege identified by the Hansard Report (1990) were in evidence in all four case studies to varying degrees. The environments of each case study institution are compellingly different, and although they are not representative of the entire university sector, they do provide details of the impact the increase of women in higher education has had across different types of institutions. The interviews and historical backgrounds to the case studies illuminate the masculine culture of the higher education system. In this light, the 'great patriarchal metanarrative' has a degree of potency, yet the distinctiveness of the different institutional cultures, and the changing politics over these past few decades, belie an uncomplicated discourse of anti-feminism.

The transitions in higher education from the 1960s to the 1980s indicate that the expansion initiated by Robbins was not smooth. Widened access to higher education

may have enabled greater numbers of women than ever before to enter the academy, but the subsequent concerns that a 'dumbing down' of the system would be the result are still debated today. Women's studies courses are implicated within this: the current status of the subject would perhaps be very different had élite institutions such as the LSE established women's studies programmes. The fact that LSE is an institution where certain discourses remain marginalised seems to be a result of a type of 'protection' of its reputation, and a resistance to the integration of feminist knowledge, which will be explored further in the next chapter. Yet the success of certain feminist interventions at Kent and PNL did not necessarily signify a greater tolerance in the 1980s.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE INTEGRATION OF FEMINIST AND WOMEN'S STUDIES COURSES IN THE CASE STUDY INSTITUTIONS

7.1 Introduction

The different experiences students and academics had at the case study institutions went beyond the physical and social environments. The courses that these institutions offered were also compellingly different. At each institution there were attempts to integrate feminist and women's studies courses at some point in the past few decades, and this chapter will detail those efforts. The case studies offered a range of feminist interventions into the curriculum: there were very few feminist courses at LSE, a mixture of feminist courses at Sussex, an undergraduate degree in Women's Studies at PNL, and a posgraduate degree in Women's Studies at Kent. The histories of these courses provided the opportunity to consider the range of possibilities for integrating feminist knowledge into the mainstream curriculum.

Drawing from de Groot and Maynard's categories of feminist knowledge production (1993), the chapter will begin with a feminist recuperative project at LSE in the 1970s and conclude with issues of reflexivity in the BA in Women's Studies programme at PNL in the late 1980s. The structure of the curriculum at each case study institution will be described, and the developments of feminist or women's studies courses will be summarised. The final section will examine some of the factors which influenced the development of autonomous women's studies programmes.

7.2 The London School of Economics

In general, from the interview data and the historical accounts, the curriculum at LSE can best be described as displaying the characteristics of the autonomous tradition: discipline-based, aloof and objective. In Bernstein's terms, the curriculum had a 'special quality of otherness' (Bernstein, 1996). Academic knowledge at LSE was strongly insulated from the outside world and internally a hierarchy of disciplines was maintained. Bernard Crick, in his contribution to Abse's collection, notes that 'most departments kept themselves to themselves and generally shop, particularly interdisciplinary shop, seemed taboo' (Crick, 1977, p. 101). As interdisciplinarity is perceived to be one of the essential characteristics of feminist scholarship, this 'taboo' may have contributed to the resistance to feminist research and teaching at LSE (combined with the low status of women and feminist scholarship in general).

Yet, in spite of these generalities, the LSE curriculum presents an interesting paradox in terms of this research. As a specialist institution, some of the courses and areas of research offered an ideal opportunity for feminist scholarship to develop. Historically, some women's research did flourish. Women scholars at the LSE in its early years made an important contribution to the field of economic history: Elizabeth Leigh Hutchins, Lillian Knowles, Alice Clark and Ivy Pinchbeck all wrote classic works on women's history (Purvis, 1995). Yet the lack of feminist scholarship associated with LSE in spite of these examples supports the theory that feminist discourses were silenced.

Courses in the field of Social Studies at LSE have always been popular with female students. It was acknowledged by several of my informants, and in archival materials in the library¹, that the Social Studies courses were typically full of female students

¹In the Library Archives of the School there are transcripts of interviews that were conducted for Ralf Dahrendorf's book. One of these is an interview with Betty Scharf by Eileen Barker, both members of the Sociology Department. As Scharf first entered LSE in 1935, she has a great deal of information to share, most of which did not make it into Dahrendorf's book.

but taught by male academics. Dahrendorf acknowledges that the School was predominantly male until the Diploma in Social Studies was established just after the War. The students who came to do the Diploma were known as 'Urwick's harem' after the Professor who headed the course (Dahrendorf, 1995, p. 113). The sexual undertones of this reference reflect the heterosexual discourses noted elsewhere in this thesis, and again illustrate how female students were sexualised within the masculine culture of the institution.

Several incidences of resistance to feminist knowledge supplied by the informants may be anecdotal, but are indicative of the strength of the regulatory discourses at LSE. John Charvet, a lecturer in the politics department, wrote a book on feminism (1990) as part of a series on political movements. It is rather apparent that the research he conducted in order to write the book did not influence him to become a feminist. The acknowledgements in the book include a thank you to his secretary for typing it, a neat irony which, again, is a typical example of heterosexual relations in academic discourses. One academic informant who did not define herself as a feminist similarly described to me how she was asked to review feminist sociology books for the *Times Higher*, not because of her research interests but because of her 'genitals'. She could barely remember the authors and titles of these books ('Ann Oakley's housewives or whatever it was she did'), let alone admit that she felt inclined to alter the focus of her research. With respect to the fact that many feminists and sympathetic men attribute their 'consciousness-raising' to reading feminist texts, this resistance is compelling. One final anecdote is that, as recently as 1993, a lecturer in politics proposed a course on feminism which was rejected on the grounds, as my informant told me, that it was not a 'serious political course', it was 'women's stuff', and that 'people can not teach about their biases'. These anecdotes may be somewhat amusing, but they also indicate the strength of boundaries around regulatory discourses in the academy.

More seriously, one postgraduate anthropology student described how her early interest in a feminist recuperative project was derided. She said that a well-known LSE Anthropology professor 'patted her on the head' when she informed him she was interested in studying women in her fieldwork. He responded that she would soon realise men were more interesting. At the time, men *were* more interesting because the dominant paradigm recognised them as such: in other words, the recuperation of 'adding women in' was the first step to gaining information which could then be used to reconstruct, or challenge, the existing paradigm.

7.2.1 The Sociology of Sex and Gender Roles Course

The first course at LSE which integrated feminist perspectives was the Sociology of Sex and Gender Roles course. This course was an option for undergraduates in the Sociology department and began in 1977. The Sociology department had a large number of female students: in the year that the course started there were 61 female students and 27 male students enrolled on the BSc in Sociology in all three years.² At the time, there were no other options for undergraduates which focused on either gender or women, although the student informants mentioned that there were disciplinary-based, feminist student seminars organised outside of the formal curriculum.

The course at LSE was initiated through student demand. One of the students who was a part of this process explained that they initially proposed a multi-disciplinary course:

Originally what we did is we sent this proposal off to all the departments because our argument was that women's studies is interdisciplinary and therefore it shouldn't be located in any one department, and we organised a

²LSE School Calendars, 1997-8

meeting for all departments who were interested in this. And that worked out not at all - nobody, no academic appeared. (Student Informant [1] LSE)

The next tactic was to target individual academics whom it was felt would be helpful. The Sociology department expressed a reluctant interest and the course proposal was sent through the appropriate academic committees. It is not clear from the interviews whether or not this proposal created controversy: the lecturer who was initially responsible for the course maintains that although she was not at the meeting she is fairly certain the proposal was not resisted, and it did receive approval without alteration. One of the students who initiated the proposal heard that there was some resistance:

We sent our proposal [...] then there were lots and lots of arguments. Including one very famous sociologist, [he] apparently went completely crazy saying this was a load of crap, rubbish, detracted from the serious academic purpose of LSE and its illustrious sociology department and so on and so forth. But I guess there must have been divisions and they kind of did allow it to go ahead provided it wasn't called women's studies but had to be called the Sociology of Sex and Gender Roles (Student Informant [1] LSE).

Presumably the argument relying on the 'special quality' of the LSE curriculum was not strong enough to block the introduction of the course, however, the chosen title is probably a significant compromise. The interviews with former members of staff on this course have given the impression that the Sociology of Sex and Gender Roles course was designed to fit in with the traditional framework of the Sociology department and the title of the course was deliberately chosen to reflect this. The Disciplined feminist who initially designed the course stated that she intended it to be viewed as just one option amongst other subject area options already offered. In this case, it might be argued that the Sociology of Sex and Gender Roles was legitimate

because it was presented in terms of fitting into the existing structure rather than disrupting it. This is significant because it compromised feminist ideals of challenging the 'malestream' curriculum by presenting it in an acceptable form. The academic who helped design the course explained:

I mean I was determined not to call it Women's Studies because I thought the first thing that will happen is that we will only have women. Not that I wanted to put off the women's libbers or anything like that but um, I didn't want to call it Women's Studies ... I wanted it to be called something [which] you could see from the title that this was on a par with the sociology of religion, this, that and the other (Feminist Informant [1] LSE).

The ramification was that the course was squeezed into an existing mould:

So obviously what happens when the women's studies course gets taken on board as the course within the Sociology department under the title of the Sociology of Sex and Gender Roles it becomes re-defined into this rather more traditional LSE mode type of course. (Feminist Informant [2] LSE)

Another academic who taught on the course also agreed that the course was designed to be more conventional rather than challenging:

If you come out of sociology they talk about sex and gender roles. It was exactly the 50s language, you know what I mean, it's an old-fashioned sociology that we are talking about . . . and it was where mainstream sociology was until . . . when. . well, at least until the end of the 60s. (Feminist Informant [4] LSE)

Another said:

The Sociology of Sex and Gender Roles is what they would accept at LSE. Now that was therefore not a women's studies course - it was a sex and gender course - it had to be open to male students. (Feminist Informant [2] LSE)

Yet why was the Sociology of Sex and Gender Roles acceptable whereas Women's Studies would not have been? Presumably feminist knowledge could exist as long as it was not perceived to be oppositional. Reading lists from the early years of the Sociology of Sex and Gender Roles course seem indicative of courses which used or eventually adopted the title 'Women's Studies', and the syllabus certainly has the appearance of a women's studies course. The attempts to mould the course into an acceptable LSE format were therefore partly semantic, but nonetheless significant. The argument here against using 'women's studies', and subsequent debates over the use of titles such as 'gender studies', illustrate the politics of making 'women' visible in the curriculum.

7.3 The University of Kent at Canterbury

As discussed in Chapter Six, Kent was designated as a 'new' university in 1961, and the first students arrived in 1965. The Academic Planning Board of Kent was encouraged by the UGC to experiment in curriculum development in response to the increasing diversity of students and the new areas of employment opening up to graduates (Martin, 1990, p. 39). The Board initially considered a Schools system similar to Sussex as a way of discouraging 'departmental tyranny', and their decision to develop Faculties (in 1965 these were the Faculties of the Humanities, Physical Sciences and Social Sciences) was based on the argument that it was simply a more familiar term than 'Schools' (Martin, 1990). Students undertook a broad 'Part I' course which was followed by subject specialisation, and 'integration' rather than modularisation was encouraged. So, for instance, the Faculty of Humanities offered a

course called 'Exploring Reality' which attempted to provide an interdisciplinary approach, although it is tempting to ask exactly who's reality was explored as a photograph of the lecturers reveals an all-male, all-white teaching team (Martin, 1990, p. 53). The establishment of 'Centres' earmarked another potential space for new research areas: Martin notes that a 'private obsession' of one male member of staff resulted in the Centre for the Study of Cartoons and Caricatures (Martin, 1990, p. 63). These are interesting examples of the regulatory discourses of the academy, or how 'what is thinkable and who can think it' will be transgressed only in particular ways (would a woman academic have been allowed to establish a Centre for the Study of Cartoons and Caricatures, for example?). Yet in spite of these few examples of innovation, Kent was the most traditional Campus University in terms of its curriculum structure.

Both Kent and Sussex were chosen as case studies because the commitment to interdisciplinary studies would seem to offer the ideal opportunity for the development of women's studies courses. An academic informant who was involved in establishing the Kent course agreed:

That's what everybody writing in this area said - where MAs would prosper, or indeed where undergraduate courses would prosper in women's studies would be in the new universities. Because the new universities were set up with a commitment to interdisciplinary studies. So it was always very easy because there was an ideology that you could call on when you had to justify the particular programme of a particular degree. (Feminist Informant [6] UKC)

Yet an appropriate structure does not necessarily translate into immediate acceptance. As all undergraduate students were required to take an interdisciplinary elective, a 3rd year optional course called Women in Society was proposed through the

Interdisciplinary Studies Committee. The origins of this course were summarised by the same informant:

I think it was 1974, quite early on. . . a group of friends, all women, same age, same sort of sense that, you know, we're all part of the women's movement, so what we wanted to do was teach an undergraduate course called Women in Society. We started doing that. There was tremendous hoo-hah in the university about it. I mean it was just, to go back, I wish I kept some of the debates - there was this huge sort of you can't do this - unbelievable blah and one senior, one professor, elderly male professor actually said at one point 'I wouldn't want my wife to take this course'. (Feminist Informant [6] UKC)

It is interesting to note that the study of caricatures and cartoons was acceptable whereas the study of women provoked this type of resistance. However, as the informant acknowledges, it was 'early' for the development of this course. By 1977, there were at least ten undergraduate options offered at institutions around the country with the title 'Women in Society' or 'Women and Society' (including Cambridge University)³. These were mostly offered in sociology and social science degree programmes, and can be described as feminist recuperative projects as they challenged the marginalisation of women in the higher education curriculum. As such, they are an important foundation for the development of women's studies. Yet the Women in Society course and subsequently the MA in Women's Studies programme are not mentioned in any historical account of Kent, or the Campus Universities, or even more general histories of UK higher education that I have seen (even in their obligatory paragraphs on women).

³This figure comes from the database I created of courses listed in feminist newsletters from the 1970s and 1980s in order to track the development of women's studies. Cambridge University offered a 'Women in Society' module in 1977 (*WRRCC Newsletter* January 1977 and June 1977) as a third year undergraduate, interdisciplinary option open to social and political science students. A few years later Klein states that both Cambridge and Oxford had interdisciplinary 'Women in Society' courses: but she says these were 'a long way from an officially recognized degree in Women's Studies' (Klein, 1983, p. 256).

An academic informant at Kent suggested that the grudging acceptance of the course could partly be due to the fact that outbursts such as the one described above can be held in check out of fear of potential embarrassment in front of colleagues⁴. It is possible that other women's studies courses have gained approval because opponents realise that to discredit the study of women would be perceived as prejudice, which goes against the generally meritocratic and liberal values of many university educators. It was perhaps better to bestow approval and then attempt to ignore the outcome. Bailey (1977), in his analysis of the 'folklore' of academic politics, argues that academics are reluctant to make 'open and formal accusations for which they must take responsibility', and as a result opinions are 'bruited around through rumour and gossip' (Bailey 1977, p. 23). Morley suggests a more theoretical explanation, in that 'power is more likely to be structured into social relations so that it does not appear to be "used" at all' (Morley, 1997, p. 10). This general 'silence' was also illustrated in the development of the LSE course, when the students who proposed it arranged an initial meeting to which no members of academic staff came.

7.3.1 The MA in Women's Studies

Although Kent has been described as more 'traditional' than Sussex, the MA in Women's Studies is well-known in the women's studies community in the UK as it was the first to offer a named degree programme in Women's Studies, established the first Chair in Women's Studies, and has gained a sound academic reputation over the past 18 years with virtually the same lecturing staff since its inception. Its existence is largely due to the dedication of the lecturing team, most of whom are Disciplined feminists and committed a significant amount of voluntary time and energy to the course as their own Faculties did not initially give them teaching credit. This lack of

⁴Rendel suggests that the proposal for the MA in Women's Studies at Kent was partly accepted because they were not asking for any money, and because the women who organised it had carefully prepared the ground beforehand. She says, 'This careful preparatory work was effective and necessary in a small university with a rather permissive environment where everyone knows everyone' (Rendel, 1980, p. 19).

wider support is indicative of the subtle forms of resistance to many women's studies courses. In terms of the impact the course has had on the wider culture of the university, most of the informants acknowledged that a major change is that women's studies has now become more respectable. As one informant said, 'there has been a tremendous interest in women's studies, so in the last 5 years we've all been made professors. I mean now we have university recognition'. These Disciplined feminists discussed in the interviews how the course enabled them to pursue their academic interests in feminist theory in their own disciplines, and some of them have become influential in their fields. Although this type of academic 'respectability' was the basis of the criticism from the Feminist agitators discussed in previous chapters, the talent and persistence of the women's studies teaching team has made it difficult for the wider Kent community to ignore them.

The MA in Women's Studies at Kent was established during a time of decreasing visibility of feminist activism, yet many of the first students had some involvement with feminist activist organisations. Although some of these students were critical of the lecturers for not being 'activists', several of the lecturers mentioned their involvement in academic pressure groups. The student informants were drawing on the 'outside/inside' distinction in order to criticise the lecturers, while the lecturers were more inclined to perceive their feminist activism within higher education as valid contributions to the women's movement.

One of the more controversial aspects of the MA in Women's Studies programme in the early years was the decision to use male members of staff on the teaching team. This attracted criticism from some of the students. As one student informant explained:

I didn't do [one module] because I was outraged that it was taught by a man. [. . .] I was really angry and complained along with one or two other women

and said surely they could have found a woman to teach that subject - because they employed him. They employed him as an extra member to teach it because he was an expert in sexuality. I was furious, furious, really was angry about that. The women who took the course said that he was OK and he obviously did do his best to - and there were one or two contentious subjects that he provided a reading list for but actually didn't attend the class - like rape and so on. I mean he did behave properly but I just thought it was outrageous - there must have been dozens of women aching for the chance to teach on this - and there was this bloody man - I was furious. But he is of course, was the (authoritative voice) 'acknowledged expert on sexuality'. But I think that that was playing into that game that men are experts on women's things - I really still feel that that was wrong. And I boycotted, or womancotted - I just wouldn't attend. And I'm sure I missed the opportunity to discuss some really interesting things with my women colleagues but I couldn't bear it. (Student Informant [1] UKC)

The politics of this debate are interesting. This particular student informant is now an established Women's studies practitioner, and she articulated a highly women-centred perspective of women's studies throughout her interview. This perspective of women's studies has been a contribution to the women's studies movement by strengthening the classification of the subject and creating a distinction between women's studies and other subjects. The above quote touches on a range of feminist principles which have set women's studies apart from other subjects: women-only classes, women's experiences and knowledge as central to the course, even the use of feminist language ('womancotted'). These feminist principles are perhaps part of the regulative discourse of women's studies, and have been important aspects of the women's studies movement. Yet they have created tensions in so far as they are oppositional to other, more mainstream regulative discourses of higher education. They have led to debates, particularly about the exclusion of men, which are further

explored in some of the women's studies movement literature such as Klein's (1983) article 'The "Men Problem" in Women's Studies'. In relation to the MA course at Kent, they also led to divisions between the students. As another student informant explained:

So [the radical lesbian discourse] was very much articulated by a few women on the course and they used that to challenge lots of things you know. [A man] was teaching on the course for example - should he be on a women's studies course? I found that really - I don't know what position I had on that. I felt very clumsy and kind of thick - and how come I hadn't worked this out, you know? It all seems evident to these other people - why haven't I got there? And challenging people like [another male lecturer] on the course, oh god. There seemed to be a very clear position. And it was very difficult to oppose it because by opposing it you were instantly constructed as anti-feminist. Do you know what I mean? So it was completely impossible. I don't think I opposed anything actually. (Student Informant [8] UKC)

The debate illustrates how the women's studies movement has been characterised by its distinction from and opposition to 'malestream' academia, thereby establishing strong boundaries around the subject. Bernstein (1996) suggests that regulative discourse gives rise to the character, conduct and manner of social actors within particular contexts, and it is clear from the above quote that the student informant (who is a Disciplined feminist rather than a Women's studies practitioner) was uncomfortable with the identity suggested through this pedagogic discourse. The social relations, the morals, and the identities proposed in the women's studies movement literature are generally perceived to be an oppositional, feminist challenge to the academy. Yet these principles have been resisted by other feminist academics as much as by the academy itself.

7.4 The University of Sussex

'No single social study by itself provides a proper educational foundation for an understanding of society or for the intelligent exercise of the ability to act and judge' (Briggs, 1964, p. 72).

As mentioned in Chapter Six, Sussex was chosen as a case study partly because it prided itself on its 'new maps of learning', and sought to promote an interdisciplinary curriculum which somehow gained a reputation for 'radical' intellectual innovation. Yet Sussex is also an interesting example of contradictions, and a superficial knowledge of the Schools system with its contextual courses belies the complexities of the structure. The tensions between tradition and innovation seem to have been acutely felt at Sussex. For example, several of the Schools were based on a geographical designation (similar to 'area' studies), of which the School of European Studies was the first. Students took both 'core' (specialist) and 'context' (interdisciplinary) courses, and in the mid-1960s, this approach was radical and innovative. However, the structure was also able to incorporate a more traditional legacy, and the first students found themselves reading the 'Classical Greats' and the 'Modern Greats', just as at Oxford (Beloff, 1968).

While new 'subjects' of study could be proposed by any academic, it was decided from the beginning that no new subject would be taught which was not likely to have at least five academic members of staff teaching it within five years (Briggs, 1964). One of the academic informants indicated that women's studies hypothetically could have become a 'major' subject (specialisation) within a School if there had been enough members of staff proposing and supporting it, but this proposal never came forward. Instead, there have been quite a few gender and feminist courses on offer within the various Schools. In at least one instance a (non-feminist) course was initiated by student demand. In the late 1960s, a group of students proposed a course

called 'Social Movements and Political Action' which generated debate amongst the academics in the School and is recounted in an article by Stephen Yeo (1970). It was perhaps this type of development which influenced the 'radical' reputation of the Sussex curriculum.

The interdisciplinary structure combined with its 'radical' reputation would in some ways enable Sussex to appear to be a university environment conducive to feminist teaching and research. One academic concurred on these points, and his comments are paraphrased here:

But going back to your question I think there is something quite important about the academic structure of Sussex University and the possibility of what you have called spaces for in general feminist work . . . where the aim is to try to make sense of gender relations and women's lives in various contexts in general and that is because the system is not based on a departmental basis which already reconfirms discipline orthodoxy in a powerful way - but it is based on a School system - and my view is that a School system allows more possibilities for what might be seen as radical intellectual interventions of various kinds - not just in the area of feminism although of course that is a very important marginalised area of study - but across all the social sciences. Because of the School system it means not only that departmental strength so to speak was not only diminished it was almost unaccounted for in the classical sense [. . .] But the second thing - it's not just the departmental thing which made a difference - is that you actually mix with people from other disciplines. . . you meet with these people and you get ideas about what is going on in the disciplines that you might not as easily get or be exposed to in a traditional departmental structure [. . .] So those two things I think made it likely. And I think the third thing is that Sussex had this reputation anyway of right from the

start being involved in radical and interdisciplinary work. . . .It's reputation was much larger than its radical content. (Observer Informant [2] USX)

As this informant acknowledges, the structure of the curriculum seemed ideally suited to the integration of feminist scholarship. To a large extent this did happen, as there have been a number of feminist courses offered throughout the different Schools. There have also been over the years quite a few prominent feminist academics working at Sussex. In fact, one academic informant stated that the 'women's studies' group at Sussex is now in the region of twenty academics, and she felt that feminist related research and teaching had thrived at Sussex, although she was including the courses and research in gay and lesbian studies which have developed at Sussex more recently. Sussex also has a well-known Gender and Development programme in the Institute of Development Studies.

Another academic informant described the development of feminist courses at Sussex as 'haphazard'. This is no doubt related in part to the resistance to the development of feminist courses. However, it also became clear from the interviews that although there have been a number of prominent feminist academics at Sussex over the years, they could not agree on who would take responsibility for a women's studies programme and what format it would take. This is a crucial point, as most women's studies courses in the country are associated with a particular academic, in spite of efforts to work in more feminist, collaborative ways. Yet the extent to which the internal politics amongst the feminist academics at Sussex inhibited the growth of women's studies can not be ascertained with any certainty by someone not directly involved.

7.4.1 Feminist Courses

One academic informant illustrated the strength of opposition to the development of feminist courses through an anecdote about a course she proposed. She explained:

We sort of threw the cat amongst the pigeons because we wanted a feminism course that was feminist. So I remember we put together this course [.] and we didn't want anybody teaching on it who didn't see as their prime investigations inequality and what is a woman. So when this course was passed at a School meeting - it was a two hour discussion and it was passed - it was accused of being prejudiced, which it was, I mean blatantly [.] We had sociologists standing up saying there is no such thing as value free study and other people saying oh yes there is. [.] It got very hot. And the course was only passed on the understanding that if any member of faculty had an ideological objection to the way it was being taught it could be brought back to a school meeting. So it was the only time a course was passed with an ideological reservation like that. And then for the next few years when I taught it I would be every so often summoned into the dean's office and be told that someone had been complaining about the course for being too one-sided.

Kelly: Students?

Informant: No, faculty. And I wasn't allowed to know who it was.

Kelly: Faculty that didn't even teach on it?

Informant: Yes, yes. They'd heard from their students that it was radical and so on - and then it started to acquire a reputation which, you know - none of us were radical feminists. This was the irony. There wasn't one radical feminist teaching the course - we all saw ourselves as socialist feminists. But it got a reputation for radical feminism and all these stereotypes started circulating the university.

