

IN HER OWN WORDS:
UNDERSTANDING ACADEMIC TRANSFORMATION THROUGH THE CREATION OF
WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAMS AT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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By

Abaigeal C. O'Shea

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Abaigeal C. O'Shea

Thesis Adviser: Tad Howard, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Fifty years ago, activists and academics created the first Women's Studies Program. This program, and the ones that quickly spread across the country in its wake, radically altered the course of higher education by changing perceptions about who belonged in the classroom as well as who, and what, was considered worthy of study within university gates. While existing scholarship about Women's Studies traces the institutional history of these programs and the extensive bodies of work they have produced, little has been done to examine the controversies and tensions that surrounded the creation of these programs. *In Her Own Words* attempts to fill that gap by analyzing the written work produced by the women fighting to create these programs between 1969 and 1980, and argues that by moving into the traditional academy, Women's Studies Programs lost the feminist ideals that had undergirded the creation of this curriculum.

This project inherently invokes questions about gender, power, and institutions, but also questions the nature, and impossibility, of perfect neutrality in the academy. The Women's Studies discipline was created with the belief that ideology and social change movements should not have to sit at the door of the classroom, but rather, be invited inside. This timely inquiry then, analyzes the creation of this type of study and asks bigger questions about positionality, scholarship, and what it means for something, or someone, to be considered academic.

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Finally, this work is based on the premise that the work that happens at universities and other places of education matters greatly. Even more so, this work posits that what we learn can change the world. So to the university community that made this possible and the people who helped me arrive to this point, thank you.

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INTRODUCTION

It is not simply that women artists have been omitted from the curriculum: we have taught students that there were none.

—Florence Howe, *Women and the Power to Change*

The 1960s and 1970s were turbulent years in American history. They were decades of uncertainty and change; the United States was involved in questionable foreign policy, experiencing mass social revolution, and having debates about who belonged in which public spaces. Notably, they were years that wrought radical change at colleges and universities,¹ particularly in regards to the relationship between higher education and women. One of the most radical changes that happened to higher education in this time period was the invention of women's studies curriculum, it both re-wrote who could be studied in the classroom as well as who was allowed to sit inside of it.

In 2019, Women's Studies, now often called Women and Gender Studies or Gender Studies, is ubiquitous on college campuses. The National Women's Studies Association currently has thousands of individual members and more than 350 institutional ones, a number that continuously has been growing since its founding in 1977.² This academic discipline spread quickly across the country after its inception, and has lasted and expanded over the past fifty years. The years that have passed in the interim have brought great changes to institutions, women have consistently earned more college degrees than men for the last few decades, a change that would have seemed unthinkable in the 1960s. Nevertheless, women's studies, was

¹ In the context of this research, the terms 'institution of higher education,' 'college' and 'university' are used interchangeably unless otherwise stated. The terminology goes back and forth depending on the text being engaged with and the terms that they used.

² "NWSA, About," accessed April 23, 2019, <https://www.nwsa.org/about>.

not always this popular, nor was it always considered appropriate for the university. It was a curriculum change that many university administrators in 1969 did not view as viable and to which they were remarkably resistant. Women were not even allowed in all of the Ivy league schools in 1969! For this reason, it is somewhat astonishing that the existence of women's studies programs is so common, and so unquestioned, today.

Women's studies, as this thesis uses the term, refers to the discipline and curriculum created at institutions of higher education starting in 1969 that had a focus on women's history and gender relations. Women's studies was founded by women, usually student activists or professors, who started to question the male-dominated nature and scholarship of the traditional university. This is a general definition: women's studies can be, and is, much more than the study of women's history or gender dynamics, but for the purposes of this project, the focus on higher education is critical.

This is not to suggest that academic work for and about women must only happen in the university, feminist scholarship happens outside of the ivory tower all the time. The two can work in confluence and often have: work within women's studies programs has created spaces for feminist theory that quickly generated conversations within the public sphere. Nevertheless, there is something unique about the interaction of feminism with the peculiar institution that is higher education because of the antithetical nature of their existences.

Universities are unique places in their own right. Long a stronghold of the elite, colleges and institutions of higher education did not start to become broadly accessible until the passage of the GI Bill in 1944, legislation that allowed students to attend higher education in rates that had never before been seen. At the time of the creation of women's studies programs, the university was not broadly accessible to the American public; women and students of color were

not considered normative students at most elite schools. American higher education is, often, a reflection of American social history and values.