(Feminist Informant [2] USX)

Rather incredibly, in the 'radical' environment of Sussex, a system of overt surveillance was imposed on the feminist teaching staff. However, it must be added that another academic who helped develop the course did not mention this opposition.

In fact, when I asked her if she remembered any resistance to the course proposal, she said:

No, I mean. no. It wasn't difficult to get it going I may be, you know, trying to idealise this a bit retrospectively but I don't think so. I've never had an experience of trying to introduce a course that was blocked. Never. Not once. Why, do other people?

Kelly: Well, some women have told me about criticisms and they may get the courses through but have to make compromises on the title or something.

Informant: No never anything like that. I mean we've had our debates over the last 20 years about what courses should be - but they've mostly been amongst ourselves . . . I can't say that we've - I can't say that I have experienced any intellectual opposition. Not at all. (Feminist Informant [1] USX)

It is somewhat tempting to read between the lines of her statement, especially with relation to her initial hesitancy and her insistence that she *personally* did not face opposition. It must also be added that the first informant who explained the opposition is no longer employed at Sussex, and the second informant is still lecturing there. These conflicting stories raise doubts as to what really happened. However, what is more certain is that several prominent feminist academics at Sussex did not obtain the promotions which some of their colleagues felt they deserved. These instances of opposition, surveillance and devaluation of women's academic work may indicate that feminist scholarship was 'silenced' at Sussex. One informant stated this explicitly:

There hasn't been a women's studies degree as such here. And that has surprised me because all the elements were in place for that to emerge but it

never did. So it never emerged as a major BA subject in its own right with its own faculty and it's own resources.

Kelly: Can you speculate on why it wasn't a subject area?

Informant: I think it was prevented. The university didn't want to have a women's studies degree and that was it. (Observer Informant [2] USX)

Whether or not 'that was it' is a matter of debate. The evidence that the women academics could not agree on either how to structure an undergraduate major or who would take responsibility for it is also compelling. The differences between these women academics were not necessarily over ideology, as the informant above indicated that they were all socialist feminists. However, the academic informants in this study, and other feminist academics who declined to take part, are well known Disciplined feminists in their own fields. It is their disciplinary differences which may be a more significant factor in the difficulties they had in agreeing on the structure of a potential women's studies course.

However, several Schools at various times have offered enough courses and academic expertise that undergraduate students could probably receive a similar education to students on women's studies programmes elsewhere. For my MA dissertation, I interviewed several undergraduate students who were taking the course mentioned above and other feminist, contextual course options in the early 1990s. They certainly considered themselves to be 'women's studies students' (see Bignell, 1996), and this ambiguity over whether or not feminist courses are women's studies courses is a unique characteristic of the subject area. As discussed in Chapter One, the choice to identify oneself as a 'women's studies' student or academic is based on other, more personal criteria than the title of one's degree. This ambiguity was also evident at the postgraduate level.

7.4.2 The MA in Women in Education

At postgraduate level, there have been a number of attempts to integrate feminist knowledge, but the resistance to them seems to have been quite strong. For instance, one academic proposed a feminist option on the MA in Sociology degree in 1974 but it was blocked by a particular professor, who allegedly said 'over my dead body'. When asked to explain, he said it would dilute the 'distinctive quality' of the Sussex MA in Sociology. Another informant recalled that she proposed in the early 1990s that an MA in Women's Studies could be put together from existing modules on other Masters degrees, but she thought this was dropped because of disagreement between the women teaching the modules. However, in 1993 an MA in Women's Studies was established and is still running today, and it is also possible to obtain a PhD in Women's Studies, although this is apparently an option which is not very well promoted.

Perhaps the most successful attempt to integrate feminist knowledge at postgraduate level was the MA in Women in Education programme which ran from about 1985-1993, recruiting around ten students every year. As mentioned in Chapter One, one of the lecturers who taught on this course declined to identify it as a women's studies course although it was designated as such in at least one list of women's studies courses in the UK (Zmroczek & Duchen, 1991). The degree programme had clear objectives, and one of the women who designed it explained:

It was one of the most interesting and exciting courses I think I've ever been involved with. . . I was aware in education that there was a whole range of Masters courses in the early 1980s that appealed very much to men in teaching. So they would come in and do courses in educational management and decision-making and the curriculum and stuff and they were usually men who were teaching in schools and they came in and did these MAs and . . . it was

clearly an important stage in their promotion. And [the other course lecturer] and I said to each other there aren't many women on these courses and we don't want to do any of this stuff, take male experience as the norm or starting point, so why don't we do a course for women teachers - because it seemed to be school teachers on the MAs in Education - why don't we do an evening course for women teachers that will look at women in education and will take women's experience as the starting point and will problematise gender from a women's perspective. So we set up a course - we called it Women in Education and not Gender in Education. There was some discussion about that - we called it Women in Education because we wanted women's experiences to be central. (Feminist Informant [1] USX)

This informant described the course as offering academic credit to women in education who were marginalised on the mainstream MA in Education. As such, this was both a recuperative and reconstructive project. The deliberate choice to make 'women' more visible, and to centralise their experiences, was a recuperative project, or a way of 'adding women in' to the curriculum. Yet the objectives of this course went further, in that by making women's experiences the focus of the course, different pedagogical practices were employed and mainstream educational studies were reconstructed from a feminist perspective. Their teaching strategies, and the way these were perceived by the students, will be discussed in later chapters. The MA in Women in Education may not have officially been a 'women's studies' course as at Kent and PNL, but the feminist pedagogical practices and the reconstructive objectives of the programme were similar to courses with the women's studies title.

There are many things that could be said about the Sussex case study⁵, but the difficulties with arranging interviews formed my impression of the case study and

⁵As an aside, I was interested in an article by Sara Delamont (Delamont, 1996) which suggested that sociologists of higher education should attempt to make the familiar 'strange' by studying novels based on university life. I had just finished reading Carol Shields' novel *Larry's Party* (1998) in which one of the protagonists is a lecturer in Women's Studies in the US. She is 'headhunted' by the

became central to my analysis. To a large extent, it serves to illuminate the highly political nature of establishing women's studies courses. The fact that Kent has a well-established women's studies course masks the internal, personal disagreements that beset the establishment of the programme. This was eluded to only vaguely, through one informant (not herself directly involved in the women's studies programme) who mentioned 'blood on the carpet' over the issue of course leadership. The Sussex case study is therefore probably not unique. The importance of leadership (through a Women's studies practitioner) is a neglected site of analysis in the women's studies literature, largely due to the reluctance of feminists to attribute success to a hierarchical structure rather than a collective enterprise.

The issue of course leadership raises a question over the 'ownership' of knowledge. At the case studies where a women's studies course had been established, there were indications that those academics who only had minimal contribution to the course felt 'outside' women's studies and perceived the course to 'belong' to someone else. At the final case study to be discussed, PNL, an academic informant (an Indisciplined feminist) initially hesitated to be interviewed because she felt marginal to women's studies as the programme was the course leader's 'baby'. This 'ownership' of courses goes against the grain of feminist principles and methods of organisation, yet was apparently a factor in the way women's studies has been perceived. The women's studies literature emphasises an inclusiveness in the construction of the subject (Brunt *et al*, 1983) that is not always realisable within an academic environment which values individualism and competition.

Department of Women's Studies at the University of Sussex for the directorship post, which she is tempted to take because the department boasts three secretaries, five lecturers and four cross appointments. It is difficult to imagine how Shields, who works in the Canadian higher education sector, gained the impression that women's studies is thriving at Sussex to an extent not realised anywhere in the UK. To use this novel as a sociological text, despite Sara Delamont's best intentions, would make the familiar much too strange.

7.5 The Polytechnic of North London

PNL began to develop a modular degree structure in the early 1980s in the Access to Continuing Education Department, which is where the Foundation Courses in women's studies and the part-time degree programme in women's studies were first established. The two women who were mainly responsible for setting up these programmes were, however, originally based in the Department of Applied Social Studies and Sociology. They moved to the Continuing Education Department and established the Women's Studies Unit in the early 1980s. The Foundation Courses for women were one of the first projects of the Women's Studies Unit and received a substantial amount of funding from the GLC and ILEA ('hundreds of thousands of pounds' according to one informant). This economic incentive to offer courses for non-standard entry women was a significant factor in the establishment of the Women's Studies Unit. The Director gave approval for the Unit but it was somewhat of a phryric victory for the women. One academic informant explained:

I think that it was almost like we were his toy really. I felt like his toy. You know, it felt like the initiative was his toy and at any moment he could have said (snaps fingers) 'That's it', you know, finished. So you existed at his whim (Feminist Informant [5] PNL).

The informants who attended the launch of the Unit recalled the Director's patronising attitude towards them. However, the Foundation courses were extremely successful and attracted nearly 150 applicants for the first course. This response clearly paved the way for the Women's Studies degree programme.

7.5.1 The BA in Women's Studies

The part-time evening degree in Women's Studies was established in 1986. The Women's Studies programme is now based in the Faculty of Humanities, with a Chair

and two and a half lectureships in Women's Studies at the time of the fieldwork. There are a large number of feminist and gender related courses across the Humanities and Social Sciences degree programmes, so that at PNL more than the other case studies women's studies seems to have had a fairly substantial impact on the mainstream curriculum. The modular degree structure and the number of feminist academics working at PNL have facilitated these developments.

However, a recurring theme in the interviews with the Disciplined and Indisciplined Feminists at PNL who do not have lecturing posts in women's studies was that teaching on the autonomous women's studies programme was 'preaching to the converted'. They felt they were not part of the women's studies programme even though they contributed to the teaching of some of the women's studies modules. These informants argued that they preferred to integrate feminist knowledge into their disciplines, and used the notion of a 'strategy of subversion' to describe how they 'snuck' feminism into the mainstream curriculum on unsuspecting (male) students. They did not go so far as to describe the women's studies programme as a 'ghetto', but the implications of their arguments are similar to this debate. For these academics, the recuperative and reconstructive projects of feminist knowledge are better placed in the disciplines, where they will be introduced to students who are not necessarily feminists, and can be taught alongside other critical theories. The academic informants at PNL were divided between Disciplined feminists, Indisciplined feminists, and Women's studies practitioners, and their different perspectives have led to the establishment of a wide range of women's studies and feminist courses in the curriculum.

The autonomy of the women's studies programme has improved the visibility of women's studies as a subject area. It has also arguably provided the space for a reflexive, feminist engagement with the curriculum which might not occur in courses

outside of women's studies. For instance, one student informant related an anecdote which occurred during the first years of the programme:

We had some heated stuff on the way black women were dealt with in the lectures. . . There was one lecture [on the representation of women] where black women really weren't dealt with at all in the context of this issue and in the seminar several people pointed this out to the lecturer - that it had to be re-written, it had to include black women and so forth. And she was basically in a total state afterwards, and was very upset, and we dragged her off to the pub afterwards and sort of discussed it with her and from then on she did change the content and the next class she did was much better. But I don't know what it is like now but certainly quite a lot of the problems were, we felt, that there would be bits on education or sexuality or whatever and then there would be a specific week that would be about black women and a specific week was about lesbianism and so on and it wasn't integrated so that, you know, they were really outside it - they weren't a part of it (Student Informant [2] PNL).

This type of reflexivity over differences between women has become a central area of concern for women's studies (Yuval-Davis, 1993). PNL has, as mentioned, recruited a large number of black women students and offers courses in African-Caribbean studies. Almost all of the academic informants discussed the influence of black students on the curriculum, although several acknowledged that there was still room for improvement. Issues of 'race' and ethnic differences between women were mentioned more often by PNL informants than any of the others. Simmonds' question posed in Chapter One, where she asks for reflection over who is teaching and studying women's studies, is crucial to an understanding of different women's studies courses. The political and institutional context of the time is also important in terms of which issues are integrated into the curriculum. The Kent informants raised the issue of sexuality most frequently and rarely discussed 'race', as activists in the women's

movement in the early 1980s were largely preoccupied with challenges to heterosexuality, and there were relatively few black students on the Kent programme.

The significance of the anecdote related by the PNL student informant is that a feminist reflexive project was enabled through the space provided by the women's studies course. Whether or not this type of reflexivity occurs in courses in the established disciplines is difficult to judge. Paradoxically, a course which centralises 'women' is more likely to encourage a deconstruction of the category 'woman'. This implicit paradox in the women's studies movement generally was also illustrated by the Kent debates over the exclusion of men. The paradox is that when boundaries are drawn around women's studies in order to strengthen the field, not only are women marginalised who do not support the proposed principles, but the category 'woman' itself is questioned as differences between women become apparent.

The women's studies course at PNL has, however, raised the visibility of women's studies nationally, and the course leader has contributed to the women's studies literature, was a founding member of the WSN, and now has a Chair in Women's Studies. As Trowler (1998) has argued, recent changes in the higher education curriculum have enabled some women academics to advance their careers. The women's studies course at PNL was developed within a modular structure which allowed the course leader to assume greater responsibilities in the institution and eventually achieve promotion to professorship. These developments are similar to the Kent case study, and both institutions have been a significant contribution to the women's studies movement. The experiences of students and academics on these courses will be further explored in the next chapters. It is first necessary, however, to summarise the factors which influenced the development of feminist and women's studies courses, and the tensions which have resulted as women's studies gained legitimacy in the curriculum.

7.6 Summary: factors in the development of women's studies

The above accounts of the integration of feminist courses into the curriculum reveal a range of factors in the development of women's studies as a subject area. One way of charting the development of women's studies would be to follow de Groot and Maynard's (1993) feminist projects of recuperation, reconstruction, and reflexivity.

These stages can be charted with relation to the case studies as follows:

1. Recuperation: individual modules on undergraduate degree programmes challenged the marginalisation of women in the curriculum. The Sociology of Sex and Gender Roles at LSE, and the Women in Society course at Kent (mid-1970s), were both recuperative projects which raised the visibility of women and centralised women's experiences in the curriculum.
2. Reconstruction: individual modules and degree programmes challenged the established curriculum from a feminist perspective. The Women in Education programme at Sussex (early- to mid-1980s) reconstructed the field of education studies from a feminist perspective.
3. Reflexivity: the women's studies degree programmes enabled differences between women to be explored and challenged the hegemony of white, western feminism. The PNL women's studies programme (mid- to late-1980s) provided the space for a deconstruction of the category 'women' and reflexivity over issues of 'race'.

These categories as proposed by de Groot and Maynard are useful ways of understanding the stages of feminist knowledge production. However, this research has been designed to situate women's studies in the wider higher education context, and to explore the issues which both enabled and constrained its development. As Bernstein suggested would happen, the women's studies movement has been on the whole 'narcissistic', and concerned with its own development rather 'than to applications outside' itself (Bernstein, 1990). The data suggest an analysis is needed

which looks beyond the 'great patriarchal metanarrative' of the women's studies movement literature. The varying perspectives of Disciplined feminists, Indisciplined feminists and Women's studies practitioners, the structure of the curriculum, the cultures of institutions, and recent changes in the higher education system have all been important issues in the development of women's studies as a subject area. In conclusion, these factors will be briefly summarised.

7.6.1 Types of Feminist Academics

Although the women's studies literature often emphasises ideological differences between feminists, the informants in this study were more likely to emphasise disciplinary differences. In particular, the perspectives of the Women's studies practitioners on the one hand, and Indisciplined and Disciplined feminists on the other, seemed to be a crucial factor in the way women's studies and feminist courses developed.

It is useful to reiterate Trowler's idea of 'virtual tribes': that members of different academic cultures are 'in a kind of dialogue with a hypothetical world of coherent, bounded entities, placing themselves in a relationship of perceived consonance or dissonance with them' (Trowler, 1998, p. 64). Several of the Disciplined and Indisciplined feminist informants suggested that women's studies students and lecturers adhere to certain feminist principles and, as such, are already 'converted'. The women's studies movement has, in strengthening the boundaries around women's studies as a subject area and creating a recognisable pedagogic discourse, led to a coherent identity from which some women distance themselves. Clearly, some of the students also perceived a dissonance from some aspects of the women's studies movement. Whether or not this culture of women's studies is 'real' or 'virtual' does not matter as much as the fact that it is important and recognisable to these women.

The number of Women's studies practitioners in this research was smaller than anticipated. I initially assumed that feminist academics who contributed to feminist knowledge production were likely to perceive themselves to be Women's studies practitioners, but this was rarely the case. The coherency of women's studies as described in the interviews was surprising, especially considering its highly divergent nature. The women's studies movement literature has strengthened these boundaries, and neglected the influence of disciplinary differences between women academics.

Feminist knowledge production and the women's studies curriculum have been shaped by the recuperative, reconstructive and reflexive projects of Disciplined feminists. The success of these projects has been unevenly distributed across the disciplines, with sociology at the forefront of feminist knowledge production in the UK. Early developments in other disciplines and subject areas, such as anthropology⁶ and education⁷ were also influential. The feminist scholarship within these fields have contributed to the divergency of women's studies as a subject area.

Most autonomous women's studies programmes begin with an introductory, interdisciplinary course or module on feminist theory and the women's movement (usually taught by a Women's studies practitioner). The remainder of the programme usually consists of various Disciplined feminists contributing a course or module on feminist perspectives in their own discipline. Women's studies is therefore a multi-disciplinary subject area, largely dependent upon the (often voluntary) efforts of Disciplined feminists who may not be committed to the women's studies movement, but are committed to the production of feminist knowledge within higher education. While this basic structure has remained the same over the past two decades, some subjects have become more influential within the women's studies curriculum: the

⁶See Rohrlich-Leavitt (1975) and Young (1981) as early examples of feminist research in anthropology.

⁷Sue Middleton provides a useful account of developments in the 'sociology of women's education', a term proposed by Madeleine Arnot (MacDonald, 1980), which has been influential since the mid-1970s. Sandra Acker's work in this field was also an early influence (see, for example, Acker, 1981).

Indisciplined feminists in particular have been developing feminist literary criticism, psychoanalysis and related postmodernist theories⁸, cultural studies, post-colonial studies and media studies, which are all becoming popular subjects of study within women's studies programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level. Indisciplined feminists may even be less likely to promote autonomous women's studies programmes than Disciplined feminists, which may have implications for the future of women's studies.

7.6.2 The Structure of the Curriculum

Another aspect in the history of women's studies which requires further examination is the structure of the curriculum in different types of institutions. The argument that an interdisciplinary structure would enable feminist courses to be established was more complicated than initially presumed. On a superficial level, the structure of the curriculum at the case study institutions seems to be one of the most significant factors in the establishment of women's studies and feminist courses. The support of interdisciplinary studies at Kent was important in enabling the postgraduate Women's Studies programme to be established. At LSE, where the curriculum was constructed through collected codes and was strongly classified into hierarchies of subjects (Bernstein, 1971) the difficulties with establishing an interdisciplinary women's studies course was clear. The modular structure at PNL enabled women academics to offer feminist courses in their own disciplines, and for women's studies to be developed as a subject area.

However, the Sussex case study indicates that the structure of the curriculum is not the only factor in the development of women's studies. In spite of strong institutional

⁸In the US, in particular, a strand of French 'feminist' theory has become influential in women's studies courses through the books of Toril Moi (1985) and Marks and de Courtivron (1980). The French theorists they have popularised, such as Luce Irigaray, Helene Cixous and Julia Kristeva, have recently been criticised as not representing French feminist theory (Adkins & Leonard, 1992). Some of the informants in this research included this version of French theory in their women's studies courses, with one academic informant from Kent admitting she once assigned a text by Irigaray that had not been translated into English.

support of interdisciplinary studies and a number of feminist academics offering feminist courses in their fields, a women's studies programme did not develop at undergraduate level. The data suggests that there was resistance to women's studies at institutional level, but also a lack of agreement as to what form a women's studies course would potentially take. The disciplinary differences between feminist academics, and the lack of a Women's studies practitioner at Sussex, are significant factors in this case.

The different types of women's studies and feminist courses which were established at the case study institutions will be further explored in the next chapter. The women's studies movement literature has tended to portray more coherency in the way the subject was established in the higher education curriculum than is really the case. The above examples illustrate that a variety of undergraduate, postgraduate, interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, feminist, and women's studies courses have developed. Furthermore, the interviews suggest that feminist academics have had a variety of perspectives on how and where feminist interventions into the curriculum could take place. The divergent nature of feminist and women's studies courses merits further attention, especially given that the women's studies movement has promoted strong boundaries around the subject.

7.6.3 Institutional Cultures

The differences in institutional cultures was another significant factor in the types of feminist and women's studies courses which developed. This research covers a time of enormous change in the higher education system, and the impact of the increasing numbers of women in higher education also deserves further analysis. Although each case study was affected by the expansion of the system and the lack of adequate funding, their particular cultures were either enabling or constraining for feminist interventions at different times and in different ways.

The most extreme differences in academic cultures were between the LSE in the late 1960s and PNL in the 1980s. Both institutions were caught up in political struggles and were the sites of student unrest and activism. Yet at LSE the determination of the management to undermine these struggles was apparent. It was interesting that the feminist informants I interviewed had mostly left the LSE by 1980, and there were only a few feminist courses on offer at the LSE during the time when women's studies was growing in popularity nationally. It was, according to several informants, very difficult for women at the LSE to pursue their academic interests in feminism, which was not the case to the same extent at PNL. The political struggles at PNL during the 1980s were constructed through different discourses of a left-right battle largely instigated by the conservative government. Feminist interventions were enabled through funding provided by ILEA and the GLC, and were therefore approved by the Directorate. Even so, they have been important in raising the visibility of women's studies and promoting feminist knowledge production in academia.

The two Campus Universities were similar in certain ways (especially the structure of their curricula) but had different public reputations. The student informants in particular gave interesting insights into the influence of Brighton and Canterbury on the academic life at these institutions. It is perhaps not a coincidence that the MA in Women's Studies at Kent has been widely regarded as a rather conservative and academic course (suiting the conservative environment of Canterbury itself), while Sussex has developed a number of more radical courses in gay and lesbian studies over the years (appropriate for the gay community of Brighton). Both were similar, however, in the types of academic communities these institutions initially attempted to foster, and the disruptions that the greater number of women students and academics caused.

7.6.4 The Higher Education System

The time period of this research encompassed what is widely regarded to be a shift from an élite to a mass higher education system. Although the implications of this change in terms of women's participation has yet to be fully understood, it is clear that the greater numbers of women academics and students was one factor which enabled women's studies to develop. In terms of further inequalities in participation rates, especially for students from ethnic minorities and working-class students, there is still the need for more research (see Moodley, 1995).

Women now constitute just over half the number of undergraduate students in higher education, although they are still concentrated in certain subject areas. Women academics are poorly represented at the highest levels of the higher education system. Yet it is clear that women have had an impact on changing the culture and curricula of higher education institutions over the past three decades. Although some of these changes have been profound, there is still a long way to go before the feminist transformation of the academy that women's studies set out to accomplish will be achieved. Feminist knowledge production has reconstructed the higher education curriculum, although some of the most traditional disciplines, particularly in the sciences, have remained virtually untouched. The following chapter will explore the attempts to develop a curriculum for women's studies courses, by examining the goals of Women's studies practitioners as they were negotiated within the institutional contexts in which women were located.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ACADEMIC LEGITIMACY AND THE WOMEN'S STUDIES CURRICULUM

8.1 Introduction

For most disciplines, the curriculum, in the broadest sense of the term, plays an important role in establishing boundaries and is one of the dominant means by which knowledge is transmitted. Yet the women's studies curriculum has been a neglected area of discussion in the literature, especially in comparison with the growing literature on feminist pedagogies. This lack of attention to the curriculum, it has been suggested, is due to the reluctance of feminist academics to make explicit the exercise of power inherent in the selection of key texts or a feminist 'canon' (McLeod, 1998). This neglect has not always been the case: in the early years of feminist knowledge production, several journal articles and book chapters (mainly from the US) listed research and publications which could be used on women's studies courses (for example, Spender, 1978; Kirschner & Arch, 1984). Several informants related how the women's studies collection in their libraries was initially a shelf or two, and it was possible to be familiar with most feminist texts in the early 1970s. Feminist academics were initially keen to share the limited amount of resources with each other. As the amount of feminist publications proliferated, and areas of specialism (such as feminist literary criticism, feminist sociology, feminist research in education) increased, it has become harder to define a common curriculum.

It would now be possible to explore the women's studies curriculum through feminist 'readers' or women's studies textbooks. The selection of key texts for these books (and for course outlines or syllabuses) is an exercise of power which deserves critical

scrutiny. By examining these texts, it might be possible to illustrate what is missing from the curriculum¹. For example, a 'women's studies curriculum' as represented in textbooks or reading lists could be analysed for the exclusion of Black, lesbian or working-class perspectives. The analysis in this chapter, however, will follow Bernstein's suggestion that what is missing from the pedagogic discourse are not these 'minority' perspectives but its 'own voice'. In other words, instead of analysing the content of the curriculum, this chapter will focus on the recontextualisation of feminist knowledge into legitimate, academic knowledge.

Bernstein (1990) suggests that the key to understanding how power is expressed in education is through the construction of the pedagogic discourse. How is it that certain topics are selected, and then abstracted from their origins in everyday life and recontextualised into legitimate, academic discourses? What are the principles that guide this process? The women's studies literature in the UK has not fully examined this process, but has portrayed the curriculum as having particular characteristics. Its origins may be from certain topics relevant to women's experiences (which were first discussed in the women's movement) and which cross disciplinary boundaries, such as motherhood, violence against women, the family, and so on. That these topics have been marginalised in the mainstream higher education curriculum reveals the power of the pedagogic discourse, regulating 'what is thinkable and who can think it'.

The women's studies literature has sometimes celebrated the radical potential of a feminist transformation of the higher education curriculum. This transformation has been based on two defining characteristics of women's studies as a subject area: that it crosses disciplinary boundaries, and that it is related to the politics of the women's movement. Yet these characteristics have created a paradox, which will be explored through the data from the case studies. On the one hand, they have been essential to the

¹Mary Eagleton (1996), for example, has undertaken this exercise in relation to feminist literary studies. She shows how Black feminist theory in particular has been constructed as theories of the 'Other' within the curriculum

construction of women's studies and the boundaries around it. On the other hand, interdisciplinarity and the 'political bias' of women's studies courses are oppositional to the regulatory discourses of the academy, which value subject specialisation, objectivity and rationality. The ways in which these difficulties have been negotiated will be discussed in relation to the case study institutions; however, it is first necessary to analyse the regulatory discourses of the academy.

8.2 Academic Legitimacy

Paula Caplan has argued that women's studies is regarded as the 'illegitimate offspring of academia: "fuzzy" in methods and lacking in discipline' (Caplan, 1994, p. 55). Similarly, Deborah Steinberg notes that:

It has been my observation and my experience that feminist scholarship and feminist pedagogies are marginalised precisely because they are seen to lack discipline: they are too narrow and too broad, unscientific, unprofessional, lacking in rigour and biased, not enough and too much, much too small and much too loud. (Steinberg, 1997, p. 195)

These perceptions of women's studies and feminist knowledge have presented a challenge to feminist academics to ensure that their courses are academically 'legitimate'. Many of the informants described their courses as 'rigorous', 'respectable' and 'creditable'. An example from the case studies illustrates the issues:

So I applied for the [Women's Studies] course and I was interviewed by one of the lecturers. . . she said I had to write an essay to prove my academic work was up to snuff, and I went and had an informal stroke formal chat about doing the course, and she was just appalling. In fact what she actually said was 'you do realise, don't you, that this is an academic course and we won't be talking about the price of washing powder' [. . .] I was just devastated because that

was exactly in a sense my view of myself - oh god, you know . . . I'm not worthy. (Student Informant [3] UKC)

The incident related above by a student informant from Kent raises interesting questions as to the extent that power relations have been reproduced in women's studies courses rather than challenged. The lecturer is suggesting that academic knowledge is other than everyday, commonsense knowledge, and a type of knowledge to which not everyone has access. Yet this incident also illustrates the non-legitimacy of feminine discourses: the above reference to 'washing powder' is a derision of stereotypically feminine roles. Similarly, in an article documenting the struggle of several feminist academics at Sheffield City Polytechnic to establish a Masters programme in Women's Studies in the early 1980s, the authors cite evidence of the peculiar prejudices women's studies provoked. They explain:

One reaction to our original proposal to develop the MA was "Women's Studies? Whatever next - Budgerigar Studies?" - a comment which clearly equates women with small, brightly coloured fluffy objects which live in servitude and are not noted for their intellectual faculties (Brunt *et al*, 1983, p. 286).

The authors have a strong case: it is difficult to deny a Freudian slip involving a derogatory implication that women are 'birds'. Budgies are small, insignificant things; and so are women. Is the regulatory discourse of the academy, then, a masculine discourse?

The women's studies literature has suggested that feminist knowledge is resisted and derided because the dominant discourses of the academy are 'masculine' discourses. The masculine/feminine dichotomy has been widely discussed elsewhere. Kim Thomas, in her research on gender and subject choice in higher education, has argued

that 'we have to get to grips with the ways in which "femininity" is consistently devalued, both in society generally and specifically in the education system' (Thomas, 1990, p. 20). As Beck has suggested, women's studies is often derided as if it were a woman: it is seen as 'too soft' and 'insufficiently rigorous' (Beck, 1990, p. 213). In support of this view, an academic informant in this study acknowledged that any feminist research at LSE was initially regarded with suspicion, because 'the fact that it was to do with women made it low status'.

As Lowe has stated, in the higher education system 'the myth of objectivity is an extremely strongly entrenched one' (Lowe, 1991, p. 53). Women, femininity and feminine discourses are devalued in higher education through the association of rationality with masculinity which has a history dating back to Ancient Greece (Lloyd, 1992). Lloyd argues that throughout the development of 'western civilisation', women have occupied the place of 'non-reason'. The hierarchies and dichotomies between masculine discourses - hard, rational, objective, scientific, scholarly - and feminine discourses - soft, irrational, nurturing, emotional - are well established (see Paechter (1998) for an interesting overview of the history of these discourses in education). David Morgan has suggested that 'the academic discourse is in fact a male discourse sheltering behind such labels as "rationality", "scientific" or "scholarly"' (Morgan, 1981). And as Morley argues, in many gendered analyses of higher education, women's perceived physicality and emotional tendencies are placed in binary opposition to men's rationality (Morley, 1997, p. 118). The dichotomy between masculinity and femininity has influenced much of the women's studies literature.

The pedagogic discourse is constructed through the values of critical thinking, rationality and rigour, and the high status accorded to academic theory. Becher's development of the four knowledge domains, 'pure' and 'applied', 'soft' and 'hard', are relevant: 'pure' knowledge which is abstracted from its original source in a cognitive, discipline-based context has a high status (Becher, 1989). The production of

a specialised knowledge, based on rational thinking and characterised by an exclusive language, is again usually considered to be part of the masculine, academic discourses of higher education. Academic status is acquired through theoretical production untainted by outside interests and not immediately applicable to the 'real world' (Huber, 1990). The production of theory is invested with authority, and this authority is maintained through carefully controlled access to the highest levels of disciplinary knowledge. Theory is abstracted from experience and emotion: it has therefore been tempting for feminists to criticise the dualities between masculine (rational) and the feminine (emotional) discourses in education. Within this framework, it has been suggested:

Theory itself is a tool of male oppression because the criterion of 'objectivity' disallows and discounts women's experiences of sexual oppression because they are not 'objective' facts - facts without emotional commitment (Currie & Kazl, 1987, p. 79)

It is this perspective which has led some feminists to reject theory, and attempt to reject the authority which is inherent in its production. As Currie argues, this binary logic is ultimately restrictive and unproductive. If it is accepted that theory and rationality are masculine, than it must also be accepted that women occupy the place of non-reason, and feminist theory would therefore be irrational. Relying on a dichotomous argument has been unhelpful in so far as it continues to re-inforce the characteristics associated with masculine/feminine stereotypes.

Carmen Luke (1998) has suggested that feminist academics should not 'buy into' these dualities: she argues that feminist educators should teach theory and acknowledge the authority intrinsic with it. Many of the informants in this study supported this perspective by arguing that their courses were academically rigorous. By ensuring that their courses were 'academic', 'rigorous', and 'respectable', they were producing

a pedagogic discourse rather than a 'masculine' discourse. It is important to emphasise not just that the masculine/feminine dichotomy of certain feminist perspectives are unproductive, but that the pedagogic discourse is more complex. A history of the Worker's Educational Association, or Marxism, or Black Studies would probably reveal similar debates over academic legitimacy and the regulative discourses of the academy.

A gendered analysis of higher education which situates women's studies as always in opposition to the 'masculine' discourses of the academy is insufficient for an understanding of the resistance to women's studies. Anne Diamond's work (1991) offers a more sophisticated analysis of the gendered expressions of power and authority in education through the use of Bernstein's theories of pedagogic discourse. Diamond argues that gender relations are integral to the regulative discourse of education, and the instructional discourse reflects the gendered organisation of the academy. The preceding discussion of the cultures of the case study institutions reflected this gendered organisation, particularly in terms of the heterosexual discourses within which women were sexualised. The social relations created by this regulative discourse were dependent on particular notions of masculinity and femininity, which should also be reflected in the instructional discourse of the curriculum. Yet Diamond suggests that expressions of power are rarely categorical and can not fully be understood in simplistic dualities. In other words, there are complex and contradictory notions about 'what is thinkable and who can think it' (Diamond, 1991). This can be illustrated through an example of an early topic raised in feminist courses.

One of the topics that some feminist academics were interested in pursuing was violence against women. There were initially no obvious spaces for this topic to be integrated into the mainstream curriculum. One feminist informant from the LSE explained how her research on violence against women was not considered legitimate:

And I can remember in 79 thinking how am I going to make work on violence sound academic? That is the power of the ideology about what constitutes real knowledge. How am I going to do this? Really struggling with it - really difficult - really difficult. What if they think it's just politics? [...] I mean everything I think I've ever done in my life has been always kind of wavering between just doing politics as against doing knowledge. See, knowledge is about consensus - we know what this is about and we know what it means and therefore that counts. There is this whole thing about whose ideas are going to count and when your ideas start to count they are knowledge and when they don't count they are politics. (Feminist Informant [4] LSE)

The above informant became interested in the topic of violence against women through her background in social policy and her involvement in the women's movement. Not only was it considered political, but it could also be raised in a variety of contexts. The 'indisciplined' nature of the topic was further illustrated in an incident related by a student informant from the Kent course. She was in a seminar where the topic of sexual abuse and incest was raised. The lecturer began the discussion with the theories of Freud, which this student felt was inappropriate as it was a topic intimately connected with women's lived experiences. She became increasingly angry and her outburst over the issue was, she felt, embarrassing for the other members of the group. As one academic informant from Kent explained:

There were boundaries [...] what do you do when a woman who has been badly hurt starts telling you about how badly she's been hurt in an academic seminar? Now that doesn't happen anywhere else in the university and I suspect it no longer happens in women's studies. But there was a time when it did. And it wasn't clear whether that was part of the curriculum or not. Because it was supposed to be the sort of place where that could happen - and we were

developing, you know, who we were and taking knowledge out of a continuum of experience and that was very difficult. (Feminist informant [1] UKC)

This issue raises a number of points concerning the boundaries around theory, experience, politics and legitimate academic knowledge. The lecturer who discussed Freud was perhaps attempting to legitimise the topic by associating it with academic theory, whereas the student was arguing for a more political discussion based on women's personal experiences. The lecturer was engaged in a process of recontextualisation: in order for the topic to be legitimate it must be abstracted from common-sense knowledge and recontextualised into a pedagogic discourse.

The topic of violence against women can be raised and discussed in a variety of ways: through psychoanalytic theory, through studies of social work and social policies, through literature from the women's movement, through women's personal experiences, even through popular culture. The most academically 'legitimate' approach depends partly on the disciplinary context. For instance, a lecturer with a background in social policy is likely to raise the topic through the social policy literature: violence against women is recontextualised from something that occurs in everyday life, and is reconstructed within a disciplinary framework into an 'imaginary' discourse.

It could be argued that the topic of violence against women was necessarily 'disciplined' in order to become a legitimate academic discourse. The higher education curriculum in the UK has largely been based on subject specialisation, and so the issues in the women's studies curriculum which crossed disciplinary boundaries were difficult to integrate into the mainstream curriculum. The data from the case studies illustrates the ways in which the women's studies curriculum has been constructed in terms of the interdisciplinary strategies which have been a defining aspect of the subject. It is first necessary to locate these issues in the wider context.

8.3 Interdisciplinarity and the Changing Higher Education Curriculum

Arguments in favour of interdisciplinary studies in higher education gained academic currency during the 1960s, especially in the 'new' universities with their 'new maps of learning' designed to cross disciplinary boundaries (Daiches, 1964; Lockwood, 1980). In 1975, a degree course guide listed around 150 interdisciplinary courses in a range of higher education institutions (Squires, 1987, p. 149). The new focus on interdisciplinary studies was taken up in the polytechnic sector. The CNAA stipulated that polytechnic students must 'learn to perceive his or her main studies in a broader perspective' (quoted in Squires, 1987). The polytechnics increasingly offered modular degree programmes with greater diversity in subject choice for students, and this created the space for women's studies modules to be offered. As Paul Trowler (1997; 1998) has argued, the new 'credit frameworks' have benefited some academics working in fields of study which draw from a number of disciplines. These academics have been able to offer a number of modules in their areas of interest which may develop into subject pathways, giving them a higher profile within the university administrative and academic structure. As a result, Black studies, peace studies, environmental studies, media studies and cultural studies have all been on offer in many of the post-1992 institutions.

Therefore the former polytechnics and Campus Universities began to create spaces for interdisciplinary subjects to develop. Were these more conducive environments for women's studies courses? The women's studies literature on the whole has not explored the relationship of women's studies to other recent and similar curriculum developments. The changes in the higher education curriculum post-1963 have been complex, and some factors have facilitated the development of women's studies whilst others have been constraining. The general trend over the past three decades towards what has been called the New Higher Education (Trowler, 1998) has included modularisation, new credit frameworks, and greater flexibility and choice for students.

Women's studies has developed as a multidisciplinary subject area within this changing context.

The women's studies literature has tended to focus not on these institutional matters, but on an *ideology* of interdisciplinarity, which is usually portrayed as a challenge to traditional academia. Women's studies practitioners initially argued that in order to study 'women' it was necessary to draw from a number of disciplines. This ideology differs from the approach of Indisciplined feminists, who are moving beyond gender as the privileged site of analysis (and their perspectives will be discussed in more detail below). The Women's studies practitioners, on the other hand, developed a discourse of 'spatial metaphors' for focusing on the study of women, in which boundaries are clearly inhibiting:

I believe that Women's Studies is, must be, about moving outside and beyond academic disciplines with their narrow habits and rigid boundaries (Smyth, 1992, p. 616).

Klein also suggests:

... from the outset, Women's Studies made no secret of the fact that it aimed at crossing disciplinary boundaries... what was emphasized in Women's Studies were interconnections, continuity and interrelationships: the compartmentalisation of knowledge was - and by some of us still is - explicitly opposed (Klein, 1991, p. 76).

Some Women's studies practitioners took the argument one step further, and suggested that disciplinary specialisation constitutes a 'patriarchal domination of learning' (Margarey, 1983, p. 168). Interdisciplinarity is interpreted as a more 'feminine'

approach, as Wisker argues after stating that women's studies is a model for 'interdisciplinary flexibility':

A fluid but structured expression of a variety of ideas and related arguments builds on the *recognizably female desire* to perceive links and related alternatives, rather than making rational, strict, rigid choices and developing a hierarchy of arguments (Wisker, 1996, p. 51, my emphasis).

Feminist academics who argue that feminist scholarship is an oppositional discourse have sometimes appropriated the term 'disciplined' through playful, postmodern variations such as '(in)disciplined', in the sense that it conjures up images of unruly feminists wreaking havoc at the hallowed portals of academe (see, for example, Smyth, 1992; Broughton, 1993). It is tempting to continue making puns with the word 'discipline', and suggest that feminist knowledge has been portrayed as 'indisciplined'². Yet this discourse is again typical of a somewhat unreflexive approach in the women's studies literature: it does not acknowledge institutional structures, nor take into account the development of other interdisciplinary studies in higher education.

The women's studies literature has suggested that the resistance to feminist knowledge production was based on the patriarchal culture of higher education which values subject specialisation. Interdisciplinarity has been a common strategy in the women's studies literature which has created boundaries around women's studies as a subject area. In other words, interdisciplinarity has been a key aspect defining women's studies. The contradictory position this creates is obvious: Women's studies practitioners have often implicitly argued that women's studies is an *interdisciplinary discipline*. This would seem to be an untenable position, and is partly the reason why I

²There have been influential developments in education theory following from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977). The word 'discipline' certainly has many different connotations, and theorists have explored the power implied by it in relation to its educational meaning. Walzer (1983), however, has warned against developing a theory based on 'elaborate puns'.

have chosen to define women's studies as a multidisciplinary subject area rather than a new discipline.

It is interesting that the arguments put forward by Women's studies practitioners for interdisciplinarity are strikingly similar to the arguments used in Daiche's collection on Sussex (1964) nearly three decades earlier. The contributors to Daiche's collection, however, did not consider subject specialisation to be a patriarchal method of controlling knowledge. Rather, as Squires has pointed out, subject specialisation has resulted because academics who believe in objective knowledge tend to agree with disciplinary boundaries, 'since these correspond to the structure of reality' (Squires, 1987, p. 150). Or, as Becher suggests:

Many of today's most pressing concerns, it is contended, cannot be adequately tackled from the vantage point of any single discipline: what is needed is an interdisciplinary strategy which overrides, and indeed renders obsolete, the conventional disciplinary divisions (Becher, 1994, p. 55).

The interest in interdisciplinary studies has therefore not been unique to women's studies, and has not always been perceived in terms of a feminine approach to knowledge.

The development of interdisciplinary studies lost some of its impetus in the 1980s due in large part to difficulties with resources. The resistance to new interdisciplinary developments has often been related to funding. As Mary Evans points out, 'traditional academic subjects had university departments and university appointments organized around them and breaking into, and through, this stranglehold on resources and academic legitimacy has proved a long and difficult battle for women's studies' (Evans, 1997, p. 116). Institutional constraints, especially with the higher education budget cutbacks of the 1980s, have meant that any interdisciplinary endeavour was competing

for scarce resources. Becher suggests that the developments of new fields will be resisted if universities can not expand to meet their needs (Becher, 1989, p. 141-142). The main point is that *any* interdisciplinary initiative is affected by these practical considerations, and to suggest that women's studies has had a difficult entry into higher education because of a patriarchal control of knowledge production is to overlook the wider implications of a system which values subject specialisation.

It is, however, important not to undermine valid criticisms from feminist academics of the élitist nature of the higher education system from which male academics acquire power and status through subject specialisation. As (mostly male) academics climb further up the career ladder, the more likely they are to be in positions of control over knowledge production and the validation of new areas of knowledge. Sue Middleton, referring to the situation in New Zealand, sums up the difficulties:

Administered by a feminist collective of largely junior and untenured women staff, the Women's Studies programme had to struggle for legitimacy, for visibility, for funding, for its continued existence in an institution whose administrative structures have prevented interdisciplinary approaches from attaining 'subject' status. Within the university, feminist knowledge and staff were relegated to a continuing situation of marginality and vulnerability (Middleton, 1987, p. 34).

This marginalisation would be familiar to many Women's studies practitioners in the UK. However, it would also be familiar to many academics attempting to develop an interdisciplinary subject. As Wright argues, 'It is surely no coincidence that for most of the last hundred years English higher education has been both one of the most exclusionary systems in the developed world as well as one of the most highly specialised' (Wright, 1988, p. 185). The link between exclusion and subject

specialisation is pertinent not only for feminists, but also those concerned with other social justice issues in higher education as well.

New intellectual developments during the late 1980s and 1990s have undermined the authority of conventional disciplines, and further strengthened the argument in favour of interdisciplinary approaches. There has developed, in the last few years, an alliance between critical educationalists and feminist theorists around discussions of interdisciplinarity, although this term has been dropped in favour of more postmodern phrases evoking the crossing of borders and boundaries. For instance, Giroux has stated in *Border Crossings* that critical pedagogy must transcend disciplinary boundaries 'that are a barrier to intellectual thought and discussion' (Giroux, 1992; and see also Jackson, 1997, Broughton, 1993; Deem, 1996). There are also similarities with cultural studies, as Richard Johnson suggests:

Interdisciplinarity is an obvious strategy in Cultural Studies as it is in Women's Studies, Black or African-American Studies, Gay and Lesbian Studies. These subjects can not be grasped by a single discipline. (Johnson, 1997, p. 53).

The emphasis here is not on the 'patriarchal' domination of knowledge, but rather grows out of a concern that education should enable students to think critically about the world around them. As Barnett argues, 'interdisciplinarity is necessarily "critical interdisciplinarity"' (Barnett, 1997a, p. 19).

These intellectual developments seem to be an important future direction for many feminist academics. The Indisciplined feminists working in such areas as literary theory, post-colonial studies, cultural studies, ethnic studies and so on, are developing feminist, postmodern theories which are rapidly becoming popular in feminist and women's studies courses. These Indisciplined feminists are not arguing for interdisciplinarity for the same reasons as Women's studies practitioners. Indisciplined

feminists are moving beyond gender as the privileged site of analysis: the focus is therefore not always 'women'. For instance, Ahmed has recently suggested that:

My own work, like many of the 'newer' scholars in Women's Studies, is as much about race as it is about gender, and I can easily imagine working in a centre for Black studies. My point is that there are many different points of entry for questioning and critiquing relationships of power and difference. (Ahmed, 1999, p. 6).

Yet, in spite of all of these developments, the extent to which women's studies has been an interdisciplinary subject area in practice is questionable. Women's studies in Britain was initially perceived to be 'that part of sociology which deals with women' (Scott & Porter, 1984, p. 217). Many of the first course leaders of women's studies programmes came from a background in the social sciences. A survey of the archival data collected for this research reveals that in 1977-8 there were (approximately) 16 universities and polytechnics that offered a women's studies related undergraduate option in their social science faculties, compared with 7 universities and polytechnics that offered an option as part of a humanities degree. Although many of the articles from the women's studies literature espouse an interdisciplinary ideology, most at least acknowledge the influence of feminist sociology³. As areas of specialism in feminist knowledge have expanded, the legacy of these origins has remained a defining aspect of the subject area. Women's studies, for instance, was entered into the 1996 Research Assessment Exercise as a sub-panel of sociology.

It is difficult to verify whether women's studies today is a less interdisciplinary subject area than many academics originally intended to be. A recent survey of feminist

³Gill Kirkup, for instance, in an article (1983) about the Open University course 'The Changing Experience of Women', states that the 'transdisciplinary' ambitions of the course designers were not achieved, due to the fact that 'more feminist analysis and criticism has taken place in the Social Sciences than other disciplines', and the 'representation of the course team has been higher from the Social Sciences' (Kirkup, 1983, p. 278).

journals widely read in Britain and the US concluded that 'the frequent characterization of women's studies as a field of interdisciplinary research and teaching is little supported by available research evidence' (Allen, 1997, p. 362). To a large extent, the structure of the university curriculum will be a major factor in determining whether or not an interdisciplinary approach is practical (Squires, 1987). The courses at the case studies highlighted some of the difficulties of establishing an interdisciplinary programme, and these courses will be explored in the following sections in order to illustrate the extent to which an interdisciplinary ideology was put into practice. As will be shown, the differences in institutional contexts have resulted in a variety of different courses.

8.3.1 Postgraduate Interdisciplinary Opportunities

The University of Kent at Canterbury developed an interdisciplinary studies programme which supported the MA in Women's Studies. The Women's Studies degree consisted of an introductory course on feminist theory followed by a range of courses taught by Disciplined feminists on feminist perspectives in their fields (such as philosophy, anthropology, economics, and literature). The choices available depended on the willingness of these academics to (voluntarily in the beginning) teach a component of the programme. The MA was therefore more *multidisciplinary* than *interdisciplinary*, and this has been a common structure for postgraduate level masters courses. Whether women's studies students learn about feminist sociology, feminist history, or feminist literary theory and so on depends on whether there are Disciplined feminists willing to contribute to the degree programme.

One of the academic informants discussed another difficulty with this structure. She helped organise a course on feminist literary criticism, and found that students who did not have a background in literary studies often lowered the level of the discussions.

And I was beginning to feel in a rather disgruntled way by then that the [course] was being taken by women who were trained in the social sciences who saw it

as an opportunity to read nice novels. And we seemed to have to constantly start at first base - that there were those sort of endless dreary arguments about élitism, and about high and low culture, operating at a not very interesting level I felt. And the course was sort of dogged with that - that there was a need to go at two speeds. . . so you know one was trying to do interesting theorised work with them but then there was always a rump of students who liked reading novels and identifying with characters and essentially wanted to do that sort of work. (Feminist Informant [4] UKC)

This point resonated with my own experiences of women's studies, as one of the first women's studies courses I ever took as an undergraduate was on women writers. The opportunity to read 'nice novels' was a motivating factor behind this choice, and the discussions we had about the women characters were probably very similar to what this academic informant is describing. Yet the course for me was a revelation: I had never sat in a women-only classroom discussing books mainly written by women about women, and the idea that this was an academically legitimate exercise completely altered my perceptions of academic knowledge. In fact, it raised my consciousness as to the political nature of academic knowledge, and to hear this informant disparage her students in a way which made their efforts seem non-legitimate was disconcerting.

Without explicitly expressing the issue in these terms, the academic informant is drawing a distinction between the recuperative and reconstructive projects of feminist knowledge production. Feminist approaches to literary studies were initially concerned with uncovering women's contribution to literature by 'discovering' women novelists who had been 'written out' of the canon. This was followed by a reconstruction of literary studies, as genres were re-defined and the canon was challenged. The informant described this reconstruction as much more intellectually exciting and groundbreaking than recuperation, and wanted to use her Masters level

course to explore it. The multidisciplinary structure was a constraint, however, as some of her students were not at a level which enabled them to challenge the field.