For far too long, only men, mainly white and elite ones, were allowed to attend universities. Their continued attendance at the institution that could allow an individual to climb the social ladder perpetuated notions of value and elitism embodied by the traditional college student. The men who were rich had always been so, there was no need for that to change. Higher education is notoriously slow to change, and as a place that remains difficult to break into, it is both elitist and exclusionary. Women did not gain access to elite higher education until quite recently in American history. That anything changed in any of these spaces is less a testament to the willingness of the institution to change and much more to the capacity of the social changers to demand action.

Higher education is a social incubator, it accepts and welcomes those who are deemed socially acceptable for attendance. It also determines who will be successful, a college degree can become a pass to a better life. Studying the nature of change within these institutions, then, automatically invokes questions about broader social change that might be happening at the same time. Higher education though, in its role as educator, also teaches values; it teaches what matters. This means that higher education must be approached both as something that studies history but also that changes it. When what is taught in higher education influences the nation's elite and the decision makers, then what is taught is of particular importance. History is both created and consecrated within the walls of universities, and any study of higher education must approach these institutions as such.

At its most basic level, the creation and implementation of women's studies programs exists at the intersection of social change in the second half of the twentieth century and the

history of higher education as a whole. This project was driven by a desire to understand how these programs came into being and how two starkly different realities, feminism and the university, collaborated and created something that still exists today. It meant asking questions about who gets to decide what is taught within universities and how the process of changing what is taught might come about.

Women's studies, to some extent, can be explained by the scholars and activists who were fed up with learning about only men in their classrooms and decided to do something about it. These women were radical because they decided that they were going to reimagine what a university could be and rebuild it in a way that made sense for a broader audience in a changing world. It was not, however, nearly that simple. Nothing about it was that easy. There were tensions and complications and contradictions that were repeatedly in their way.

By researching and engaging with questions about the creation of women's studies programs, this thesis will address conversations about the validity of women's studies as a discipline from all sides of the arguments that evolved from their creation. Unsurprisingly, universities and administrations with traditional ideas of what the academy could have and should have looked like were usually opposed to women's studies. They represent some of the people who had their hands in creating the history that this research will examine. There were also people inside and outside of the women's liberation movement involved in the creation of the history. Some were in favor of the programs: what an exciting new academic field! And some were opposed to the programs: why silo off classes about women when all the entire curriculum should be addressing them? This project will engage with all of these voices. There are some viewpoints that are inherently more contradictory and questionable than others in this

project: the conversations had by men who simply did not want women in the university come to mind.

The American women's liberation movement, the history of higher education, and the creation of women's studies programs at institutions of higher education are all well researched. The birth of women's studies programs, happening in confluence with the women's movement and sweeping changes to demographics at elite institutions, has attracted scholars that have covered the general intersections of feminism and the American university. None, however, has looked closely at the debates that occurred within the women's movement regarding the adaptation of feminism to the academy and the changes that it pursued within it.

There is a tremendous amount of scholarly work on the social movements of the sixties and seventies in the United States. Notable among these works is one by Van Gosse; in *The World the Sixties Made: Politics and Culture in Recent America* (2003). Gosse traces the long-term impacts of the New Left social movements of the sixties. This work plays well in conversation with Ruth Rosen's *The World Split Open* (2000). Rosen's book takes a deep dive into the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and analyzes the slow cultural changes that it inspired, showing through her analysis of liberal and radical feminisms the unrecognizable image of the world before feminism.

Both of these works address the background of radical social change from which women's studies would emerge. Also key to understanding the environments in which these programs came about is understanding the context of changing higher education. *A History of American Higher Education* (2004) by John R. Thelin and *The History of Higher Education*, ed. Lester F. Goodchild and Harold S. Wechsler (1997) both offer broad overviews of American higher education from the time of the creation of Harvard, but the second book narrows down in

a way that is particularly helpful. The chapter entitled “The Female Paradox: Higher Education for Women, 1945-1963” by Paula Fass adds context to the emergence of women’s studies programs by engaging directly with higher education for women in the years before the advent of the new discipline.

It is crucial to understand that around the time that women’s studies programs were forming, certain elite colleges and universities in America were just becoming coeducational. “*Keep the Damned Women Out*”: *The Struggle for Coeducation* (2016) by Nancy Weiss Malkiel addresses the fundamental changes impacting the American universities with the most power and influence in the country. While she analyzes the social underpinnings and environmental changes in which this fundamental shift took place, she argues that, for the most part, this change was an institutional one. It was not, as one might imagine, directly the result of social upheaval. The approach that Malkiel took to analyzing coeducation inspired and influenced the questions asked for this project.