This difference in students' disciplinary backgrounds is a general issue for postgraduate, multidisciplinary women's studies programmes which is rarely explored in the literature. The idea that women's studies courses should break down disciplinary barriers is difficult when the programme consists mainly of Disciplined feminists who teach their own disciplines to students from other backgrounds. This problem was overcome at Sussex in the MA in Women in Education programme, where the students came mainly from education backgrounds and the course was specialised for them. As feminist knowledge production has proliferated, the opportunity to offer Masters level degrees in a specialist area, rather than the 'generic' MA in Women's Studies, has increased. As examples, there are now 'applied' Masters programmes in women's studies which are oriented towards social work (the University of Bradford developed an early programme), and MA degrees in Gender and Development have also been popular (programmes have been offered at the University of Wales at Cardiff, the University of Manchester, the University of Sussex, and the Institute of Education, University of London).

8.3.2 Undergraduate Interdisciplinary Opportunities

At undergraduate level, the opportunities for developing an interdisciplinary degree would seem more realistic. However, a survey of the *WSN Courses Handbook* produced in 1995/6 revealed that undergraduate options in women's studies were still more numerous in social science faculties than in the humanities. The actual number of full-time, single or combined honours degree programmes in women's studies in the UK has always been relatively small. Recent research conducted by the WSN surveyed the UCAS course listings for 1998/9, which showed that there were only eight institutions offering women's studies as a single honours degree, and twenty-five

offering women's studies as a joint degree (Jackson, 1999). The survey further revealed that there are not enough applicants to fill all of these places.

The PNL case study highlights some of the difficulties in establishing a truly interdisciplinary programme. The course leader of the Women's Studies programme had the choice of locating the degree in either the Humanities Faculty or the Social Science Faculty, and she chose Humanities even though she has a background in sociology. One of the other lecturers on the women's studies programme explained how they moved out of the Access to Continuing Education unit:

We found [that] Humanities were very keen to have us - and in some ways I thought and still think that that was good because it was quite good getting social science - in fact our third member is also a social scientist - getting the social sciences into Humanities given that women's studies is and has to be interdisciplinary. So we ended up in Humanities and then really completely arbitrarily we are in the School of Literary and Media Studies. There is no logic to that - we could equally be grouped into History.

(Feminist Informant [4] PNL)

The extent to which the programme is interdisciplinary because of this arrangement is constrained by the fact that the feminist courses in social sciences are located on another PNL site several miles away and are not timetabled to enable Humanities students to easily incorporate them into their degree. The BA in Women's Studies is a half-degree, and combining it with a programme outside of Humanities is difficult in practical terms. As this informant explained 'I think [the location of Women's Studies in Humanities] has actually worked against students who want to combine a social sciences degree with Women's Studies'. Furthermore, another informant explained that students often opt to graduate with a degree in 'Combined Humanities' rather than Women's Studies. This is in spite of the fact that there are so many feminist options that they are not all

listed as Women's Studies courses, and so students can choose to almost exclusively take feminist courses throughout their programme yet still end up with a degree in Combined Humanities.

The location and visibility of women's studies at PNL is a result of a number of practical and structural factors, which have constrained the strategy to create a recognisable, interdisciplinary programme. Although the academic informant above argued that interdisciplinarity is achieved by locating social scientists in the Humanities Faculty, in practical terms it means that they can offer a few social sciences courses in a programme that is largely comprised of humanities courses. As with many women's studies programmes, an interdisciplinary approach is only evident (if at all) in the introductory, core courses, such as 'Women and Feminism' or 'Gender and Sexuality' (both offered at PNL), where the cross-disciplinary topics such as family, motherhood, violence against women, and feminist concepts such as 'patriarchy', 'gender roles', and so on can be taught. Even so, it could be argued (contentiously) these topics and theories can be adequately covered at undergraduate level from a sociological perspective.

Therefore, establishing women's studies as an interdisciplinary subject area has been an ideology which is difficult to achieve in practice. The institutional fragility of women's studies is often blamed on the resistance to the feminist challenge of 'breaking down boundaries', which sounds much more intellectually exciting than a couple of feminist social scientists moving into offices in the Humanities Faculty. The spatial metaphors which have been deployed in the arguments for interdisciplinary approaches have glossed over the mundane practicalities of timetables, resources, and the physical locations of academic departments. The women's studies curriculum is more often a multidisciplinary programme created through the rather *ad hoc* contributions from Disciplined feminists who are committed to teaching from a feminist perspective in their discipline. If women's studies was initially considered to be a non-legitimate subject

area in higher education, the resistance to it stemmed from more than a patriarchal domination of the traditional disciplinary boundaries.

8.4 The Political Bias of Women's Studies

The emphasis on processes over content in the women's studies literature is based on the explicit goals of empowerment through teaching women's studies. The traditional 'banking' method of education as described by Paulo Friere (1970) has been rejected in the women's studies literature in favour of a consciousness-raising project of feminist empowerment. The women's studies curriculum, then, is difficult to describe in terms of a body of knowledge that is imparted to the students, partly because the emphasis has been on the process of educating students to see the world in a different way. For example, in an introductory textbook for women's studies students, the opening chapter explains that 'participating in Women's Studies is a political engagement', and that it 'empowers women collectively, leading to changing them as people' (Madoc-Jones & Coates, 1996, p. 4). The women's studies literature has focused less on the content of courses - or 'what' is taught - in favour of 'why' and 'how' it is taught.

Yet it is the explicitly political aims of feminist and women's studies courses which have been another obstacle in their acceptance as a legitimate addition to the higher education curriculum. As Lowe states, women's studies has been seen to be incompatible with the university system, in part because of the 'political nature of women's studies and the supposedly objective nature of the university' (Lowe & Benston, 1991, p. 52). However, this type of resistance has been provoked by other new subject areas in higher education. In a collection of articles on Bernstein, Edwards (1995) discusses the strength of the regulative discourses in the construction of the curriculum and the hierarchies of academic knowledge. He argues:

From a conservative perspective, the authority of the teacher is inseparable from the authority of a properly designated subject. Teachers lose pedagogic

authority once subjects are replaced by 'studies' - social, business, communication, environmental, peace, women's, and so on. Some studies are more obviously objectionable than others because of their political purposes, but all represent regrettable departures from knowledge that is properly established or 'disciplined'. (Edwards, 1995, p. 108).

Again, the 'indisciplined' nature of feminist knowledge has been perceived to be a barrier in terms of gaining academic legitimacy. Yet women's studies is not the only subject area facing such discrimination. Dave O'Reilly (1992), in his account of the development of the Diploma in Higher Education course at North East London Polytechnic in the mid-1970s, provides an example of the way the regulative discourses of the academy create boundaries. The Diploma was designed to enable non-standard entry students to propose their own subjects of study, and one potential student planned to study esoteric astrology. Her personal tutor wrote a letter attempting to explain why this proposal would be rejected. He said:

My view is that you start from a position of commitment to astrological beliefs. Getting your programme of study accepted is currently unlikely precisely because the institution, by social definition, seeks to represent a tacit commitment to a rationalistic ideology. . . the majority of staff within the institution does not consider that it is appropriate for the institution to support such non-rationalities (O'Reilly, 1992, p. 131).

The fundamental academic values of critical thinking and rationality are intrinsic to most pedagogic discourses. The free thinker, who is capable of seeing all sides of the argument in the pursuit of 'truth', is the ideal product of the dominant pedagogic discourses of higher education. In concrete terms, this moral order implies that higher education lecturers must not be biased in their teaching. E.P. Thompson explains that 'one prime social function of a university is to inquire freely, and to criticize freely'

(Thompson, 1970, p. 39). University lecturers are expected to be critical of society and its institutions, but from a non-partisan perspective. As Michael Allen states: 'There is a long-standing tradition in British academic life that, whenever controversial material is being dealt with, the lecturer has a moral responsibility to present both sides of the issue objectively' (Allen, 1988, p. 111). Allen cites evidence, from surveys of the public and of academics, that most of those questioned did not feel academics should 'convert' students to a particular point of view. This perspective has made it difficult for feminist academics, when, as Caplan suggests, one of the 'myths' of academia is that feminist lecturers 'impose' their views on students (Caplan, 1994, p. 62). Although it may be a 'myth', it is a widely held belief which has been damaging to the status of women's studies.

As Lowe has explained:

Given the degree to which a distorted objectivity has been established as a basic criterion for judging scholarship, the explicitly political orientation of feminist scholarship and women's studies has inevitably made it suspect to anyone who is in the mainstream. Feminist scholarship is regarded by many non-feminists as lacking in rigour, as tainted by politics, or simply as special pleading (Lowe, 1991, p. 53).

The association of women's studies with the women's movement may be celebrated in the women's studies literature, but in reality has been a major factor in its slow acceptance into the higher education curriculum. Kate McKenna similarly suggests that '[by] being trained as an academic we are taught "critical thinking" as a scholarly activity which is legitimised in so far as it remains disconnected from political activity' (McKenna, 1991, p. 123). Again, it is important to emphasise that the dominant pedagogic discourse is not simply a masculine discourse: if it were, than the following examples from the case studies would either illustrate how feminist academics produced

an oppositional 'feminine' discourse, or reproduced the dominant masculine discourse. In fact, what they illustrate is the production of a *pedagogic* discourse shaped within particular institutional and disciplinary contexts.

8.4.1 Strategies of Subversion

As discussed in Chapter Six, the LSE was a conservative institution in spite of its reputation. During the early 1970s, the LSE became embroiled in controversy when several members of staff were sacked for their alleged participation in the student revolts. This climate was clearly not safe for feminist academics whose work was considered to be political. An informant alluded to the 'purges' of left-wing staff whose contracts were not renewed, and said that one feminist academic had to leave LSE because 'they had got her number'. Similarly, another informant who distanced herself from feminist research (she is now a professor at LSE) admitted that a well known feminist, left-wing academic 'would fall into that category of being dismissed because she was aggressive, and you know some of my other colleagues, feminist colleagues, had a lot of trouble because they were seen as too aggressively, you know, feminist.'

This climate placed feminist academics in a difficult position if they wanted to incorporate feminist scholarship into their teaching and research. At LSE, the boundaries between politics and academia were clearly drawn. One informant said: 'movement activities take place outside the academy. . . not inside', implying that it was impossible to incorporate a feminist political agenda into the curriculum at LSE. Yet this was not a complete hindrance, as one way to obtain approval for feminist courses was to distance feminist scholarship from its association with a political movement, and instead associate it with legitimate academic knowledge. This was not a unique strategy for LSE feminist academics, as an example from the literature discusses a similar approach:

Women's history was a fresh area of inquiry like area studies or international relations, I argued for example, when defending new courses on women before a university curriculum committee in 1975. In part this was a tactical ploy (a political move) that attempted in a specific context to detach Women's Studies from too close an association to the feminist movement. (Scott, 1991, p. 53)

One of the academic informants from PNL described this as a subversive strategy. She was a lecturer in the Business School, one of the faculties at PNL without a particularly strong feminist influence in the curriculum. In order to teach feminist theories on mainstream courses, she re-wrote the syllabuses to include a few lectures on feminism. She said:

It is a strategy of subversion. You kind of creep up very very slowly and you make small gains - it's a war of attrition rather than a revolution. (Feminist Informant [1] PNL)

It is implied that one can play by the rules, as it were, so that acceptance is obtained and feminist politics is later 'snuck into' the curriculum. The feminist informant who used to teach at LSE explained how subversive strategies operate. She said:

I am aware that there is a problem when you can't get something shifted out of the political category into a knowledge category. Now women's studies would have been seen as political by LSE . . . I'm sure they would have seen it as politics [. . .] And the name of the game. . . at LSE and everywhere, is pluralism. You can put down anything as long as you also put down the opposite. That is how you play this one. So as long as you've got all that really traditional boring stuff on sex and gender roles you can put any number of feminist political texts down. And you call it something boring like sex and

gender roles, you see, and write a really boring description of the course - and you're in business. (Feminist Informant [4] LSE)

This perspective and strategy is motivated by a strong boundary between politics and knowledge, and although feminist academics may have been creative in how they integrated feminist politics into particular courses, the potential for integrating feminist politics into the *wider* curriculum was limited. As acknowledged by one of the academic informants at LSE who was involved in setting up the Sociology of Sex and Gender Roles course, controversial or political material was raised in class only if a particular lecturer was inclined to introduce it. She said, when asked whether the course had any impact on the wider curriculum at LSE in terms of integrating feminist knowledge, 'I really don't think so'.

8.4.2 Political Platforms at PNL

The climate at PNL in the 1980s was far removed from the LSE of the 1970s. As discussed in the historical background to this case study institution, the Women's Studies Unit was established with the consent of the Director, and was done so for political and financial reasons. The director of PNL at the time made no secret of the fact that he was a member of a left-wing political organisation and his feelings about feminism could be discerned from a sign on his desk that (allegedly) said 'lefties make the best lovers'. As discussed in Chapter Six, the members of staff who wrote The Rape of Reason (1975) suggested that there was a 'correct line on women's liberation' at PNL (Jacka, Cox, & Marks, 1975). Their complaints were grounded in an appeal to academic freedom and 'reason', which, it was argued, had been undermined by overtly political connections.

It was interesting, therefore, that several feminist informants from PNL made reference to the notion that the classroom is not a political platform, and this is a sentiment that was not expressed by informants from other case studies. The three informants who

raised this issue are Disciplined and Indisciplined feminists who all considered themselves to be located outside of Women's Studies at UNL (although they taught various Women's Studies modules for many years, they do not consider themselves to be Women's Studies staff). One of these informants stated that women's studies is more 'politicised', and that she preferred a different approach:

I actually do not like politicised history - I mean my whole work is on eliminating any kind of bias in history and eliminating, you know, most of my work has been on eliminating nationalist bias. So I would be the last person to say it's legitimate to put in any kind of political message. [. . .] the classroom shouldn't be a platform. . . . I am very very much against any type of propoganda. (Feminist Informant [3] PNL)

In a similar vein, another informant implied that the Women's Studies Unit attracted feminist students who knew the 'correct line' on feminism. She added:

I mean I've always felt really - and actually [a colleague] said that she said the same thing [in her interview] - that it is very much preaching to the converted in women's studies and it's really more creative to be introducing feminist ideas into . . . mixed groups. (Feminist Informant [2] PNL)

Her colleague, in a previous interview with me, had discussed how teaching feminism to feminist groups led the 'dialogue to narrow down' and that within women's studies 'there is a sort of degree of exclusivity and loyalty and having to preserve a certain perspective that maybe I don't share'. She said she preferred to introduce feminist ideas into her courses outside of women's studies:

I can influence my students by not doing it under the title of Women's Studies but by kind of. . sneaking it in, if you want, right? More surreptitiously but in

a, you know, an academically rigorous way I'm raising issues that I think they might be even more prepared to listen to if it's not done under the heading of Women's Studies. Maybe that is my very personal experience and point of view and also it is connected with what has happened with women's studies as a unit here in this institution as well. (Feminist Informant [6] PNL)

Again, feminism is 'sneaking into' the academy; but in this case it is unsuspecting students who create the need for deviousness, not the academic boards who grant course approval because, as one informant said, you could teach 'anything' at PNL. The implication of the above comments seems to be that the politicised history of the Women's Studies Unit may have led some academics to doubt its legitimacy. For the above informants, at least, academic legitimacy for their own feminist interests was obtained by not becoming too involved with women's studies, which was regarded as bringing politics into the academy at the expense of academic rigour.

The perception of women's studies as 'politically correct' was not an issue raised by informants from other case studies, and seems to have been a result of the particular history and culture of PNL. Although it is arguable that the LSE has had a similarly politicised history, the extent to which feminist politics could be integrated into the curriculum was much greater at PNL than the LSE. One of the above feminist informants at PNL explained how she regularly raised issues from the women's movement (such as pornography and lesbian feminist politics) in her lectures, and it is hard to imagine a similar scenario at LSE, where an academic who was interested in violence against women felt she had to leave her job in order to pursue it. At the final case study to be discussed, the political nature of women's studies was negotiated in an academic culture which created yet again different perspectives.

8.4.3 Knowledge with a capital 'K' and politics with a small 'p'

As mentioned in the background to Kent, the campus is located on the outskirts of a small, cathedral town. The university founders (mostly from an Oxbridge background) wanted to establish a collegial atmosphere of scholarly pursuit, and these factors created a climate not particularly amenable to the feminist politics of more urban campuses. The informants (both students and academics) described the rural, isolated, middle-class, conservative atmosphere on campus (one American student said it was 'white, churchy, Englishy'). Certainly this climate was constraining, and an academic informant suggested that the women's studies programme was part of an attempt to modernise the university. She said:

Kent was founded by people who failed to get chairs at Oxford basically and unlike Sussex which was trendy from the start Kent was incredibly old fashioned so we had these colleges and high tables for the staff and gowns - you know - and tutors - just like Oxbridge. So what was probably quite radicalising for the whole university was all these young people who came and got jobs here who didn't know about Cambridge and said what the hell are we doing - parading to high table in our gowns? Why are the students not allowed to come and go after 11.00? So probably Kent was quite radical in the late 60s and early 70s because the people who came were overthrowing this old fashionedness - so the general air of radicalness might have sort of swept in women's studies - you know we are not doing what we did at Oxford and Cambridge - because they tried to foist that on us here and we won't have it. Maybe that was the climate in which women's studies actually came because nobody liked to deny something radical. (Observer Informant [1] UKC)

The extent to which women's studies was 'radical' at Kent contrasts with the political context of, for example, PNL, where there was a more explicit engagement with the

politics from the women's movement. Most of the student informants from Kent were in agreement that they did not consider the academics who taught on the Women's Studies degree to be feminist activists. Instead they were remembered variously (and, for the most part, fondly) as 'head girl types', 'Home Counties intellectuals', 'straight', 'the big kids', 'feminist leaders of intellect' and representing a 'white heterosexual hegemony'. As one student informant said, it seemed:

that the women who set up the course seemed to have no association with feminist action other than the action of setting up the MA. What action they had taken was to find a way to get women's studies into the higher education curriculum but they hadn't been marching in the streets and they hadn't been organising as feminists themselves. (Student Informant [1] UKC)

Another student informant concurred:

There was a lot of criticism of the instructors that they were only academics and they had nothing to do with feminism, really, you know, so there was criticisms that they were careerist about it, or individualistic, or where were their feminist credentials. So that was a matter of much discussion. I was sympathetic to their struggle to institutionalise women's studies [. . .] I guess I identified with their struggle within an institution. (Student Informant [5] UKC)

The academic informants admitted that they were not actively involved in the women's movement, and most of them emphasised the importance of the feminist research they began doing in the 1970s as a contribution to the movement. One academic summed this up:

I think for most of us, feminism - there was a lot to do in the academy. I mean we didn't have that sense of being in an ivory tower. . . Because real politics

was absolutely inside! I mean who needed any other politics, you know, there was quite enough going on here to keep us going. . .the movement was here. I mean we didn't feel that we were cut off from the real world. [. . .] I think it's a construction that feminism has actually taken on - this idea that real politics is somehow outside the institution, outside the academy, outside this that and the other. I don't see things like that. I see things as much more flat if you like. I actually see politics everywhere. . .this is a deeply political world, although you know maybe it's politics with a small 'p'.[. . .] It seems to me engaging with knowledge with a capital 'K' which is after all what universities are for was actually a very real kind of politics - and if you could engage with that you are engaging with practically the whole society. It's so important and is completely fundamental. (Feminist Informant [6] UKC)

In this case, political activism is re-defined: introducing feminist scholarship into the academy is in itself a political act. The result of this perspective was that many of the student informants (particularly those involved in feminist activism) felt the MA in Women's Studies was too academic. Some were surprised at the traditional forms of assessment required, the lack of radical feminist texts on the syllabus, the fact that men taught components of the degree, and the absence of small group work. Mary Evans, in an article about the MA in Women's Studies at Kent, acknowledged that the framework of the course was not innovative (Evans, 1983, p. 325). All of these factors led many students to feel that the lecturers on the MA in Women's Studies course were not trying to incorporate feminist principles from the women's movement onto the course.

The lecturers, on the other hand, spoke about how their feminist research was marginalised by the faculties in which they were located (most of them did not get teaching credit for the MA for several years), and the academic who initially gained approval for the MA faced a great deal of opposition from her male colleagues (one of

whom apparently said 'I wouldn't let my wife take this course!'). In this context, the establishment of the women's studies programme was itself a political act.

The emphasis on theory and academic rigour has been an important but controversial aspect of the women's studies curriculum. Many informants commented on the growing 'institutionalisation' of women's studies, and suggested that as women's studies became established in higher education it lost its political 'edge'. For some academics this process was indicative of the success of women's studies, for others an indictment of the academics who teach on women's studies courses. The perceived political bias of women's studies and feminist knowledge varies between different contexts, yet in general it is now often suggested that women's studies courses in higher education are far removed from the political activism that initially motivated them.

8.5 Summary

It has not been my intention to describe the content of women's studies courses in order to explore the development of the women's studies curriculum. Apart from concerns that the content of courses too often reflect a white, heterosexual, middle-class, Anglo or other bias, the curriculum of women's studies courses has been a somewhat neglected topic in the literature. I have therefore chosen to locate the development of the women's studies curriculum within the wider higher education context, and to illustrate the ways in which feminist academics have negotiated certain difficulties as they produced pedagogic discourses within particular institutional and disciplinary contexts.

A fundamental aspect of the development of women's studies has been its struggle for acceptance as a legitimate, academic subject area. The 'academic rigour' of women's studies has led to much debate, and recent issues of the *WSN Newsletter* have continued to question whether women's studies is now 'just another' academic subject

area and no longer connected with the movement which is credited as having created it. Whilst this has been a popular topic since the early days of the first women's studies courses, other initial goals of Women's studies practitioners need also to be interrogated. The proposal that women's studies should become an interdisciplinary subject area in service to the women's movement has been an ideal which is difficult to achieve in practice.

The production of feminist theory has been implicated in these debates, as the high-status of theory has brought an academic legitimacy without which women's studies would find it difficult to secure a space in higher education. Feminist theory has often been produced within disciplinary contexts, as the reconstructive and reflexive projects of feminist knowledge production demand a level of understanding which can not be achieved through a superficial study of disciplines. The example of the Kent lecturer who was disappointed with her students who wanted to read and discuss 'nice novels' is a case in point. However, the production of feminist theory has led to accusations that women's studies has become exclusive and jargon-ridden which have been difficult to counter. Anne Seller, for instance, has pointed out how postmodern feminist theorists are in a contradictory position:

There is a terrible irony in Spivak meeting complaints [about unintelligible theory] with "Do your homework", and yet elsewhere arguing that she would like to talk so that the subaltern can hear her, and this is simply a reflection of the general paradox that the theory which draws attention to the silenced and excluded is at the same time one of the most exclusive conversation clubs in the world (Seller, 1997, p. 93).

The debates over feminist theory which began in the late 1960s have clearly not been resolved. Perhaps the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group have now been partly vindicated, but the exclusivity they criticised has been part of a general shift over the

past few decades in terms of the relationship between left-wing politics and the academy. One academic informant described it as the 'treason of the intellectuals': that those academics and students who challenged the authority of the academy have themselves become the gatekeepers.

The production of the women's studies curriculum has been shaped by the principles giving rise to the pedagogic discourses of higher education. Feminist academics have not produced 'masculine' or 'feminine' discourses, but have negotiated complex notions around 'what is thinkable and who can think it' that regulate what is considered to be legitimate, academic knowledge in specific contexts. The next chapter will turn to the next 'message system' of education in order to examine how the curriculum was presented to the students through the development of feminist pedagogies.

CHAPTER NINE

EMPOWERING PEDAGOGIES?

9.1 Introduction: The History of Feminist Pedagogies

Those of us who teach are in power, and our critical perspective does nothing to shift how we are regulated as teachers. We are not protected by progressive ideas. (Rossiter, 1997), p. 38)

The development of feminist pedagogies was introduced in Chapter One as a central concern of women's studies. There is now a body of literature focusing on this issue alone, yet this has been a relatively late development in the UK. Several publications resulted from the WSN(UK)A annual conferences in the early 1990s (Walby, 1991; Hinds, 1992), and subsequently there has been an increase in the body of literature focusing on feminist and/or critical pedagogies. It is evident that the theoretical development of feminist pedagogies has only recently become popular from the early articles which first appeared at the beginning of the 1990s. For instance, Cathy Lubelska in 1991 argued that feminist teaching methods had been given 'scant attention' (Lubelska, 1991, p. 41), and one year on McNeil (1992) makes another case for more theoretical work on the 'neglected' subject of feminist pedagogies. She quotes from Judith Williamson to make her point: 'teaching is like sex - you know other people do it, but you never know exactly what they do or how they do it' (McNeil, 1992, p. 19).

Just six years on the growth in publications about feminist (and related theoretical developments in critical pedagogies in cultural studies) has been so great that it is possible for Julie McLeod to argue that they are now a 'sexy' topic (McLeod, 1998). She points out that the literature on feminist pedagogies within women's studies far outweighs literature on other potential sites of analysis, such as assessment or the curriculum. The combination of fashionable theories about power (such as Foucauldian discourse theories), and the abundance of data from the feminist classroom (sometimes verging on the voyeuristic and salacious), make for a much more gripping journal article or book chapter than one on modes of assessment or the content of the curriculum. As McLeod argues, the reliance on personal experience in the feminist classroom can produce intimate pedagogical encounters, to the extent that feminist teachers imply success according to the level of disclosure in which their students engage.

Even a quick review of that body of literature would reveal that feminist pedagogical approaches focus on women's personal experience. This practice originated in the consciousness-raising groups of the women's movement in the US from the 1960s, which are characterised in the history of the movement as small, informal gatherings of women who met to discuss their social roles (Ryan, 1992). Although CR has been widely discussed in the literature, these groups were short-lived and not strategically placed to contribute to the growing activist organisations, and most dissolved after a short period. Betty Freidan, who is usually credited with motivating these groups through the influence of her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), described them as 'navel-gazing exercises' (Ryan, 1992, p. 47). Nevertheless, it is clear that the UK women's movement was initially interested: as discussed in Chapter Three, papers from the first Ruskin national conference referred to Freidan and typical CR issues.

Yet the trajectory of the two movements progressed along different ideological lines. The US women's movement was characterised by consciousness-raising based upon

liberal, humanistic notions of the individual (McNeil, 1993, p. 149), whereas UK groups were more influenced by the New Left and current political issues. As Maggie Humm has suggested, 'from the beginning, British (CR) groups had a political rather than therapeutic ambience' (Humm, 1987, p. 9). Several informants suggested that they had been involved in groups who practiced CR, but the influence of the ideology of CR seems to far outweigh their strength in numbers. Consciousness-raising as practised in the 1960s and 1970s has subsequently been widely criticised for focusing on middle-class, heterosexual concerns (as illustrated in Chapter Three), yet in both the UK and the US the feminist principles of CR which promote collectivism and non-hierarchical relationships have been influential. The transformation of these feminist principles into a higher education system which encourages competition and individualism has not been straightforward.

It is common in the women's studies literature to argue that feminist teachers can in some ways reduce the authority they have in the classroom. In other words, they argue that they can either subvert the (patriarchal) power relations which are at the core of academic life, or they believe that women can somehow transcend or work outside of these power relations. As Gore (1993) has pointed out, there has been a tendency within the literature to blame 'patriarchy' for creating power relations in the classroom, and it has been seen as the goal of feminist pedagogy to transform these relations. As with other criticisms of the patriarchal metanarrative, this type of analysis does not allow for an analysis of power which might be generated elsewhere, namely in the pedagogic discourse itself.

Pedagogical practices, no matter how democratic and collaborative, involve careful selection and interpretation at their most basic level. The power inherent in this process has created difficulties for feminist academics who wish to somehow divest themselves of this authority. Furthermore, the notion that all experience is valid and should be

given equal weight does not always contribute to a productive pedagogical situation. As argued in the introduction to Bernstein's latest book:

Pedagogies based on unproblematic notions of individualism and liberalism, which attempt to recognise and celebrate difference *per se*, may in fact deter an analysis of the very unequal distribution, acquisition, and 'valuing' of knowledge and competence they are so critical of (Singh and Luke, in Bernstein, 1996, p. viii).

It has been the differences *between* women which have posed one of the most fundamental challenges to feminist pedagogical practices, and which were raised most frequently in the interviews with relation to negative experiences in feminist classrooms. Before exploring the problems raised in the interviews, it is necessary to illustrate some of the limitations of feminist pedagogies as developed in the women's studies literature from the UK.

9.2 Feminist Pedagogies in the Women's Studies Literature

Cathy Lubelska's article on feminist pedagogies (1991) is a typical example from the women's studies literature in the UK, and she has been a Women's studies practitioner since the early years of women's studies. She explains that 'as core philosophies and aims (of women's studies) tend, quite rightly, to be pervaded by a pre-occupation with women's experience it is essential to ensure that the methods of delivery employed really do meet our objectives' (Lubelska, 1991, p. 43). She goes on to stress that this learning process should take place in a cooperative and supportive environment, and that teachers need to regard themselves as participants in the learning process alongside the students. This is a common aim promoted within the women's studies literature.

As others have typically stated, women's studies teachers

. . . can create supportive contexts which empower both students and tutors. Part of the pleasure is the reversing, blurring, and equalising of power relations between student and teacher, as we realize we are all students, all 'experts'. (Kennedy *et al*, 1993, p. xii)

The notion that women learn cooperatively by sharing their experiences and knowledge has been central to women's studies. The sharing of personal experiences has subsequently become a standard characteristic of feminist pedagogies and is often referred to in definitions of women's studies. A textbook for introductory women's studies courses states that 'Women's Studies is about *experience*' (emphasis in the original), and that women's experiences are 'a rich resource for a Women's Studies curriculum' (Madoc-Jones and Coates, 1996, p. 3-4). Lubelska expands on this point:

If Women's Studies is to fulfil its potentially productive role within both education and the women's movement then its relevance to all women needs to be clearly demonstrated. Regardless of their other differences all women have experience which is unique to them. Within a context of learning which demonstrates the value of both individual and collective experiences in the creation and exploration of shared resources for Women's Studies, the diversities and commonalities amongst women are more readily appreciated. Making clear the value of each student's experiential contribution provides a common point of access and a means of enabling everyone, in particular those who might feel themselves disadvantaged judged by conventional academic criteria, to participate. (Lubelska, 1991, p. 42-43).

The collective sharing of personal experience has become one of the defining aspects of feminist pedagogies, yet the tensions inherent within it are clear from the above contradictions between commonalities and differences. Furthermore, the implications

of the *practice* of sharing personal experience are not often explored, particularly from the students' perspectives.

It has already been mentioned that the women's studies literature has been unreflexively celebratory in its descriptions of attempts to subvert the authoritarian nature of the classroom, of which the above examples are typical. There are two related criticisms which can be proposed in relation to personal experience and authority in the women's studies classroom, both of which were initially raised by Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) and are further developed by Jennifer Gore (1993). The first point is that the use of personal experience is not in itself a necessarily empowering practice. Ellsworth described how her attempts to use the theories of critical pedagogues (specifically Friere, Shor, Giroux and McLaren) were not empowering for her students, and that, to the contrary, her classroom practices became oppressive as power relationships remained unexamined. In particular, she argued that her own position as a white, middle-class academic can not place her in a position to make sense of, and validate, her students' varied experiences. As she argues, 'As an Anglo, middle-class professor. . . I could not unproblematically "affiliate" with the social groups my students represent and interpret their experiences to them' (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 309).

The second point is that feminist pedagogical practices as developed in the women's studies literature have been similar to critical pedagogic theories, but the engagement between the two fields has been limited. The criticisms which feminists like Ellsworth have made concerning critical pedagogies have been applied to feminist pedagogies in an attempt to understand potentially oppressive practices in women's studies classrooms (Gore, 1993; Bignell, 1996). Yet, the women's studies literature in the UK has promoted a teaching method which assumes that the feminist teacher can give up her authority and learn alongside her students, in what has sarcastically been called 'the cherished stereotype of the feminist classroom as a scene of perpetual collaborative bliss' (Shilb, 1985; quoted in Gore, 1993, p. 28). The women's studies literature

presents a rather simplistic account of feminist pedagogies as a radical and innovative challenge to traditional teaching methods. This tendency has led to limitations within the literature in terms of claiming innovation without reference to other forms of critical pedagogy, and also in terms of overstating the claim for possibilities of empowerment in the classroom. The women's studies literature has also tended to ignore radical developments in the field of adult education, although this is less true for women who teach women's studies in adult education (see, for example, Thompson, 1983). However, it is worth noting that as early as 1968, there were adult educationalists who had surprisingly similar aims to the later feminist pedagogues:

All education which is worth the name involves a relationship of mutuality, a dialectic, and no worthwhile educationalist conceives of his (sic) material as a class of inert recipients of instruction - and no class is likely to stay the course with him - if he is under the misapprehension that the role of the class is passive. What is different about the adult student is the experience which he brings to the relationship. This experience modifies, sometimes subtly, and sometimes more radically, the entire educational process: it influences teaching methods, the selection and maturation of tutors, the syllabus; it may even disclose weak places or vacancies in received academic disciplines and lead on to the elaboration of new areas of study (E.P. Thompson; quoted in Goodson, 1988, p. 36).

Lubelska (1991) rather convincingly argues that the use of personal experience raises issues in women's studies classrooms which have been marginalised by the academy. Therefore, her students are encouraged to provide personal accounts of topics such as pregnancy and childbirth, which can be used to understand the many levels on which patriarchy operates. What she does not acknowledge is that her project of giving voice to the oppressed in order to better understand oppression, has similarities to the work of E.P Thompson or, for example, Paulo Friere. She also does not acknowledge that

her students will be aware of power relations in the classroom which may inhibit their ability to speak of their experiences: they may be wondering how they are being 'assessed' on their pregnancy anecdotes, and may perhaps also feel uncomfortably aware of how the non-mothers in the classroom are being silenced. These may be simplistic criticisms, yet they are issues which arose in the interviews with students. This unreflexive tendency has also limited the development of potentially more liberating feminist pedagogical practices.

It is telling that as recently as 1994 a lecturer in women's studies in the UK published an article in which she voices her concerns about using experience in the classroom without reference to Ellsworth or Gore, whose work would have helped advance her argument. Instead, she is rather re-inventing the wheel, as is clear through her title 'Is a Feminist Pedagogy Possible?' (Welch, 1994). Welch's main criticism of feminist pedagogical practices was the difficulties arising from the use of personal experience, which she had decided to incorporate into her own teaching practices after reading much of the women's studies literature on feminist pedagogies from the US. I have argued elsewhere (Bignell, 1996) that feminist pedagogic practices in the UK are not always entirely successful (as does, implicitly, Welch), and will explore this further in the following sections. The ways in which feminist academics in the case study institutions developed their own feminist pedagogical practices varied according to the context and their own perspectives on feminist teaching.

9.3 Educating for Change?

The issue of feminist pedagogies was raised in the interviews with nearly all of the informants who taught feminist or women's studies courses, although there were variations in the priority given to this topic. These variations could be discerned between the case study institutions, and are related to the types of courses which were established, the context of the institution, and the time period in which they were running. The development of theories about feminist pedagogies correlates to the

development of women's studies as an autonomous subject area, and it is possible to trace this history through the case studies.

The majority of informants from the LSE were discussing the 1970s, before feminist pedagogy had become a significant issue. The struggle to find a space in the curriculum during this time was the most central concern, and this was reflected in the interviews. The Sociology of Sex and Gender Roles course was one such space, and as already mentioned, was designed to fit into the existing format of the Sociology degree programme. The teaching methods were therefore traditional lectures. The Sussex informants were mostly discussing the 1980s, and the lecturers who established the individual feminist courses had varying perspectives on the relationship between their teaching methods and feminist pedagogies. At the two case studies with autonomous women's studies degree programmes, the informants were more likely to identify their teaching practices with feminist pedagogies. The student informants from Sussex, Kent and PNL also had varying perspectives on feminist pedagogies, but were mostly critical of certain practices as they perceived them.

There are three general and related concerns with feminist pedagogies which will be explored through the interview data. The first concern is that the sharing of personal experience can lead to a focus on lifestyle choices which can be perceived by some students as coercive and intimidating. In other words, students who are new to feminist politics can feel 'unenlightened'. Secondly, the sharing of personal experiences can create divisions amongst the students (and the students and teachers) rather than an overall feeling of commonality, and have been criticised for relying on essentialist notions of women. Thirdly, the non-authoritarian style of feminist teachers can be perceived as a lack of effort, or what will be called 'invisible' pedagogies (Bernstein, 1996), which can be frustrating for the students. The tendency of feminist pedagogical theories to overlook the tensions within the feminist classroom has meant that some students have had negative and emotional experiences on women's studies

courses which have not been adequately explored. As Simmonds has argued, 'commonalities between women have been more readily incorporated in feminist discourse than difference' (Simmonds, 1991, p. 52); this is an aspect of women's studies which underlies the following discussions. The tensions which arose through the recognition of differences between women have been a significant aspect of women's studies since its inception, and how they were recognised and negotiated varied between the different institutional and disciplinary contexts.

9.4 The Differences Between Women

9.4.1 Radical politics

To take the issue of feminist political awareness first, the sharing of personal experiences in the classroom can lead to those students with a high level of involvement in feminist political activism dominating the classroom discussions. Students who are new to feminist politics may feel 'unenlightened' when confronted with unfamiliar arguments. The MA in Women's Studies at Kent clearly recruited a high number of students who were, or had been involved in feminist activist groups. It is important to place this data within the context of the time: at the end of the 1970s and early 1980s, lesbian separatism and radical feminist politics had caused a major debate within the women's movement. Most of the students and academic informants from this course spoke about the divisiveness caused by this issue, and for some, there seemed to be an implicit link between lesbian separatism, radical feminist politics, and feminist consciousness.

It was acknowledged by a few of the lecturers that they had not been prepared for these debates and, as they were negotiating the course content with the students, radical feminist politics and sexualities did become student-initiated topics on the core course. This 'gap' in the formal course content was criticised by a student in one of the occasional working papers that was published by the Women's Studies Centre at Kent based on students' essays (Franklin & Stacey, 1986). Another student informant

explained that radical feminist politics was not included in the curriculum, but was raised by a few of the students who asked that time be set aside for it. She said:

Why is it rejected so much? Why isn't there a space made for it in the academy? What is so threatening about it? Why does it have to be constantly written out? Why is it always put into a little box? And one of the results of it which is a bit of a paradox in that it wasn't actually on the curriculum was that I think it certainly opened my eyes to radical feminist theory which remains to me the most intellectually satisfying of the various [feminist strands] . . . but I am very grateful to my fellow students who gave me that - I didn't get it from the course. (Student Informant [7] UKC).

Although this issue was not intended to be part of the formal curriculum, most of the student informants were aware of an 'identity politics' and a divisiveness which left many of them feeling marginalised. A heterosexual student informant is paraphrased at length for her vivid description of the divisiveness:

A lot of the women's studies students all knew each other - not necessarily each other personally on the course but they knew people who knew people - because somebody came from London and that community and somebody came from Brighton and that community and there were crossovers. So they would sit and have these kind of exclusive conversations - not their fault - you know about Linda Bellos this and so-and-so that, and had they gone to the lake with Sheila Jeffreys and all sorts of in-conversations about the latest kind of lesbian political furore that happened at such-and-such conference where somebody stood up and said something and somebody else - all that sort of thing. And that became a sort of sub-group within the wider Women's Studies MA course in fact - so you know there were groups within groups and it was quite hard. I mean actually, I seem to remember now, come to think about it, you were

actually quite tense quite a lot of the time. You desperately want to be accepted - so you desperately kind of want to straddle every group - you want to be part of that group because that is the kind of in-group - the lesbian kind of alternative - knowing all the other lesbians, knowing the scene, knowing the politics, knowing the gossip. That's the in-group. The staff also gave greater credibility to that in-group because they themselves were caught up in that whole issue around their own sense of. . . because they themselves were leading those kinds of conventional lives so they were kind of attracted to - and often they were very attractive people as well. And then there was the sort of, as I say, people like me who didn't have the confidence to say well, I am who I am - I don't know about this, tell me - I don't know about it I'm interested - or I don't want to know about it - but sort of straddling it and trying to be part of it by not talking about it - being terrified to talk about it in case you were seen as some kind of either prude, or somebody who had sold out or somebody who is somehow getting the best of both worlds. I think I felt inauthentic I'd say - I think that about sums it up. (Student Informant [3] UKC)

This 'silencing' of students' voices is antithetical to feminist pedagogical strategies, yet it is a subject which has not yet adequately been explored in the literature (Lewis, 1993; Luke, 1994). In a later year, a student informant reveals a different perspective:

I think the dividing lines [in the group] were partly along sexuality - all of the lesbians students were disaffected. Partly along the lines of the extent to which some of us were interested in radical feminist ideas - that was really really on the outside. It was very much socialist feminist and we didn't really deal with radical feminism and some of us were really into it at the time. (Student Informant [2] UKC)

It is difficult to interpret these very personal accounts of students' experiences, yet it is interesting that both a heterosexual student and a lesbian student discussed feelings of marginalisation due to their sexualities. A recent article by Sue Jackson, who explores the tensions in feminist classrooms created by social class differences, argues that more articulate and powerful students can dominate the group and make claims for the ownership of knowledge (Jackson, 1997, p. 211). The different perspectives between these students may be a result of more articulate lesbian students dominating the group one year, and more articulate heterosexual students dominating another year. Furthermore, as one women's studies lecturer interviewed by Louise Morley (1997) explained, she was 'highly suspect' of the notion of a unified group of students, as 'students engaged with course content from partial and situated positions, meaning that there were always multiple readings of any session' (Morley, 1997, p. 192).

These multiple perspectives may have a basis in the historical context of the time. The above students were in different cohorts, and by 1984 when the second student attended the course, the political debates around lesbian separatism and radical feminism had been dampened by a feminist backlash. It is likely that the heterosexual students were the dominant 'voice' in the mid-1980s (and have arguably remained so). As Wilton suggests, 'the failure of women's studies to incorporate lesbianism is a reflection of deep-rooted homophobia in society' (Wilton, 1993, p. 170).

The changing political climate of the times were also revealed as an influence on students' perceptions of each other during an interview with a student informant from PNL, who enrolled on the evening degree in 1986:

The association on the whole, thanks to the media, was around sexuality wasn't it, around the Hite report, maybe, lesbianism and that kind of thing. So I think I either felt that feminism was about raging dykes or whatever I'm not quite sure but it certainly felt that the association was quite strong and that was kind

of a worry to people. And most of these women, the other women, were having relationships with men which made them uncomfortable politically. I don't think you can do a course like that without a challenge - it challenges your values really. It challenges your whole way of life. I think [another student] once said to me - oh you're doing a women's studies course - people break up when they do a women's studies course - or they get depressed or something like that (laughter). Which is inevitable because, not inevitable, but it challenges your values. (Student Informant [1] PNL)

This stereotype of feminist classrooms has a long history. An academic informant from Sussex found out that her feminist course in the mid-1970s was widely derided by the other students as a course which only lesbian students took. The association of feminism with sexual identities, and the media backlash against lesbian and radical politics, has been deeply damaging to women's studies courses and feminist politics in general. Yet, as the interviews from the early years of the Kent course illustrate, there were very real divides between the heterosexual and lesbian students. As feminist pedagogical theories become influenced by postmodernism, these 'multiple perspectives' are described through terms such as 'fragmented identities' and so on (see, for example, Price & Owen, 1998). Yet it seems important for the development of women's studies to understand how they were based on the actual social and political context of the times.

9.4.2 Life-changes, liberation and lesbianism

The danger is that women's studies classrooms can be perceived as coercive environments, where the sharing of experiences serves to intimidate those whose lifestyles do not 'conform' to certain feminist principles. A Kent student went on to illustrate how even the lecturers were expected to be feminist role models for the students:

As a group some of us felt [the lecturers] were very straight, you know. And as our group definitely was made up of a number of lesbians as well as heterosexual women and you know, unknown, I think it was assumed right off that they were all straight and that they were lacking in that, what do you call it, understanding of - I certainly don't recall anybody thought they were homophobic - but not being part of a lesbian group that later sort of did form together. I wouldn't want to vouch for that but I don't recollect that anybody had complaints of that sort but just that they were very straight and they behaved in a very straight way - in a variety of ways - that a lot of us were more used to being with feminists who were more overtly behaving as feminists - and it wasn't that they were behaving in unfeminist ways they just weren't behaving the way we were used to in women's groups (laughs). I mean that would sort of sum it up. We had expectations of them which they didn't even know, you know, they weren't meeting. (Student Informant [1] UKC)

This student makes an implicit link between lesbian lifestyles and feminist lifestyles, which explains why the heterosexual students who were living with men at the time of the course were reluctant to share their personal experience. To further exacerbate the matter, the expectations could at times extend to a highly articulate theoretical awareness of lesbian politics. As mentioned elsewhere, the Kent course was academically rigorous, and attracted students who were academically confident and successful. The combination of political and intellectual arguments around lesbian feminism caused even some of the lesbian students to feel inadequate. The most extreme example of this was provided by an academic informant from Kent, who recalled that a lesbian student dropped out of the course when other lesbian students seemed more intellectually aware than her. She described how the issue of sexuality was raised by the students who were involved in the women's movement:

There was a lot on sexuality and that was very much linked to politics in the movement . . I mean the whole issue of lesbian separatism, and sexuality and feminism was very linked, and sexual practice and stuff. So that was something that was an issue. . . I'm not sure whether we predicted that would be an issue - I think we were pretty straight, you know, the people who set the course up and I think it probably only emerged that we should have taken on lesbianism.

Kelly: Oh right so it wasn't written into the curriculum or anything like that.

Informant: No I don't think so - I think it came up. (Feminist Informant [3] UKC)

Sexuality became part of the discussions in the classroom, but became divisive when two lesbian students began to theorise the issue:

Well [these two students] were exceedingly, very clever. So I was running this sexuality option [. . .] And there were tremendous tensions within the group and the tensions were around I think. . . . a mix of lesbianism and heterosexuality and who is cleverer than who, yeah? So some of the not so intellectual lesbians felt they had been kind of hijacked by the way it was going on a highly theoretical level. So that was a very tense thing - so it did seem like the personal was very much linked to the theory -

- it was very alienating and one student dropped out - and in those days particularly Lacanianism was running high and it is almost incomprehensible . . . So I mean actually this woman who left I think that for her the women's studies course was part of coming out as a lesbian - I mean she had taken that political move in coming out as a lesbian and the women's studies course was a kind of institutionalisation of that, and to then find out that she wasn't clever enough to be a lesbian - I mean so it was very tense. (Feminist Informant [3] UKC)

This incident illustrates how articulate students can claim the 'ownership' of knowledge, as discussed above. The coming together of feminist politics and academic theory was for many women in the early 1980s an incredibly powerful and liberating experience, so it is important not to overemphasise the negative experiences of some students. It is not the intention either to imply that women's studies courses are necessarily intimidating, and as the rise of homophobic discourses in the 1980s has virtually silenced lesbianism in the academy in the 1990s it is important to recognise the significance of sexualities as being on the agenda at all. Yet the experiences of some students on women's studies courses do undermine the celebratory nature of much literature on feminist pedagogies which emphasises the empowering environment of feminist classrooms. It is also impossible to argue that women's studies courses encourage women to become lesbians, or to leave male partners, even though this does happen from time to time. Two student informants commented on this with reference to the Kent course:

The other big tension that year within the women's movement was radical separatism was at its most militant and so we actually had arguments on the course and the whole sort of tension among women about heterosexuality, lesbianism, separatism, the whole deal. Some women in the first year actually sort of made some life decisions about leaving husbands. (Student Informant [5] UKC)

Another said:

I remember there were something like 2 lesbians to start with and I think the number had gone well up by the end (Student Informant [7] UKC)

Although it has been recognised that women's studies courses can be life-changing for many students, this has not been adequately explored in the literature. Jalna Hanmer notes that prospective students on the MA in Women's Studies course at Bradford are given 'the equivalent of the UK smoker's Government Health Warning, "This course can change your life"' (Hanmer, 1991, p. 113).

Arguably, almost any educational experience can be life-changing. It is interesting that another new subject area in higher education, Nursing Studies, is constructing a disciplinary culture through a discourse strikingly similar to feminist pedagogical theories in women's studies. A number of articles in *Nursing Education Today* discuss empowerment, experience, emancipation, and androgogical teaching methods such as those proposed by Friere (see Casey, 1996; Hickey, 1996). The complete absence of citations of articles about feminist pedagogies, and indeed any mention of feminist theories of education, is perhaps an indication of the extent to which women's studies has 'transformed' academic knowledge. This gap is puzzling given the preponderance of such terms as 'revolution', 'liberation' and 'emancipation' in these articles. Yet there is a confidence amongst these academics in the field of Nursing Studies that the education they provide is indeed empowering and life-changing for the (mainly) women students who enrol on them.

However, a truly 'liberating' education is likely to be an emotional process. As suggested in one article in the Nursing Studies field, women who return to higher education as mature students may have experienced academic failure in the past and have 'non-academic self-images'. They may come to their studies with 'old anxieties and painful memories' (Hill et al, 1996, p. 328). Hill relates how she encouraged her Nursing Studies students to reflect on their own education, through a special course titled 'Orientation to Higher Education'. She concludes that the course increased 'confidence, motivation, self-awareness and risk-taking' (Hill et al, 1996, p. 331). A similar process was described by several of the Kent students, who acknowledged that

they had anxieties about their academic abilities when they enrolled on the MA, and were proud of their achievements at the end of the course. As far as I am aware, however, there have not been courses such as the one described by Hill on women's studies programmes.

These intensely emotional processes are, as discussed in the last chapter, antithetical to the regulatory discourses of the academy which value objectivity and rationality. It was suggested in the interviews that some feminist academics were reluctant to encourage the exploration of personal issues because of the emotional and difficult interactions that can follow. Several students from the Kent course were critical of the absence of lesbian and radical politics on the formal curriculum, and suggested that they may have been avoided because of their emotional potential. As one student explained:

I think there was a resistance to tabling the personal. And unfortunately I had a lot of emotional needs which I don't think is unusual for students on women's studies. I think there are other sectors of education where that baggage doesn't get raised in an explicit way because the topics don't touch on it in a direct way. It's in women's studies where issues like domestic violence and rape and . . and that's what the rejection of radical feminism perhaps has something to do with having to air those issues. (Student Informant [2] UKC)

There is little discussion in the current literature on feminist pedagogies about students' sexual identities and marginalisation. The Kent case study illustrates how, in the early 1980s, the discourses of the women's liberation movement found a space in the academy through politically aware students. In the 1990s, these debates have been silenced. Instead, there seems to be a lack of awareness as to how the sharing of personal experiences can be deeply distressing for some students, as is evident in the article by Lubelska, in which she blithely states that:

Discussions of women's social roles, for example, as housewives, mothers, carers and workers, can be reassessed using women's experiences to identify and affirm the skills, labour, knowledge and values which women really do, and can, contribute to society (Lubelska, 1991, p. 43).