One of the most influential books in the analysis of women’s studies, and equally influential in the creation of this thesis, is *When Women Ask the Questions* (1998) by Marilyn Boxer. This work focuses on the impacts of the development of women’s studies programs in the world at large as well as within institutions of higher education. Boxer argues that the creation of women’s studies represented a sea change in the institution of higher education; that the work done in these programs fundamentally changed the nature of the university. *When Women Ask the Questions* offers a broad history of women’s studies programs from the voice of someone who was involved in their creation, and her book remains one of the only books on the history of the programs.

The journal article “Academic Feminism Against Itself” by Robyn Weigman complements the historical work done by Boxer. Weigman discusses the present day arguments happening within the discipline of women’s studies and the way that the feminist academy seems to be at odds with itself. While Weigman discusses present day Women’s Studies deliberations and Boxer touches on the changes women’s studies wrought on the American University, no-one has looked at the debates among feminists in the 1960s and 1970s and traced their arguments influence on the university. This small gap is where *In Her Own Words* fits: it is an analysis of the early debates surrounding the creation of women’s studies and the anxiety about adjusting to patriarchal colleges and universities. This project also includes research into the history of women’s studies at Georgetown University as a new, and relevant, case study of the creation of these programs.

As the author of this thesis, I approached this work with the belief that women’s studies programs are critically important parts of university communities. As someone who does firmly believe that women’s studies classes matter, the author is fully aware that this research could not have sought to answer that question. As such, this research does not focus on the value, or potential lack thereof, of women’s studies. Rather, it focuses on the historical moment in which this discipline was created, it discusses social movements and feminism and understands the history of the academy in the larger history of the social context of the United States. The question that drove this research, then, was: what does the movement of feminism into the academy through the creation of women’s studies programs say about compromise and tensions around power within the university?

To answer this question, this research focused on primary sources from the period of 1965-1980, a time frame that has allowed for a narrow research window in which a large number

of the programs in this country were being created. This window encompasses the first national conversations about women's studies as well as the creation of the first Women's Studies Programs at San Diego State College and Cornell University in 1969. Notably, this window does not include the creation of the Women's Studies Program at Georgetown, a gap that would later come to define some of the questions that shaped this research. By focusing on this early 15 year period, the big questions with which the authors of the primary sources engaged, were ones about the creation of these programs, rather than questions about the continued relevance, or irrelevance, of these programs. As the research continued, it revealed that the majority of established scholarly voices within this time period, the voices already well-known and well-respected within universities, did not think that women's studies was a viable, long-term, academic offering.

In short, universities did not take the idea of women's studies programs seriously and often chose not to discuss them as such, or not to discuss them at all. The only people writing and talking about women's studies programs in serious and academic ways were the women who were fighting to create them. To start off the research in engaging the voices of those creating these programs, it was important to center the focus on academic journal articles published within the given timeframe about the challenges of creating women's studies programs. It allowed for engagement with the opinions of the individuals shaping the programs and the work that they were producing from their new positions. The primary source research focused on journal articles published in *The Women's Studies Newsletter*, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *The NWSA Journal*, and other academic and higher education publications.

The benefit of engaging academic work or sources was twofold. First, as academic institutions, these journal articles were produced to create a sense of legitimacy in the academic

world: these are the works that women's studies scholars were creating at the onset of women's studies. In many ways, these works are the basis of the programs themselves. The other benefit of the academic writings is that they engage directly with the contradictory nature of the work of these professors and academics. The goal of women's studies scholars was to break down the academic systems as they existed, but they had to participate within the systems in order to do that, a contradiction that made for an exciting research project.

In an attempt to understand the institutions and their reactions to the women whose voices were clear in the primary source material, the author also spent time focusing on the creation of Women's Studies at Georgetown. As mentioned previously, Georgetown did not have a Women's Studies program within the original time frame of this project was studying, but it did have an accessible collection of information and documents about its creation. Research in the Georgetown archives led to a quote from former Georgetown professor, Leona Fisher: "one has to conclude that policies and programs (as well as persons) survive at Georgetown only if they are initiated or approved of by the administration; a top down ethos means that one must work within, not against, the administrative hierarchy in order to achieve longevity."³ In conversation with the work done by Malkiel about elite institutions of higher education becoming coeducational in this time period for politically expedient reasons, this idea reframed the approach to understanding these programs in regards to the power of administrative decision-making.

Stories and information from Georgetown University archives have been included within this thesis for a few reasons: as the institution that the author attends it allowed for increased

³ Leona M. Fisher "The Challenge of Women's Studies: Questions for a Transformed Future at Georgetown." *Georgetown at Two Hundred : Faculty Reflections on the University's Future*. Georgetown University Press, 1990, 241.

access to documents on campus and institutional history. The accessibility and understanding of one's own University does make some of the work a little bit easier, and the documentation encountered at Georgetown was interesting and relevant as institutional documentation of the tensions found in other primary sources. Notably, Georgetown was a late adopter of Women's Studies, something that makes the history maybe a little bit more interesting. In this way Georgetown may have avoided some of the tensions that other, earlier adopters of the programming would have had to face.