It seems almost naive to assume that a discussion of women's social roles would not lead to significant tensions amongst the group. Not one of the heterosexual students I interviewed felt that her social role was reaffirmed by the course, and most of them acknowledged the uneasiness they felt when confronted with students who seemed to be living out their feminist politics by not living with men.

9.4.3 Motherhood, sisterhood and social class

A similar lack of recognition of differences between women students was raised with relation to the Sussex case study. During a discussion about the MA in Women in Education course, I asked one of the lecturers if she thought the course was feminist in practice, as she was reluctant to identify the course with an explicit feminist politics. In response, she discussed how the lecturers were sensitive to the constraints on women's lives, particularly in relation to motherhood. She said:

They were all adult women and . . . a lot of the women had children and I still remember things - like they were very surprised that we - well, we wouldn't, for instance, have seminars on November 5th because we were mothers and we knew that mothers can't go to seminars on the evening of November 5th! There was an assumption that most of us had children and we were all . . . keen on academic work and wanting to work seriously but that motherhood was not seen as a problem in that respect. In other words we worked round the fact that we were all mothers instead of seeing it as a problem. So you know if children were sick the students didn't feel they had to apologise horribly which I think sometimes in a situation where women are in a minority they feel guilty

and resort to subterfuge about their mothering responsibilities and we never would suggest that they were anything other than the norm. And that made for a relaxed atmosphere. (Feminist Informant [1] USX)

One of the students on this course remembered these efforts, but felt that they created unspoken divisions amongst the students:

I had a baby towards the end of the course so it wasn't really a problem - another student had hers earlier so the baby actually turned up at seminars and I think it was that kind of female solidarity - it was perfectly OK and everybody was interested. And you know there were conversations that were about . . . mothers which might have been deeply irritating to women who weren't mothers. . . anecdotes about their kids in the university crèche - I don't know - I don't think they were that clued up but I think that is as much about social class as anything else as it often is in this country. I think they operated with a lot of assumptions which didn't get challenged very often - middle-class assumptions about motherhood and also the extent to which they talked about female solidarity and feminism they were more or less actually talking about a particular set of things which may or may not refer to the women in the group.

[Student Informant (1) USX]

This illustrates a different 'hegemony' around feminist discourses from the students at Kent who were intimidated by lesbian politics, nevertheless, it was potentially just as disruptive.

Relatedly, one student informant from Kent recalled that the rhetoric of sisterhood meant that social class differences between women were not acknowledged:

I mean you know class was *off* the agenda. And I would have preferred to look at issues around class and around women and around working class women - because there was this kind of assumption that was very rarely questioned really which was this whole issue around sisterhood. You know it wasn't questioned - you know what the *fuck* did that mean? Actually. There we all were - white, middle-class women, I mean maybe one or two that weren't white in my year - maybe in the next year there was one other black woman, can't remember - but you know all white women, middle-class and well educated and the rest of it and we never talked about the sorts of issues which are actually much more interesting. (Student Informant [3] UKC)

A student from a later year made a similar comment:

[The lecturers] struggled so hard to get women's studies established and that was it - they just didn't have any more energy for a struggle and I think that is partly true. But I think there was . . . resistance to looking at some major issues which I think a lot of women have taken up now like issues around differences between women in terms of class - although they talked about Marxism there wasn't really a very profound analysis of sort of what it meant to be living in poverty - to me it struck me as the heart of middle class privilege without an analysis of that privilege so it was like weird to me - there were ways in which class became an analytical category but not a personal category. There wasn't a discussion about identity - there wasn't a discussion about positionality - we didn't look at black feminisms particularly (Student Informant [2] UKC).

These points are interesting in that they acknowledge the effects of the dominance of white, middle-class students and lecturers on the Kent course. Although most of the student informants were adamant that they respected the lecturers for managing to establish the first women's studies course in the country, they were critical of this

academic culture and the 'gaps' in the course content and seminar discussions: especially in terms of race, class and sexualities. These gaps were often only filled when students took the initiative. A similar criticism was raised by a student informant from PNL, discussing her experiences on the women's studies degree in the mid-1980s. As mentioned in Chapter Seven, issues such as 'race' and sexuality were not integrated into the entire course, but were taught in separate sessions. The Women's Studies course at PNL has, as mentioned, successfully recruited a high number of black students. Yet the lack of black lecturers was cited by several informants, both students and lecturers, as a problem which has affected the programme throughout its duration. Felly Nkweto Simmonds' question about who has access to teaching women's studies is still fundamental (Simmonds, 1991).

9.5 The Pedagogic Device

An early article by Dale Spender (1981) argues that 'equality and cooperation were almost the inevitable outcome of the circumstances in which feminists found themselves' (Spender, 1981, p. 169). This ideal has recently come under scrutiny as the current literature on feminist pedagogies has begun to recognise some of the above tensions and explore them through an analysis of power. To use Lubelska's article again as an example of feminist pedagogical strategies, she argues that lecturers should regard themselves as 'participants in the learning process alongside our students' (Lubelska, 1991, p. 47). She warns against teaching methods that perpetuate the 'tyranny of the expert', as this 'has been so instrumental in the oppression of women' (Lubelska, 1991, p. 48). Her argument relies on the assumption that lecturers have an authority which disempowers students, as did many of the early articles on feminist pedagogies. As is clear from the Kent interviews, the lecturers were aware of the significance of adopting non-authoritarian teaching styles. Some of them did attempt to divest their authority by, for example, allowing the students to initiate course topics. This practice did not automatically lead, however, to the empowerment of the students, but had the consequence of allowing certain students to dominate the discussions.

These theories and practices have been criticised for assuming that power is a 'zero-sum' property which can be shifted from the lecturers to the students. Gore (1993), for instance, argues for a more complex understanding of power. She makes a distinction between 'authority-over' and 'authority-with', and argues that power might reside within the pedagogical device itself. To explore this notion with relation to the data, it seems clear that the Kent student who dropped out of the course was disempowered by the authority of the text as much as the authority of the lecturers and other students. The 'pedagogical device' always operates through an exercise of power.

An anecdote related by a feminist academic who taught on the Kent course for many years illustrates the power of the pedagogical device:

. . . I mean I can feel myself getting angry even as I remember this! Um (sighs) I remember one occasion when I taught in my office - I keep my books in my office - and a student suddenly, one of these mature students suddenly burst out and said she couldn't be taught in this room because the atmosphere was so oppressive because there was as it were the wealth of - a shelf of old paperbacks (laughs) was being constructed into, you know, the leatherbound, booklined study of the male stereotype of the academic and I was being situated in this - I was completely unable to handle it. (Feminist Informant [4] UKC)

How is it that a shelf of old paperbacks signifies an oppressive pedagogical environment? The student clearly recognised certain codes: the office in a collegial setting, the academic books on the shelves, and the lecturer invested with the authority from the university, all signified power through academic knowledge. What the informant does not reveal is her own pedagogical practice preceding this outburst. We do not know how much power she was exercising (and her description of the student as 'one of these mature students' perhaps does not bode well), and in that respect it

may be a misrepresentation of the events to suggest that the paperbacks were the primary motivator of the students' anger. Nevertheless, the setting of a university office is a strongly classified space, and it is important to understand the student's perception of disempowerment.

Feminist educators have been interested in employing methods which attempt to weaken the classification and framing of the classroom through altering traditional practices: for example, by arranging the chairs in a circle and negotiating the format of the seminar with the students. Pedagogical practices which are perceived to be feminist are employed, such as small group work and group discussions with less of an emphasis on traditional lectures. The attempt to foster a 'consciousness-raising' environment through small group discussions and non-didactic modes of teaching have become almost a stereotype of the feminist classroom. These types of transformations have been fundamental to feminist pedagogies, and at their core is the assumption that power is being shifted from the teachers to the students.

Yet the instance cited above illuminates the power inherent in the pedagogic discourse itself. The classroom and the academics' offices are strongly classified spaces, and the seminars are strongly framed. Taking the above anecdote as an example: the seminar would have been scheduled to start and finish at specified times in the lecturer's room, the lecturer's name and a room number would be attached to the door, a certain topic to be discussed would have already been circulated to the students, the lecturer would start the discussion at the scheduled time, and the students would be expected to take part in the discussion on that topic. In general, the pedagogic situation was an exercise of power, which the lecturer thought she had subverted through her informal approach.

9.5.1 Essentialism

This situation was difficult for those involved because of the idea that women's studies would provide a space in academia for women to learn collectively and in empowering

ways. Women-only spaces in higher education are relatively rare, yet with the development of women's studies they have often been perceived as a corrective to the dominant masculine culture which values competition and individualism, and has historically marginalised women's experiences. The perception that women-only groups can eschew the power relations of traditional education relies on assumptions about the nature of women's ways of interacting which are deeply ingrained in this culture. For example, I asked a male academic informant who taught a course at Sussex in the 1970s called 'Women's Reality' (which recruited only women students) if he found the teaching experience to be different from his usual mixed classes. He replied:

I didn't realise it the first year I was teaching it but it gradually built up over the first two or three years - how cooperative women were in seminars when they were seminars only of women. They weren't competing in a seminar - they were sharing knowledge.

Kelly: That's interesting.

Informant: Yeah, it was very, very interesting. That made me think about what the teaching relationship is in relation to any feminist project. (Observer Informant [2] USX)

Gore (1993) argues that assumptions such as these about women's nature rely on essentialist notions. When this supportive environment is disrupted, as with the Kent anecdote, the result can be extremely upsetting (the lecturer felt 'unable to handle it'). The interviews illustrated that this type of assumption can also be exploited, with equally upsetting results. Several students from the Kent course, for instance, remembered a small room they used for informal gatherings in between lectures. The two students I interviewed together had this discussion:

A: Um, there was a little room that I have in the back of my mind.

B: That's right it was a student union room.

A: One room that was put aside for women's studies - it was really small - about the size of this office.

B: Yeah, and we would have lunch in there.

A: And you could go into it and you could find out what had been happening and what people had been talking about.

B: Yeah, their life crises.

(Student Informants [5] UKC)

The informal setting of the small student room became a space for a type of interaction between the students that was perceived to be different from the interaction in the classroom where the seminars were held. Although this might have had the potential to be a space free from the more obvious student-teacher power relationships, it was apparent that the room became a space with another type of power relationship in operation: the coerciveness of 'sisterhood'. The two students discussing the interactions in the small break room on the Kent course went on to explain:

I had never been in such an intense atmosphere where somebody's personal crisis was considered to be conversational material endlessly you know. And sisters being expected to huddle around because whatever disaster had just occurred to whoever. (Student Informant [5] UKC)

These coercive relationships have also been identified by Hollway (1994) in an article about her attempt to create a women-only, feminist environment in support group meetings for students on the MA in Women's Studies course at Bradford. Hollway recalls that one student in this group confessed that she always removed her wedding ring prior to the class meetings as she was worried about what the other students would think of her. Hollway writes:

For me, this comment - and other contributions which followed it and which echoed fears from every quarter about not being accepted by other women - raises fundamental and important issues about 'sisterhood'. Despite the more recent recognitions of differences within feminism, notably those of race, sexuality and class, certain ideas run very deep: that women will relate together successfully; will be able to share personal experiences; will empathize, give support and like each other. (Hollway, 1994, p. 213)

Hollway's article illustrates very well some of the difficult relations established in the name of 'sisterhood'. As a trained psychologist, she describes the strategies she employed in order to create a successful support group, such as acknowledging her own power as facilitator of the group. The small room at Kent did not have such a facilitator, and the students who met there described the tensions between them, especially in terms of the 'needier' students who required support from the other students. The notion that women-only groups are supportive has only recently been the subject of critical analysis. As Mimi Orner argues:

The overriding concern in feminist pedagogical discourse with shared meanings, the presumption of 'safe space', and the fiction of non-hierarchical modes of interaction, leaves little room in which to explore the impositional, the awkward, the sometimes devastating realities of feminist educational contexts (Orner, 1997, p. 99).

Hollway suggests a psychological approach by arguing that these types of interaction involve a process of splitting and projection, whereby some group members contain their feelings of distress which are acted out by other, needier members of the group (Hollway, 1994, p. 218). As a psychologist, Hollway has been trained to analyse interactions in this way, yet most Women's studies practitioners are not psychologists,

and it is unlikely they will have the necessary experience to cope with intense, emotional disruptions in the classroom.

This was evident in an incident from the Kent case study. One of the students in the early years of the course had severe psychological problems which culminated in her having a nervous breakdown during one of the class sessions. This was extremely upsetting for the other class members and lecturers, and most informants who mentioned it felt they reacted in an unhelpful manner. Can feminist pedagogical theories provide the necessary skills? Hollway might argue that this student was 'acting out' the distress of the other members of the group. Although this is perhaps an extreme example, it was clear from the interviews that most students remembered the Kent course as an intensely emotional period, and most of the Disciplined feminists who taught on the programme were not trained as counsellors. Feminist pedagogies in the women's studies literature have been remarkably silent on these limitations.

9.6 Invisible Pedagogies

Although feminist pedagogical strategies are often based on the assumption that the lecturer can somehow divest herself of authority, it was noted in some of the interviews that feminist pedagogies can be perceived as the *absence* of pedagogy. This was also identified by Morley (1997), when one women's studies lecturer she interviewed admitted she was 'horrified' when the students accused her of 'skiving'. As Morley states, 'it appeared that students interpreted feminist pedagogy as no pedagogy at all' (Morley, 1997, p. 163).

The perceptions of a lack of pedagogy is an example of what Bernstein would call 'invisible pedagogies' (Bernstein, 1975). Invisible pedagogies are realised through weak classification and framing: the methods are not made explicit, and the students appear to have more control over the proceedings and often negotiate both the content and the format of the seminars. Yet, as Bernstein argues, it should not be assumed that

the students have more power, as all pedagogic relationships are 'essentially and intrinsically asymmetrical' (Edwards, 1995, p. 104). In the absence of a clearly defined pedagogical relationship other, less explicit forms of power are exercised, but they are nonetheless just as disruptive. As Bernstein states:

Here we have a social context which at first sight appears to be very relaxed, which promotes and provokes the expression of the person, 'a do your own thing' space where highly personal choices may be offered, where hierarchy is not explicit yet on analysis we find that it is based upon a form of implicit control which carries the potential of total surveillance (Bernstein, 1975, p. 32).

It is arguable that the invisible pedagogies employed by the Kent lecturer when she conducted the class meeting in her office were disrupted by the student because she was uncomfortable with the recognition of power in the pedagogical device. Invisible pedagogies can also be extremely frustrating for the students, as a woman who studied on the MA at Sussex explained:

I think the problem with it was we felt they weren't taking enough responsibility. We felt that they didn't seem to notice how angry we were getting with them. We thought they weren't doing their job basically. We thought they had a model of feminist teaching . . it was the tyranny of structurelessness! Just let people rabbit on and really annoy everybody. I mean we were travelling down from London and I had to take the whole day off and arrange childcare and all of that, and we were getting back really late as well - and if you think about what that was costing us. And it was just not on to let people sit in a group and waste time by telling pointless anecdotes that were not relevant. They'd give us very long booklists and people would want to know what was important, you know, if we don't have time to read the lot which should we read. They wouldn't respond - they would just act as though they

hadn't understood the question. Which was partly about really not understanding - not being able to accept it and say I know you don't have time to read all this. But partly about them saying the MA isn't like that. We are not going to package it for you. I think it was about them not wanting to be those kinds of teachers, and not wanting to tell us things in that kind of way. I do think it was a general feeling that they were ducking it. They were not kind of taking enough responsibility for their position and particularly how much power they had. [Student Informant (1) USX].

The two Kent students interviewed together described very similar feelings, which are paraphrased:

A: The key full-timers were foreign students who had come in and paid an enormous amount of money. But where was the delivery of this course? Because it was all getting negotiated and you didn't really have that much time (laughs)

B: Yeah, really, what are we making this up as we are going along?! (laughing) No, it wasn't that bad but in my moments of frustration I remember thinking . . .

A: Somehow people had come for an MA course and were expecting structure and accountability in the sense of what is happening. And every now and then it came apart at the seams as these things sometimes do. [. . .]

B: I think the issue was partly about democracy and access to decisions about what the curriculum would be which I didn't exactly have a problem with. The kind of time and input it takes to make decisions about curriculum I was all too aware of as a teacher myself and so my sense of frustration was about if we are going to decide on this stuff what sort of knowledge do we have to make these decisions and then how are the decisions going to get made. And what I would get frustrated with was this kind of - and this is very harsh - a

kind of lame-o business - a kind of ineffectualness in making decisions (we laugh) as a group, you know? So if we decide we are going to make a decision about the curriculum or whatever today and we have until 3 o'clock how are we going to go about doing this. Now maybe I sound very pushy and American and very manic about it but you know you could talk endlessly and people did and nothing gets produced that is going to be useful for next time. [. . .] You know, that is what I mean by lame-o. (Student Informants [5] UKC)

The PNL course was also criticised for a similar lack of structure:

Sometimes the women's studies lectures just fizzled out into nothing or [a lecturer] would come in and say, 'Oh I haven't prepared anything for today, let's just talk about this'. And so that was a bit of a pain. And that happened quite a lot really. (Student Informant [2] PNL)

Yet, on the whole, the lecturers from Kent, Sussex and PNL did not acknowledge the frustrations experienced by the students over this lack of responsibility, although it would be disingenuous to claim that all the lecturers were guilty of not doing enough work. Although they certainly recognised there were problems with other aspects of their courses, there seemed to be a general agreement that anti-authoritarian, collaborative classrooms were almost natural, feminist ways of teaching that were expected by the students. As one informant said:

It was always bound to have a far more democratic and less hierarchical set up than other postgraduate degrees because it would, wouldn't it? I think the students expected it and so did we. And it would have seemed absurd to have the kind of authoritarian relationship that you would in other degrees. (Feminist Informant [2] UKC)

Although collaborative methods of teaching may be more feminist than didactic modes of pedagogy, it seems crucial to recognise the ways in which supposedly non-authoritarian teaching styles can be negatively perceived by the students. What has recently been recognised in the literature is that lecturers can not totally divest themselves of their power. Feminist lecturers also always have the power of non-disclosure. Maureen McNeil (1992), for example, describes how she refrained from sharing personal details about her life in a feminist course when she was feeling emotionally fragile. This issue was also raised by some of the students on the Kent MA, who felt that the lecturers were not willing to share their personal experiences in the classroom discussions. McNeil was also aware of the non-liberating aspects of certain pedagogical practices, as she argued:

Given the fact that education (even feminist education) is under the jurisdiction of the state, that an aura exists around the professions (even Women's Studies lecturers), the link between power and knowledge, not to mention the constant context of assessment, teachers' calls to expose personal experiences are not necessarily experienced as liberating. Hence, for some students, invoking 'the personal is political' can seem a threatening imperative, associated with surveillance and scrutiny which provokes unease and possibly resistance (McNeil, 1992, p. 21)

The tensions that have been explored through the above examples illustrate the necessity for further development of feminist pedagogical theories. The emphasis on collaborative and non-authoritarian teaching styles have, from the early days of women's studies, sometimes resulted in tensions between women and disempowering experiences in feminist classrooms.

9.7 Data and Evidence

The dichotomy between the academic and the personal has long been of concern to feminist academics. Like many aspects of women's studies, this dichotomy presents a paradox: it either needs to be recognised and challenged in the creation of an oppositional discourse, or it needs to be reproduced in a bid for legitimacy. The non-legitimacy of personal experience is implicitly illustrated in the example of a women's studies course proposal which was rejected by an Australian University, on the grounds that the university did not have enough counselling facilities for the women whose marriages would break up as a result of doing the course (Spender, 1986, p. 52). Dale Spender facetiously wonders whether the university had enough counselling facilities for the women whose marriages did *not* break up.

The course proposal was not approved, however, and the sub-text of the concern over the students' welfare is a resistance to the idea that women might be discussing their lives in an academic classroom. This type of resistance has therefore been particularly problematic for feminist academics and students who valued the role of women's personal experience as a basis for social transformation within the women's movement. Yet the appropriateness of counselling facilities is perhaps not a ridiculous suggestion, as the above data illustrates how sometimes extreme emotional outbursts can result from what was intended to be an empowering experience.

There were alternative approaches to these potentially disruptive and emotional encounters. Although nearly every informant who discussed feminist pedagogies related accounts of using personal experience as a basis for understanding theory, there were examples of pedagogical practices which were designed more for education than empowerment. One academic informant who taught feminist courses in the area of social policy discussed how she used her students' personal experience as 'part of the data' in a course on the sociology of work, by asking the students to analyse their own

experiences of employment and housework. Another informant who taught on the Women in Education course at Sussex explained how she asked the students to analyse their own experiences of schooling as a foundation for discussions of feminist theories in education. In general, the Disciplined feminists who used the personal experiences of students to inform a theoretical discussion within a disciplinary context, and who had a clearly defined educational strategy for the use of personal experience, seemed to be the most successful in negotiating tensions around the non-legitimacy of personal experience.

One of the more successful pedagogic strategies was discussed by a feminist historian at PNL. She taught courses on women's history, and asked her students to interview their grandmothers as part of the coursework. She acknowledged that this use of personal experience was problematic in mainstream history. She said:

There is always a problem in history about the nature of evidence and I think it has been difficult for women working in women's history to validate evidence that looks like personal experience alongside other kinds of records. And hence some scepticism from male historians about women's history because the written sources are so scarce. And if it isn't written sources it feels more like something teetering on the edge of gossip. (Feminist Informant [3] PNL)

It could be argued that the academic subject areas which have been most influenced by feminist scholarship are those fields of study which can be more directly related to women's lives: mainly those in the social sciences and the humanities. The use of personal experience as 'evidence', however, is peculiar to history, and feminist historians could justify its inclusion if they recognised it as such. 'Evidence' is obviously more scholarly than 'gossip'.

However, this informant explained that she was uncomfortable with the division between academic theory and personal experience, and that her approach was to view personal experience as a useful element of academic enquiry. She said:

What has been exciting and a great contribution of women's studies is the idea that the personal is relevant . . . and it's the personal that gives you your interest but for me you have to move on implicitly to . . . transforming that interest to a more disciplined - and I don't mean that in a non-liberating sense - but into a focus where your interest meshes with the academic discourse in order to produce a new academic discourse. (Feminist Informant [3] PNL)

These informants seemed able to develop pedagogic strategies which negotiated the tensions around the boundary between personal experience and academic theory more successfully than the approaches which adopted the rhetoric of CR practices and sisterhood. As Women's studies practitioners come from a range of different disciplinary backgrounds, they may have found a common language in feminist political practices. However, this language is not the language of the academy, and although feminist pedagogical theories have attempted to recontextualise CR into an academic activity, the dominant pedagogic discourse is difficult to disrupt.

9.8 Conclusion

Feminist pedagogies have been an important defining characteristic of women's studies courses. The exploration of the connections between women's personal experiences and theory has been an influential aspect of the 'feminist transformation' of the academy. Where this project becomes part of the formal curriculum, however, students may feel personally challenged to examine their own identities in comparison with other students. One Kent student wrote an essay about women's studies as part of her coursework, in which she points out the difference between members of a women's studies course and members of a CR group (Maconachie, 1982). Students are selected

for their academic potential: they are not volunteers entering into a group of friends whom they trust with the intimate details of their lives. The appropriateness of consciousness-raising pedagogic practices for a course leading to a degree raises interesting questions about the purpose of women's studies.

Of course, some students are eager to share their personal experiences, and it was clear that not all lecturers considered this appropriate. As Richard Johnson suggests with reference to cultural studies: 'learning based on the experience of the student has been standard, not least because it is often imposed by students on tutors whether they like it or not' (Johnson, 1997, p. 55). Yet Women's studies practitioners have often encouraged the foregrounding of personal experience as the basis for empowerment. When this aspect of the course becomes the purpose of education there are tensions created through the rather fundamental fact that degree courses are assessed. The next chapter will consider how the issue of assessment illustrates most clearly the gap between feminist principles and the dominant discourses of the academy. Women's studies courses may seek to empower students through an examination of their social subjectivities as women, but how can this type of educational project be assessed?

CHAPTER TEN

THE FORGOTTEN DISCOURSE?: ASSESSMENT OF FEMINIST KNOWLEDGE

10.1 Introduction

The assessment of women's studies courses has been an issue that is rarely explicitly engaged with in the women's studies literature. There are several possible reasons for this lack of attention. The number of feminist academics who publish in the women's studies literature in the UK and who have backgrounds in educational theory are in a minority. Whereas the issue of pedagogy has crossed disciplinary borders, becoming of interest to academics with a variety of different disciplinary backgrounds, assessment has tended to remain the concern of educationalists. Feminist academics can turn to theorists such as Friere, Giroux and Foucault when developing feminist pedagogical theories, but there is a dearth of similarly interesting, exciting theoretical developments around the issue of assessment. It is only recently that feminist theorists have begun to draw from Foucault's theories of surveillance and discipline (Steinberg, 1997) to analyse power in the feminist classroom, and although this work does not necessarily identify itself with assessment it is perhaps the closest that the feminist literature has come to tackling this issue.

Perhaps more importantly, assessment is the one area where feminist academics must concede that they have an authority and power over the students which can not easily be subverted, if at all. This power is exacerbated by the principles of feminist pedagogical practices which value students' experiences: there is a tension around the implication that students might be assessed on their own experiences, or their interpretations and

presentations of their experiences. There is a further tension around the notion that students may be assessed on their 'feminist politics', or, in other words, that lecturers are marking students for the degree of 'enlightenment' they seem to be exhibiting. The data from the case studies will illustrate how students' subjectivities, or their perceptions of themselves as students, can be powerfully reinforced through the way they are assessed.

As with other aspects of women's studies discussed throughout this thesis, the data from the case studies illustrate the gap between the feminist principles argued for in the literature, and the practicalities of incorporation into the higher education system. Some of the early arguments that, for example, women's studies courses should not be assessed at all may have been idealistic given the nature of the higher education system, but do raise important points about power in the feminist classroom. It is also impossible to discuss assessment without asking one of the most basic questions of the purposes of women's studies: what are women's studies courses trying to achieve? In other words, assessment judgements can not be made without established criteria. Throughout this chapter will be a consideration of what capabilities were being evaluated on the feminist and women's studies courses of the case study institutions, and how these differed.

10.2 Assessment and the Women's Studies Literature

Although there has been a lack of explicit engagement with issues of assessment in the women's studies literature, where it is mentioned it is almost always assumed to be problematic. For instance, it has been suggested that Access and adult education courses are more suited to the use of personal experience and consciousness-raising practices in the classroom because they are not always assessed (for example, Warwick and Auchmuty, 1995). The opposition between feminist principles and academia is again indicated through these tensions. Yet the assumption that feminist principles are

compromised by traditional assessment methods in higher education deserves greater scrutiny.

Jalna Hanmer in her description of the implementation of the MA in Women's Studies at the University of Bradford (1991), notes that the university imposed heavy assessment requirements on the course. She says:

The lukewarm welcome to Women's Studies was expressed organizationally by central academic committees through the imposition of an exceptionally heavy examination structure on students. Even though the course was recognized as innovative, traditional ways of examination were added to the requirement of assessment by essay and dissertation and this had to be accepted by the course team in order for the degree to be offered (Hanmer, 1991, p. 106).

Hanmer implies that both the examination as a mode of assessment, and the amount of assessment required, were problematic for a women's studies course even though it was necessary in order to obtain academic legitimacy. She associates examinations with the masculine discourse of higher education as other Women's studies practitioners have done. After listing the compromises necessary to gain legitimacy, she states:

I am confident that other Women's Studies degrees could present their own list, as we are all adversely affected by a structuring of education, as with everything else, so that the *gendered interests of men* predominate (Hanmer, 1991, p. 106, my emphasis)

The idea that women's studies courses should subvert the patriarchal culture of higher education through non-traditional methods of assessment has often been more of an implicit argument in the literature than an explicit engagement with educational theory. The flip side of the dichotomy this argument rests on is rarely explored: if traditional

examinations, for example, are 'masculine', than innovative methods of assessment must somehow be 'feminine'. The limitations of these assumptions can be illustrated through a detailed analysis of one example from the women's studies literature.

Maggie Humm (1991), as mentioned in Chapter One, has produced one of the few articles on women's studies in the UK which draws from educational theory. A closer analysis of her article reveals that she is constructing a 'great patriarchal metanarrative' of the higher education system, in which women's studies courses are oppositional to this masculine culture. She suggests that self and peer-assessment can be innovative methods which challenge students to 'question institutional hegemony' (Humm, 1991, p. 57). Rather than producing guidelines for this type of assessment, which would perhaps have been helpful to academics without a background in educational theory, she focuses instead on criticising the 'masculine mode of address' which traditional examinations require. This mode of address, she argues, is formal and abstract, and denies students the opportunity to explore the personal. However, Humm does not propose what criteria are necessary to evaluate the personal experiences of students, nor question whether self and peer-assessment are really 'feminine' methods of assessment.

For example, she mentions an article by Robert Bezucha in *Gendered Subjects* (Culley and Portuges, 1985), an early collection on feminist pedagogies from the US, who celebrates feminist history as able to influence 'the most intellectually ambitious' student. Humm suggests that his focus on the cognitive aspects of the field, or 'work of the discipline', denies students' social subjectivities. As they are not asked to link theory with experience, their identities are formed in a disciplinary rather than social context. This is, Humm argues, a masculine approach to education. Yet what she fails to do is offer a method of assessing the personal and social subjectivities her students are asked to form.

For Humm, simply by stating that she employs self and peer-assessment is enough proof that women's studies can offer the feminist innovative practices necessary to challenge the masculine culture of higher education. Self and peer-assessment are not unproblematic; however, she does not offer guidelines which would enable others to employ these methods objectively. This would seem even more necessary when she suggests that students should be forming a gendered, social subjectivity through women's studies courses. As with other articles from the women's studies literature, she is privileging 'process' over 'content' as students are asked to see the world, and their place within it, through new perspectives. Yet assessing this goal of women's studies courses is bound to be a difficult project which merits a rigorous analysis presently lacking in the literature. The ways in which students' identities are constructed in higher education, and the influence of assessment on these identities, were raised throughout the interviews as a problematic issue on women's studies courses.

10.3 The Pedagogic Device

One of the three principles of the pedagogic device are evaluative rules: the distributive rules select the knowledge deemed appropriate for study, the recontextualising rules abstract this knowledge into a legitimate, academic discourse, and the evaluative rules measure competence and skills within the field of study. They provide the 'criteria to be transmitted and acquired', and measure the ability of students to meet the standards that have been defined (Bernstein, 1996, p. 117). Assessment is therefore a powerful means of reproducing the pedagogic discourse. Yet as a new subject area, the criteria on which women's studies courses were to be assessed were initially unclear, and the interviews related the debates about how the evaluative rules were to be constructed.

Several informants mentioned that an early objection to proposed women's studies courses was that there was not enough literature to make the course viable. Rendel notes that at one university, a feminist Head of Department blocked a proposal for a

women's studies course on the grounds that there was insufficient accessible material (Rendel, 1980, p. 17). Although it seems obvious, a substantial literature base was necessary for the establishment of women's studies courses. Diana Leonard, for instance, noted in 1982 that the materials developed for the 'Changing Experience of Women' course at the Open University would enable other feminist academics to justify women's studies course proposals to their validating committees (Leonard, 1982). Without this knowledge base, the evaluative rules, and the pedagogic discourse itself, would be ambiguously defined.

A student informant from the Kent programme explained this initial difficulty:

I wrote a very personal piece in the second year. About why I was not a lesbian. Why I was battling with the idea of bisexuality, which in fact didn't have a lot of theoretical background because there wasn't anything much about it - so I used things like Adrienne Rich and so on but it was a very autobiographical piece and probably a bit of a cry from the heart. One of [the lecturers] who marked it said 'I really don't know what to do with this because it is so personal'. So I think they were being very honest about that - I did another one about menstruation which again was based on some research that had been done but there wasn't very much. . . again it was probably hard for them to mark but they did and again I got an average sort of OK-ish mark. I don't know what other people did in terms of getting assessed but I felt they had been very flexible about it (Student Informant [1] UKC)

This lack of literature raises interesting questions around how new academic subject areas develop, and the notions of authority and expertise which are highly valued in academia. How do academics assess work which is (perhaps modestly) groundbreaking and for which they do not have the support of a canon or literature base? The use of students' personal experiences in order to produce knowledge

presented new challenges. These two points are not unrelated and have been touched on throughout this thesis: the development of feminist knowledge has often been based on personal experiences because of the lack of established knowledge in so many areas that are central to women's lives. Furthermore, the women's studies literature has suggested that an exploration of women's social subjectivities should provide the focus of women's studies courses. In other words, the use of women's personal experiences as a basis of knowledge production was not just necessary but desirable.

The issue of assessment was initially considered to be so problematic that some informants revealed in the interviews that *any* mode of assessment was considered dubious in some quarters in the early days of women's studies. Several of the lecturers and students recalled that in the first few years of the Kent MA there were students who argued that women's studies courses should not be assessed. As one student said:

I think we were very concerned about assessment - I mean we went round and round and on and on about that - that it was outrageous that we should be judged, you know. And it wasn't that we didn't think they were competent to judge us we just didn't think there should be such a concept in a women's studies course. [...] I think that I and a lot of others came up with what I now see to be radical ideas that were too radical. I think at one point we suggested in one course that we should all get the same mark. And again I think all credit to [the course team] - I actually think they took those suggestions seriously and probably discussed them and came back to us and said it is absolutely impossible to do that. So there was a constant kind of negotiation between our ideas and what they knew to be as far as they could go or what they thought to be as far as they could go. (Student Informant [1] UKC)

The idea that a Masters level course should not be assessed, or that everyone be given the same mark (which is basically the same thing), is anathema to most of the higher

education system. The argument that feminists should not be in a position to judge other women is related to the democratic principles of the women's movement. However, this argument also implies that women's studies courses were a different educational project to other courses, or that the students were doing something other than gaining the competence associated with a Masters degree. An academic informant suggested this difference when she explained how they responded to students' arguments against assessing their work:

You were asking about the tensions, weren't you, and how we resolved them - well I guess . . . they were kind of irreconcilable - you know we did have to assess people. I suppose one of the things we did was for the most part fudged - we passed them all. I mean there was stuff that really wasn't MA - but we just kind of - I mean almost 100%, almost. . . I mean it is a really painful problem and everyone, I mean it was unreconcilable - you know, university assessment, that is what it is about. (Feminist Informant [3] UKC)

Her inability to articulate the problem clearly is perhaps indicative of feminist academics' responses in general to university requirements in the area of assessment. She is acknowledging that they knew the level at which Masters degree students should be producing, and yet that as feminist academics they felt reluctant to enforce these standards. Their reluctance was both an attempt to subvert power relations, and an acknowledgement that women's studies courses were somehow different. It is the ambiguity of this difference which has been problematic for women's studies courses and students, and perhaps not surprisingly, as women's studies courses have become more secure in higher education this difference has become less apparent. In other words, as the subject area has developed, the evaluative rules have become more firmly established. As one informant explained:

I'm sure you've heard from everybody else, there was very much a politics of women's studies which I think was important and interesting but . . . I felt the sort of turmoils that there were around assessment and assignments and essay writing and standards, the appropriate academic standards that were set - were just an irritation to me and you know that from the very beginning there were rows about the number of essays that people had to write and whether it was appropriate to set the criteria for an MA which was used in other social sciences for this course were just a constant irritant [. . .] that has settled down now and the questions of theory, the questions of as it were the academic and professional rigour - or academic work in women's studies has become established now. (Feminist Informant [4] UKC)

The establishment of women's studies courses, or their 'institutionalisation', has been controversial as this seems to compromise the feminist principles on which women's studies was initially based. Yet the interviews with students suggested that the integration of feminist principles into an academic course created tensions. In particular, the ways in which they perceived the purpose of the course and their own abilities within that framework were sometimes problematic.

10.4 Evaluation and Identity

The ways in which assessment can influence students' perceptions of their identities came out most clearly in the Kent case study. The heavy assessment load of the Women's Studies programme was commented on, and for the most part criticised, by a number of informants. One of the American students recalled her difficulties with meeting the demands:

Another aspect was the work load. They had nine essays they wanted us to write during the year and then you could go home and write your dissertation and send it back and they were talking about, you know, what 12 - 20 page

essays. Right? They were not talking about 8 pages. So that was part of the thing that kept my expectations up, you know, I kept thinking this is serious. I managed to get 6 written the first year which was I think more than anybody else had. . . So that was another part of the struggle, just figuring out what the expectations were. [. . .] I remember in January I actually burst into tears at the workload in that Thursday morning seminar . . . and people were very alarmed because they figured I was the workhorse and if I was breaking down there were problems. (Student Informant [5] UKC)

Her description of herself as a 'workhorse' is interesting: several students described an educational identity formed partly through the ways in which they completed their work, and the ways in which their work was assessed. Some students had a low self-confidence in their academic abilities which were either reinforced or dispelled through the grades they achieved. One of the student informants from Kent explained very powerfully her feelings of inadequacy, which she overcame when she began to receive good grades:

I got the good marks, do you know what I mean? And there is nothing like - in terms of my rather sad little psyche - there's nothing like being told you are a good girl to generate - or I want more of that praise please, do you know what I mean? It's all rather pathetic, I know.

Kelly: Oh I don't know. I'm like that too.

Informant: Well it's so nice to be recognised. Especially if you have low self-esteem or whatever - fears and fantasies of failing - and you suddenly find yourself - oh god - I can do this! I'm going in the right direction. My work is improving or people want to publish it. I got several things published from that - pieces of work I'd done. And that was really confirming. . . . So I got more excited! That's when the seduction kicked in - I want to do this! (Student Informant [8] UKC)

Assessment is a very powerful tool in terms of shaping students' identities within a particular course. For another Kent student, her low grades have left a lasting impression on her of the Women's Studies course and her identity within it. She wrote an essay on women's reproductive rights:

...and they barely passed it. They said it was a really trivial piece of research, it didn't say anything particularly interesting and it was just, it was just slammed. Well what happened was that was the first paper I ever got published in a journal. So I thought that was really interesting - I thought that was really funny that it was that paper that got me invited to a bunch of conferences to give it and then eventually got published. (Student Informant [2] UKC)

She related her poor marks to her own identity as a student, which she described as 'difficult'. She said 'that was partly because I was very difficult as a student, and I was very angry and I wasn't very diplomatic'. For this student, her low grades reinforced her feelings of not being a 'good' student, and she described a sort of vicious cycle in which she did not perform well and continued to receive low grades. She clearly felt her abilities were recognised elsewhere, and as she is now a fairly well-known feminist academic it is difficult to imagine that she did not have the ability to do well on the MA degree.

The identities described above - the 'workhorse', the 'difficult student', and the 'good girl' - are not the social subjectivities Humm (1991) suggests women's studies students should be developing. Humm seems reluctant to acknowledge that students may be more concerned with their 'cognitive' identities, or their own academic competence, and instead focuses on social subjectivities constructed through a feminist consciousness-raising project. Yet it was apparent in the interviews that when personal issues were the focus of classroom discussions, the students often found it difficult to

feel comfortable about their own identities in relation to the others. The lesbian student mentioned in the previous chapter who dropped out of the course because she felt she wasn't 'clever enough to be a lesbian' is perhaps the most extreme example.

In general, the differences between Disciplined feminists and Women's studies practitioners are apparent through the issue of assessment. The women's studies literature emphasises the process of educating for change, in which the empowerment of students through an exploration of their experiences as women in a patriarchal society has been foregrounded. Disciplined feminists have focused on the feminist projects of recuperation, reconstruction and reflexivity within the cognitive aspects of their field. Although the scholarship of Disciplined feminists has sometimes been criticised as adopting 'masculine' modes of address, women's studies courses have not necessarily subverted this through creating an empowering feminine discourse. Students must still be assessed on women's studies courses, and are concerned with the criteria on which they are being judged. If their social subjectivities are the prime concern of the course, the fact that they are assessed may result in the notion that the basis of assessment is their ability to construct a new, feminist identity as well as an academically competent identity. The Disciplined feminists in this research explained how they avoided these tensions.

10.5 Assessment Methods on Feminist Courses

The feminist historians discussed in the previous chapter, who recontextualised 'gossip' into data and evidence, were clear about the evaluative rules of their courses. One academic informant discussed how she assessed the oral history interviews with students' grandmothers. I asked if there were difficulties assessing students' accounts of personal family events (one of which included a male student discovering that his mother gave birth to a son during the war that he never knew existed), and she was emphatic that as long as she taught them how to use these accounts as a way of understanding more fundamental issues in social history it was not a problem. She said

You go from the personal into thinking about what were the social and historical conditions that created difficulties for your mother - were they shared by other people in her locality in this particular time period? Are they characteristic of war in general? It's not difficult, I don't think, to move from his reaction to this bit of personal information to seeing it as part of a pattern. (Feminist Informant [3] PNL)

This approach was also adopted by another feminist historian at PNL, who argued that

I think women's studies is always predicated on that history of valuing the experience of women... being able to start from experience I think is crucial. I would say women's studies has to be taught as somehow centrally drawing from and working with that experience but that experience can never just be taken 'in the raw' as somehow valid in itself... I would still want to hold to the value of experience, especially in the seminar situation where students are encouraged to think about the experiential side but then it mustn't just become chit-chat. You want to be able to discuss the relationship between their lives, other women's lives, differences between women. (Feminist Informant [4] PNL)

For these lecturers, the use of personal experience informs the theory, and is the means to an end rather than an end in itself. The evaluative rules are based on academic competence, not the ability of students to re-examine their social subjectivities as women. Privileging the cognitive aspects of the field is not necessarily a masculine mode of pedagogy, but a pedagogic project which is the basis of higher education.

One of the ironies in the women's studies movement in general is that assessment has always been, and will probably always be, of great importance to the students, whereas

feminist academics have been reluctant to enter into debates about it. The quote mentioned in an earlier chapter about teaching - that it is like sex, you know everybody does it but you don't know how - is far more appropriate to assessment (McNeil, 1992, p. 19). This lack of attention to issues of assessment may have been problematic for students who need to know on what criteria they are being assessed.

10.6 Summary

As mentioned in Chapter Nine, the empowering potential of feminist pedagogies is beginning to be questioned through analyses of power relationships and differences. Although much of this literature is based on poststructuralist theories, Bernstein's theories also offer a way of analysing the power of pedagogic discourses in higher education. In particular, he suggests that the evaluative rules are intrinsic to the pedagogic discourse, and regulate the control over 'what is thinkable' (Bernstein, 1996). As such, assessment is a powerful means of reproducing what is considered to be legitimate within a particular pedagogic context, and measures the ability of students to meet the defined criteria. The interviews suggested that one of the early difficulties encountered on women's studies courses was the ambiguity of the evaluative rules.

The women's studies literature, as Humm's article (1991) demonstrated, has sometimes perpetuated this ambiguity by not explicitly engaging with the issue of assessment. The literature seems to imply that assessment is problematic on a women's studies course without offering a clear alternative. Humm is critical of assessment based on academic competence in a particular field, and emphasises pedagogies which engage with students' re-examination of their personal identities. Yet it is difficult, if not impossible, to assess someone's exploration of their social subjectivity, and women's studies courses must be assessed in order to be legitimate. However, the pedagogic device does not necessarily have to be dis-empowering for women students, and some of the courses the Disciplined feminists described illustrated how students can learn about themselves as they learn to be competent in a discipline or subject area.

As has been suggested, the privileging of personal experience in a consciousness-raising project may be better suited to spaces outside of a degree awarding course (in feminist courses in adult education for example (Warwick and Auchmuty, 1995)).

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CONCLUSIONS

11.1 The Future Prospects of Women's Studies

Probably, in a century from now, cultural historians will conclude that women's studies was one of the striking intellectual pedagogical and institutional innovations of the late twentieth century (Allen, 1997, p. 358).

It has been a temptation throughout the thesis to go beyond the time period of the research and discuss the position of women's studies in the late 1990s, and even forecast its future. The above quote from a Women's studies practitioner in the US seems a strangely qualified prediction: will women's studies not be one of the 'most' striking innovations? And does the use of the past tense sound too final? A topic of concern amongst the women's studies community in the UK has, in fact, been the continued viability of women's studies as a recognisable subject area. Student recruitment at undergraduate level is currently decreasing for a variety of reasons (Jackson, 1999), causing even greater concern about the continued institutional fragility of women's studies. It appears that the excitement during the 1980s over the possibilities of women's studies has lost much of its impetus, yet at the same time, new spaces are opening up for feminist scholarship in the academy. As I finish writing this PhD, I am aware that the subject has entered a new phase in its long and difficult struggle to gain acceptance in higher education.

This research has hopefully provided some insights into why women's studies continues to be institutionally fragile. Before conducting this research, I would have posed the question in different terms and asked why it continues to be resisted. The difference represents to me the shift in my perspective as the research developed: I started out with different assumptions about the difficulties feminist academics have negotiated in bringing women's studies into the academy. This project has altered my perception of its role in the academy and my understanding of the way it has developed.

The research questions posed in Chapter One were based on issues suggested by the women's studies literature. The articles promoting women's studies as a new discipline have relied to a certain extent on several assumptions about women's studies: that its origins are 'outside' the academy in the women's movement, that there are 'feminine' approaches to education, and that autonomous women's studies courses are preferable. This type of dichotomous thinking (outside/inside, feminine/masculine, autonomy/integration) has limited the terms of the debates. By exploring the research questions through the data from the case studies, it has become apparent that the conventional narratives of the history of women's studies have largely been constructed through these dichotomies, and have therefore not encouraged a more complex understanding of the variety of feminist interventions into the higher education curriculum.

To summarise somewhat crudely the conventional accounts of this history, the literature suggests that women's studies courses were offered in higher education after feminists from outside the academy demanded knowledge from academics on the inside. The subsequent debates focused on whether women's studies courses should develop as autonomous programmes, and the women's studies movement began to argue that women's studies was a unique and innovative new subject area. Women's studies was increasingly portrayed as oppositional to the masculine culture of the higher education system, in particular through its interdisciplinary strategies and the development of

feminist pedagogies. There have therefore been three general assumptions about women's studies that the literature has promoted: that feminists are either outside or inside the academy; that women's studies courses are either autonomous or integrated, and that women's studies has been in opposition to the masculine culture of higher education.

These dichotomies have been deconstructed throughout the thesis, and the following sections will summarise the ways in which the case studies enabled a more complex analysis of the development of women's studies. Although the following accounts of the case study courses may not represent the 'feminist transformation' of the academy that the literature initially celebrated, they have been significant achievements given the constraints of the higher education system. The future prospects of women's studies may be better understood through an analysis of its development which takes into account the disciplinary and institutional contexts in which women's studies is located, and which goes beyond the dichotomies usually presented in the literature.

11.2 The First Feminist Courses

The individual courses in the undergraduate programmes at LSE and Kent are examples of the first feminist courses that were initially offered in the UK from the 1970s. As recuperative projects, these courses were an important addition to a higher education curriculum in which women, and women's experiences, were marginalised. One academic informant explained how certain disciplines were easy targets for a feminist, recuperative project:

Sociology was an absolute pushover because - and so was anthropology - because both disciplines presumed to be the study of society. Now if you can show that what those subjects have been is just studies of one half of the whole then it's so easy! I mean they were open targets initially! . . . You know, who is this about? Again the same thing was very much true of the great tradition in

English literature. You know it was so easy to say well, it's all books by men. And these subjects were just sitting ducks for feminism. (Feminist Informant [6] UKC)

The first undergraduate courses, often called 'Women and Society', provided the space for feminist academics to gain a foothold in higher education. The entry route was through the already established sociology and, to a lesser extent, humanities programmes. These courses may not have been the 'transformation' of the higher education curriculum that was argued for, yet they were a necessary first stage towards gaining academic legitimacy for feminist knowledge.

These types of courses were popular, and were either organised as a result of student demand, or by a woman (or, more commonly, group of women) with an interest in the women's movement and the new feminist scholarship. As such, they were not high in status and were 'institutionally fragile' from the beginning. If the students had not been so forthcoming, even this small space for feminist interventions would probably have been lost. They were also a potentially risky engagement for women members of staff, especially junior women, without much security in the institution, and many women academics avoided any association with feminist courses or feminist research.

For others, however, these new courses provided a certain degree of credibility within their institutions for their feminist, academic interests. The potential for these courses to transform the curriculum was partly determined by the institutional contexts in which they were located. At some institutions they provided the foundations for further development of feminist and possibly women's studies courses, while at others these courses remained within their disciplinary base. Either way, they were important interventions into the dominant culture of higher education.

At the LSE, the Sociology of Sex and Gender Roles course was organised as a result of student demand, and was designed to slot into the sociology curriculum as 'just' another option. The academic who was given responsibility for the first sessions of this course was not a well-known feminist academic, or involved in the women's movement, but a long-standing member of the sociology staff who was near to retiring (there were very few women in the sociology department at the time). The course content consisted of a focus on women as the subject of study (i.e. women's roles in society) and sociological theories on gender roles in society, drawing from the sociology language of the 1950s. This may now seem a rather intellectually 'conservative' project, especially in relation to the groundbreaking developments in feminist sociology which the BSA Sexual Divisions conference had advanced in 1974 (see Allen and Leonard, 1996). Yet the LSE was a conservative institution, and the strong classification and framing of the curriculum was difficult to disrupt as it maintained the high status of their degree programmes.

In the interviews with LSE informants, I asked the student who helped make the initial proposal if she felt the course was successful in terms of what she had intended. She replied:

Um. . . I suppose it was the barest minimum if you like. And we weren't in any way happy with what was on offer but I think we were fairly realistic to recognise that given it was the LSE we actually hadn't done too badly (Student Informant [1] LSE).

What were the possibilities for a feminist intervention into this framework? One small instance illustrates the power of an oppositional discourse. The academic who designed the Sociology of Sex and Gender Roles course recounted her surprise when she invited another lecturer to teach on the course:

She was a real women's lib feminist and she used to give two or three lectures. I remember I'd never heard her lecture before but she was keen to come in and so I thought again it would contrast with my sort of approach . So I remember going to her first lecture I suppose and she walked up to the blackboard and wrote in large letters 'herstory', you know? One word. (Feminist Informant [1] LSE)

The term 'women's lib feminist' has negative connotations of 'bra burning' feminists, largely due to the media's fascination and revulsion with women who were transgressing the feminine stereotype of servile (or sexy) housewives. That this small but powerful incident now seems so out-of-date is an interesting reflection of the political context of the time and the culture within which the course was established. Symbolically, swapping the 'his' for 'hers' was a major disruption in the dominant or regulatory discourse. As the informant acknowledged, it was only one word, but it was obviously a word that signalled a challenge to the tradition of 'history'.

It was within this same political context that the Women in Society course at Kent was introduced, but into a very different institutional culture just a few years before the Sociology of Sex and Gender Roles course at LSE. As with many other of these early feminist courses, it was organised by a group of junior, women members of staff who were interested in the women's movement, several of whom had taught women's studies courses in the US. Instead of being confined to the sociology programme, this course was on offer as one of the interdisciplinary options required for both humanities and social science students. The interdisciplinary 'ideology' of the Kent curriculum supported the introduction of this course.

These first 'Women and Society' type courses were one way for feminist academics to intervene in the mainstream curriculum. Many of them were the foundations for the subsequent development of women's studies programmes. The significance of these

courses for the ways in which women's studies programmes developed is complex. Firstly, these courses began to shape the disciplinary boundaries of early women's studies programmes. They drew from the knowledge bases of sociology and certain humanities subjects, and their curricula was developed largely by Disciplined feminists. Although women's studies is portrayed in the literature as somehow having come from 'outside' the academy, these courses were originated 'inside' the boundaries of certain disciplines. For instance, some of the articles discussed in Chapter Three (Purvis, 1995; Warwick and Auchmuty, 1995) seem to suggest that the first women's studies courses were taught by feminists with only marginal ties to the mainstream higher education system. These Independent feminists were important. However, they did not become the 'founding mothers' of women's studies as some articles imply.

The question of whether women's studies developed 'inside' the academic establishment has been debated since the early years of the women's movement. The argument has rested on an unhelpful dichotomy of outside/inside which has constrained the terms of the debate. Independent feminists such as Sheila Rowbotham were (and some still are) feminist academics with connections to the women's movement: they were neither outside nor inside. The group of feminist historians producing the early feminist literature have also contributed to the development of women's studies, but they did not establish the first women's studies programmes, and it is reasonable to suggest that women's studies courses today would probably look very different had they done so. Instead, many Disciplined feminists have offered an increasing number of courses in more specialist areas than 'women and society', eventually enabling in some institutions a pathway or 'minor' in women's studies to be established.

11.3 Undergraduate Women's Studies Programmes

One of the ways in which women's studies can successfully change the higher education curriculum is through the opportunities created by an interdisciplinary strategy. As discussed in Chapter Eight, women's studies courses have not always

achieved the interdisciplinary structure argued for in the women's studies literature. However, the strategy of interdisciplinarity seems to offer a potential for change. Bernstein's theories of educational knowledge codes offer a framework for understanding the possibilities.

Sue Middleton (1987) drew from theories of Bernstein's educational knowledge codes in her analysis of women's studies at the University of Waikato. Middleton argued that at Waikato, women's studies was marginalised and vulnerable because it lacked the power base of subjects organised within traditional departments. Bernstein suggests that where knowledge is organised through a collection code with well-insulated subject hierarchies, there is often an oligarchic control of the institution (Bernstein, 1971). Junior members of staff are often isolated from each other and are excluded from the decision-making bodies of the university, while on the other hand heads of departments meet across faculties and control the resources. Middleton's description of a women's studies course team made up of largely untenured, junior, female members of staff, who were powerless to control the fate of the women's studies course, would probably be familiar to many women's studies course teams in the UK. For instance, she highlights the vulnerability of the women's studies programme when feminist members of staff who have been contributing to it leave Waikato and are not replaced within their departments by other feminist academics. This is certainly a problem that was raised by informants in this research.

Middleton suggests that as long as women's studies remains an integrated code, it will fail to achieve the status and power of collected codes. This argument seems unduly pessimistic. Bernstein explains that 'a move from collection to integrated codes may well bring about a disturbance in the structure and distribution of power in property relationships and in existing educational identities' (Bernstein, 1971, p. 63). Middleton acknowledges this, but fails to apply its implications to women's studies and its potential for change. Instead of remaining in horizontal relationships with the members

of their own department, the staff contributing to an integrated code are able to form relationships vertically across the different departments. Once the junior members of staff teaching on women's studies courses have the opportunity to meet and work together across the faculties, the power structures of the university become more apparent. In other words, these junior members of staff have more knowledge of the institution than if they had remained within their own department. The integrated code may also enable and support a change in educational identity for the staff involved.

Although this new organisation of knowledge may not transform the academy, it can offer the possibility for various feminist interventions. With relation to the case studies, the Women's Studies Unit at PNL is an example of an integrated code. The women who contributed to the development of the women's studies programme at PNL were mainly junior members of staff brought together through their interest in feminism. The external funding that they secured provided a power base from which to organise and, for example, argue for better nursery provision and the establishment of an Equal Opportunities Committee. Even though their interventions were, as discussed in earlier chapters, appropriated within the backlash against feminism and other left-wing political movements in the 1980s, the potential of an integrated code to change the organisation of knowledge is apparent. The number of feminist courses on offer at PNL is very high, and they are supported by a visible women's studies programme. So instead of, for example, a lone feminist historian who is marginalised within a male-dominated history department, there are several feminist historians who can use the women's studies programme to offer feminist courses which are also available to other students.

The women's studies literature has tended to produce contradictions about the interdisciplinary goals of women's studies courses. Although interdisciplinarity is portrayed as a feminist approach to knowledge production, and as such a challenge to traditional disciplines, it is also perceived to have contributed to the institutional fragility

of women's studies as a subject area. A more realistic understanding of interdisciplinary structures, which acknowledges the institutional context, is necessary. Women's studies degree programmes may not always be interdisciplinary in practice, but they are almost always organised as integrated codes. Bernstein argues that 'any organisation of educational knowledge which involves a marked attempt to reduce the strength of classification is . . . called an integrated code' (Bernstein, 1971, p. 51), and further explains that:

Because one subject uses the theories of another subject, this type of intellectual interrelationship does not constitute integration. . . Integration, as it is used here, refers minimally to the *subordination* of previously insulated subjects *or* courses to some *relational* idea, which blurs the boundaries between the subjects' (1971, p. 53).

Women's studies courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels are based on this type of organisation. The important point here is that, in spite of the particular difficulties at PNL which have been discussed, Bernstein suggests that within an integrated code the possibilities for change exists. The women's studies literature has not celebrated the radical potential of integrated codes, and admittedly this analysis is nowhere near as exciting as breaking down the 'intellectual boundaries' of 'patriarchal thought'. Yet these spatial metaphors have been unhelpful in so far as they have been ambiguous, and have continued to perpetuate the masculine/feminine dichotomy.

Another ambiguity in the women's studies literature which undergraduate women's studies courses illustrate has been the use of the term 'autonomous'. The PNL Women's Studies degree programme is well-established and was at the forefront of women's studies in the UK. Yet I was surprised to learn that during the academic year I conducted fieldwork the Women's Studies Unit consisted of just two and a half appointments in women's studies. The Women's Studies pathway is supported by the

large number of feminist courses on offer throughout the curriculum as optional modules, and no longer receives external funding. The women's studies programme may be perceived to be autonomous, but as several informants acknowledged, if it were to disappear there would still be more feminist courses in the curriculum than at many institutions.

11.4 Postgraduate Women's Studies Courses

If autonomy refers to separate resources, than the history of women's studies in the UK would be brief. At postgraduate level, women's studies courses have managed to obtain as much autonomy in the curriculum as any other specialist postgraduate course, but were often established because they were inexpensive (Adkins and Leonard, 1992). The rise of the New Right throughout the 1980s had a significant impact on the higher education system, not least in the form of constrained resources, and it was during this period of conservatism and economic restraint that the MA in Women's Studies began its first decade at the University of Kent. Several of the Disciplined feminists who taught on the early years of this programme explained to me that they initially taught their courses without any credit from their departments. The fact that the course thrived in these circumstances is a significant achievement, and it would be interesting to know how many other postgraduate courses were developed by volunteers.

This lack of support also illustrates the resistance to women's studies at Kent. The feminist informants explained how their colleagues were dismissive of their feminist interests, and did not object to them teaching on the MA programme as long as it did not require any sacrifices on their part. This environment was accurately described by one academic informant who called it 'oppressive tolerance', which even the student informants seemed to recognise. One student informant's comments are typical of what others told me:

Kent wasn't a radical context. It was an incredibly hostile context for those women to have put together a women's studies degree. And if I had been able to understand that better it would have been much easier to appreciate what an amazing accomplishment it was to establish that programme in that university in that town. You know? I think that was a pretty amazing thing that they were able to do it. And it does explain many of the tensions in the programme - the ways in which the curriculum, the pedagogy, the objectives were not consistent with some definitions of feminism and the continuities between the personal and political.. . it was an amazing accomplishment and they knew that - they had struggled for years for that - it was extraordinary that they were able to do that.

(Student Informant [2] UKC)

In spite of all of the criticisms the students had of the early years of the course, many of them were apologetic that they had not appreciated at the time the pressures the lecturers were facing.

The criticisms that students raised of the Kent course, and some of the difficulties that the lecturers described, illustrated the gaps between the feminist principles argued for in the literature, and the practicalities of establishing a postgraduate degree programme.

The success of the MA in Women's Studies at Kent was important for the establishment of other postgraduate degree programmes elsewhere and raising the visibility of women's studies as a subject area. The women's studies literature has emphasised certain characteristics of women's studies, such as interdisciplinarity and the use of feminist pedagogies, as defining aspects of the subject area. The portrayal of women's studies courses as oppositional to the 'masculine' culture of higher education has led to the assumption that there are 'feminine' approaches to producing knowledge and teaching. It was apparent from the Kent case study that many of the tensions between the students were created by this notion that a feminist classroom would be a supportive, democratic, and empowering environment. The use of personal experience

in the classroom and the issue of assessment, in particular, illustrated the problems in attempting to construct 'feminine' approaches to education in order to oppose the traditional 'masculine' modes of address.

11.5 Feminist Courses throughout the Curriculum

The case study that presented the most difficulties in terms of the fieldwork, the University of Sussex, has somewhat ironically been the most informative in terms of the relationship between women's studies and the higher education system. When the key feminist informants were first contacted, I was met with a resistance not easily understood. Partly, I felt it was because the project was presented as a history of women's studies, and as women's studies has been slow to develop at Sussex I understood that they were reluctant to share a history that might appear to be unsuccessful in relation to my research. I initially did perceive Sussex to be an appropriate case study for the research because of what was missing in the curriculum. What better way to find out the difficulties feminist academics have faced than to study an example of an institution where difficulties were obviously encountered? However, this approach was inevitably conspicuous, and led to an understandable reluctance to discuss a history which was perceived to be a 'failure' in terms of the research project.

In the end, I can not describe Sussex as a 'failure' in any sense. Not only is there now a Women's Studies postgraduate degree, but there have also been groundbreaking courses developed in the areas of Gender and Development, and Lesbian and Gay Studies. At undergraduate level there are enough feminist courses to enable students to follow a syllabus similar to many women's studies programmes. Furthermore, the courses that were described by the informants seemed to be good examples of how feminist interventions can be made in the higher education curriculum.

Women's studies at Sussex was described as developing 'haphazardly', but arguably so are most degree programmes. As mentioned in Chapter One, Broughton suggests

that the history of women's studies has been 'the result of a felicitous, but essentially sporadic and *ad hoc*, series of encounters between academic women from various disciplines and various political outlooks' (Broughton, 1993, p. 73). Although the interdisciplinary ideology at Sussex seemed conducive to the development of women's studies, the lack of a Women's studies practitioner was probably one of the crucial factors for the lack of an undergraduate women's studies degree programme.

In spite of the strong interdisciplinary ideology at Sussex, the number of feminist courses offered by Disciplined feminists was substantial. The types of feminist recuperative and reconstructive projects that were described in the interviews illustrated the different approaches of Disciplined feminists and Women's studies practitioners. The emphasis on the 'cognitive' aspects of the disciplines rather than the personal was apparent in some of the courses. This was also the case with some of the feminist courses at PNL outside of the women's studies programme.

11.6 The Variety of Women's Studies Courses

The courses at the case study institutions illustrated how feminist academics have intervened in the mainstream curriculum in a variety of ways. They can be identified as four main types:

1. Feminist courses as single options on undergraduate degree programmes (largely based in the social sciences) (LSE).
2. Women's studies postgraduate degrees (Kent).
3. Women's studies pathways or 'minors' at undergraduate degree level (PNL).
4. Feminist courses throughout the curriculum at undergraduate and postgraduate level (Sussex).

Women's studies as a subject area in higher education in the UK has developed in stages, and the above courses reflect to a certain extent how it has evolved since the early 1970s. Yet the women's studies literature has tended to portray women's studies

as a coherent subject area with certain characteristics which have been identified as feminist approaches to knowledge and teaching. The conventional accounts of its history have not generally allowed for the complexities uncovered in this research: some of the courses were neither strictly autonomous or integrated, they were not constructing feminine discourses in opposition to the masculine culture, and their relationship to the movement could not easily be described in terms of either outside or inside the academy.

In a sense the most fundamental dichotomy is that between feminism and the academy. This is a deceptively simple assertion, which the women's studies literature has sometimes failed to fully appreciate. It is interesting to note that in the mid-1970s in the US, the entire Women's Studies faculty at San Diego State resigned from their posts because they felt they could not be feminists and remain in the academy (Lowe, 1991, p. 54). I am not aware of any similar protests in the UK. Yet even here, as one commentator remarks, 'the expectations . . . of women's studies as a revolutionary force for change' have been very high (Sheridan, 1991, p. 62).

By describing women's studies as oppositional and transformative, the women's studies literature has tended to portray women's studies as somehow existing outside of the higher education context, rejecting its values in favour of the feminist principles from the women's movement that supposedly created it. The gap between 'feminism' and the 'academy', to use these terms generally, is profound. Yet feminist academics have crossed some of these boundaries, and in so doing they may, admittedly, have compromised some of the initial goals of women's studies. There may be an understandable reluctance to celebrate compromise and negotiation, but it seems necessary to do just that in order to understand the future possibilities of feminist interventions into the higher education curriculum.

The case studies may not have offered the transformative scenarios I initially imagined, but the women's studies literature has seemed to demand almost impossibly high results. As a consequence there are gaps between the literature and the practice, some of which have been identified and illustrated in the preceding chapters. At the most extreme ends of this gap, there are articles in the women's studies literature espousing an idealistic adherence to feminist principles, while some women's studies courses have been incorporated or co-opted and continue to reproduce the inequalities inherent in higher education. Criticising this gap can, unfortunately, provide ammunition to those who are derisive of women's studies as an academic subject area. To return to Allen's article from the US, she explains the risks:

In certain contexts the *modi operandi* of women's studies programs have exhibited the ostrichlike grip of what Sally Kitch characterizes as 'totalitarian utopianism' within the strands of the feminist thought informing their governance and even their pedagogy. These have, in turn, formed the basis of the critique-of-women's studies publishing industry, replete with fantastic exaggerations, incendiary rhetoric, and methodological gaucheries. Books and articles represented as 'women's studies bashing' regrettably, but almost inevitably, have obstructed some important dialogues within a field of vast intellectual unevenness and diversity (Allen, 1997, p. 359).

This 'women's studies bashing' literature has yet to proliferate to the same extent in the UK, and hopefully it never will. However, the interviews pointed to the ways in which the scholarship of feminist academics has been devalued, sometimes subtly and sometimes blatantly, and so it is understandable that 'triumphant narratives' were produced. Women's studies practitioners are on the whole understandably reluctant to criticise their own efforts when so many others may be willing to do it for them. Yet there is a need for a more realistic analysis of the difficulties feminist academics have

confronted and negotiated, and within the context of higher education in the UK the achievements that have been made are substantial.

The future of women's studies in the UK may be uncertain, and the impact that it has had on higher education in the past few decades is difficult to assess. Certainly feminist research and feminist scholarship have had a profound, if uneven, impact on the disciplines. New areas of feminist inquiry have opened up, yet the future for these developments will be shaped by the continuing changes in the higher education system. As universities increasingly become consumer-driven and managed through an entrepreneurial ethos, the traditional value of 'knowledge for its own sake', let alone 'education for change', may be compromised. Feminist academics are facing new battles in this changing climate, yet hopefully with more security than they had in the 1960s.

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Appendix

Information on Informants¹

Feminist Informant LSE ²	Lecturer	Sociology
Feminist Informant LSE	Lecturer	Sociology
Feminist Informant LSE	Lecturer	Social Administration
Feminist Informant LSE	Lecturer	Social Policy
Feminist Informant LSE	Lecturer	Sociology
Observer Informant LSE	Lecturer	Sociology
Observer Informant LSE	Lecturer	Social psychology
Observer Informant LSE	Lecturer (male)	Sociology
Observer Informant LSE	Lecturer (male)	Government
Student Informant LSE	Postgraduate	Sociology
Student Informant LSE	Postgraduate	Anthropology
Student Informant LSE	Postgraduate	Anthropology
Student Informant LSE	Undergraduate	Sociology
Other Informant	Lecturer	Anthropology
Other Informant	Adult Ed tutor	Women's Studies
Feminist Informant UKC	Lecturer	Philosophy
Feminist Informant UKC	Lecturer	Literature
Feminist Informant UKC	Lecturer	Social work
Feminist Informant UKC	Lecturer	English Lit and Drama
Feminist Informant UKC	Lecturer	Economics
Feminist Informant UKC	Lecturer	Sociology
Feminist Informant UKC	Lecturer	Social Policy
Observer Informant UKC	Lecturer	Social Policy
Student Informant UKC	Postgraduate	Women's Studies
Student Informant UKC	Postgraduate	Women's Studies
Student Informant UKC	Postgraduate	Women's Studies
Student Informant UKC	Postgraduate	Women's Studies
Student Informant UKC	Postgraduate	Women's Studies
Student Informant UKC	Postgraduate	Women's Studies
Student Informant UKC	Postgraduate	Women's Studies
Student Informant UKC	Postgraduate	Women's Studies
Feminist Informant PNL	Lecturer	Philosophy
Feminist Informant PNL	Lecturer	Social Policy
Feminist Informant PNL	Lecturer	History
Feminist Informant PNL	Lecturer	History
Feminist Informant PNL	Lecturer	Social Policy
Feminist Informant PNL	Lecturer	Sociology
Feminist Informant PNL	Lecturer	Sociology
Observer Informant PNL	Lecturer	Business Studies
Student Informant PNL	Undergraduate	Women's Studies
Student Informant PNL	Undergraduate	Women's Studies
Feminist Informant USX	Lecturer	History
Feminist Informant USX	Lecturer	Literature
Feminist Informant USX	Lecturer	Sociology
Observer Informant USX	Lecturer	Psychology
Observer Informant USX	Lecturer (male)	International Relations
Observer Informant USX	Lecturer	Sociology
Observer Informant USX	Lecturer	Psychology
Student Informant USX	Postgraduate	Education
Student Informant USX	Postgraduate	Science
Student Informant USX	Postgraduate	Anthropology

¹General position held at time under discussion in interviews.

²I have removed the numbers from the informants' codes as used in the main text of the thesis, to minimise the likelihood of individuals being identified with their quotations.

Samples of Interview Schedules

Sussex³

- Describe your educational background - what field were you trained in and what were your specialisations?
- When you were appointed to Sussex University what sort of position were you in? Describe the organisation of the School, and how you saw yourself fitting in.
- What was the academic environment like at Sussex at that time for women academics?
- How did you become interested in feminism at that time - were you in contact with other women at the university or were you influenced by women outside the university?
- Where did feminist studies/women's studies courses fit into the existing academic structure? What was the organisational structure of the university and how easy/difficult was it to fit women's studies into this structure?
- Were you interested in developing some type of women's studies programme at the university? If so, what form did you want it to take?
- Did you submit proposals to academic development committees, and if so, what happened to them?
- If these were unsuccessful, why do you think they were turned down?
- What was important to you about feminist scholarship in the university (and how would you describe/define it) - were you able to offer it to students?
- Some women have argued that women's studies should be an autonomous subject area - what are your general opinions about that?

³The interview schedules were adapted depending on the informant's involvement with women's studies and feminist courses, and what was already known about these courses from readings, historical documentation and previous interviews. The above questions were drafted for one of the first interviews with a feminist informant. Subsequent interviews asked more specific questions about curriculum, pedagogies, students and so on as more specific information about particular courses had been gained from these first interviews.

The Polytechnic of North London

- Describe your educational background - what field were you trained in and what were your specialisations?
- When you were appointed to your post in the polytechnic what sort of position were you in? Describe the faculty, and how you saw yourself fitting in?
- What was the academic environment like at your institution at that time for women academics?
- What was the curricular structure of PNL at the time - was it difficult to find a place for women's studies within this structure?
- How did you become interested in feminism at that time - were you developing ideas with other women at your institution or were you influenced by women outside the institution?
- When you began developing the proposal for women's studies did you have other people working with you? In what capacities?
- Why was the women's studies programme approved? What sorts of debates went on in the meetings?
- What were your goals at the time in terms of offering women's studies? What sort of contribution did you think it might make to the university?
- What sorts of contributions, if any, did you think it might make to the wider feminist movement?
- What types of students did you want to attract? What types of students did you attract in the first years?
- What were the differences between your expectations of women's studies and the reality once the programme was established?
- How did the development of the women's studies programme affect your own academic career?

Types of Feminist Academics Informants' Self-Identification in Interviews

The following information is mainly from NUD*IST, where I developed codes for data on the informants' histories and the ways they described their backgrounds and interests in feminist scholarship and activism. From this information, I began to develop the 'types of feminist academics' discussed in Chapter Four. Initially, I was surprised by the small number of informants who identified their own work with women's studies, and instead emphasised their disciplinary backgrounds. Some academics identified themselves very clearly as 'feminist sociologists' whereas others did not. In addition, very few informants emphasised their involvement in feminist activism outside their institutions, and instead discussed their feminist scholarship in response to my questions about their initial interest in 'feminism'. This suggested to me that many feminist academics consider their scholarship to be an important contribution to the women's movement, and that women have varying degrees of involvement and interest in feminist scholarship.

Informants	Women's Studies Practitioner?	Disciplinary Identity?	Involvement with feminism?
Feminist Informant LSE	No	Sociologist	No, but some early interest in feminist sociology
Feminist Informant LSE	No	Feminist Sociologist	Early interest in feminist sociology
Feminist Informant LSE	No	Social Admin/Policy	Women's groups outside LSE
Feminist Informant LSE	Not at LSE but later	Social Policy and now Women's Studies	Women's groups outside LSE
Feminist Informant LSE	No	Sociology	Some early interest in feminist sociology
Feminist Informant UKC	No but taught on WS programme	Philosophy	Early involvement in women's group at UKC
Feminist Informant UKC	No but taught on WS programme	Literature	Early involvement in women's group at UKC and feminist scholarship in literary studies

Informants	Women's Studies Practitioner?	Disciplinary Identity?	Involvement with feminism?
Feminist Informant UKC	No but taught on WS programme	Social work	Early involvement in women's group at UKC, and others outside UKC
Feminist Informant UKC	No but taught on WS programme	English literature and drama	Early interest in women's group at UKC and feminist scholarship in literary studies
Feminist Informant UKC	No but taught on WS programme	Economics	Early involvement in women's group at UKC
Feminist Informant UKC	Yes	Feminist sociologist and now Women's Studies	Early involvement in women's group at UKC
Feminist Informant UKC	No	Social Policy	Early involvement in women's group at UKC
Observer Informant UKC	No	Social Policy	Early interest in women's group at UKC and feminist scholarship in social policy
Feminist Informant PNL	No	Feminist Philosopher	Strong involvement in feminist scholarship in philosophy
Feminist Informant PNL	No	Social policy to Cultural Studies and now interdisciplinary	Very involved in left-wing political activism, including feminist groups outside PNL
Feminist Informant PNL	No	Feminist Historian	Early interest in feminist scholarship in history

Informants	Women's Studies Practitioner?	Disciplinary Identity?	Involvement with feminism?
Feminist Informant PNL	Yes	Feminist Historian and Women's Studies	Early interest in various women's groups outside PNL and feminist scholarship in history
Feminist Informant PNL	No	Social Policy	Early interest in various women's groups outside and inside PNL and feminist scholarship in social policy
Feminist Informant PNL	No	Sociology	Early interest in feminist scholarship in sociology
Feminist Informant PNL	Yes	Feminist sociologist and now Women's Studies	Early interest in women's groups in PNL
Observer Informant PNL	No	Business Studies	Involvement in women's groups outside PNL

Informants	Women's Studies Practitioner?	Disciplinary Identity?	Involvement with feminism?
Feminist Informant USX	No	Literature and now interdisciplinary	Early interest in feminist scholarship in general
Feminist Informant USX	No	History	Early interest in feminist scholarship in history
Feminist Informant USX	No	Feminist Sociologist	Early interest in feminist scholarship in sociology
Observer Informant USX	No	Psychology	Early interest in sex/gender differences in psychology
Observer Informant USX	No	Sociology	Early interest in sex/gender differences in sociology