In this thesis I argue that once women's studies programs were able to enter universities, they had to lose important aspects essential to the feminist movement that has inspired their creation.

To fully address this argument this thesis is divided into three parts. The first chapter is focused on the idealistic goals and aims of the Women's Liberation movement, notably the radical goal of overthrowing the traditional nature of knowledge in universities across the country. This chapter pulls apart tensions surrounding the fundamental mis-match between the university and feminism to suggest that at the most basic level, feminism and the university did not necessarily make sense together.

The second chapter focuses on the hierarchical nature of universities, and the ways in which successes of women's studies programs often forced them into contradictory positions. This includes decisions and debates about why programs were actually approved on college campuses, as well as information about the academic and non-academic influences that women's studies had on campuses in general. Chapter II highlights how individual program success did not always serve the women's studies movement.

The final chapter engages tensions within the feminist movement that sometimes threatened to undercut the entire women's studies enterprise. This includes speculation about the value of the academy, and questions about the value of scholarly work to a social movement.

The transition from activism to the academy was not easy, and the bumps encountered along the way by women's studies activists could determine whether or not they succeeded.

CHAPTER I:

Radical Women and Stagnant Universities

Man shall no longer make the world in his image

—Adrienne Rich, “Renaissance or Revolution”

In 1974, Adrienne Rich declared freedom for women in academia: that man would no longer make the world in his image.⁴ It was a declaration that embodied the radical change that she was trying to enact: a change in academic tradition and who was allowed to write history, but also one that challenged the nature of academic tradition. Rich was standing in front of a Women’s Studies Conference,⁵ claiming that the time in which women would be able to shape their own academic worlds and write their own versions of history had finally arrived. It was 1974 and women’s studies, a radical addition to the curriculum on liberal arts campuses, had only been created 5 years prior.

Women’s studies, as it was in its early years, was the “academic arm of the women’s movement.”⁶ This is to say that women’s studies, from its activist creation to the focus of the study itself, was born out of the women’s movement that created widespread social change in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1978, the National Women’s Studies Association (NWSA) in its constitution would state that “women’s studies owes its existence to the movement for the liberation of women; the women’s liberation movement exists because women are oppressed.”⁷

⁴ Adrienne Rich, “Women’s Studies—Renaissance or Revolution?,” vol. 3 (University of Pennsylvania Women’s Studies Conference, University of Pennsylvania: Women’s Studies, 1974), 122.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Sandra Coyner, “Women’s Studies,” *NWSA Journal* 3, no. 3 (1991): 349.

⁷ “NWSA News.” *Women’s Studies Newsletter* 5, no. 1/2 (1977): 6. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40042428>.

The ease with which the NWSA connected the feminist movement and the movement of these ideas into institutions of higher education made sense: the women's liberation movement directly created the women's studies movement. It was the ideas of feminism and the accompanying large scale social activism that created a space that allowed for the imagination of women's studies in a place like the traditional university. As it came into existence, women's studies was an academic discipline focused on the study of women in history as well as the way that gender roles affect society and expected social norms.

Women's studies programs, born out of feminism and social activism, were not an ideal match for the traditional understanding of the university. In fact, the movement itself, the radical reimagining of education to include women's stories and histories, often found itself at odds with the institutions it was trying to infiltrate. Not only was feminism new to the academy, but in many ways, feminism did not even begin to make sense in the academy. Universities were rooted in patriarchal traditions about knowledge and values that could not align with the feminist work that the creators of these programs were doing. Despite the present day proliferation of women's studies courses across the country that would suggest women's studies was the natural next step for the women's movement, the very language used to describe the idea of a feminist education was in direct conflict with the world of the university. This chapter will examine the radical language surrounding the creation of women's studies programs in conversation with the not-so-radical nature of universities at the time to argue that there was a fundamental discrepancy between the two. Part of the reason that women's studies had to give up so much when it entered the academy was the disparity between the goals feminism and the traditional university.

To understand how Women's Studies moved into the university and the language that circulated around the programs, one first has to understand the radical concepts of the women's

movement, as well as the structural failures (in regards to women and diversity) of the traditional university. The first Women's Studies program was created in 1969 in the heyday of second wave feminism. It would be impossible, and unwise, to attempt to explain the entire history of feminism up until 1969 in order to explain the world into which women's studies was born. With that being said however, it would be equally unwise to ignore the work that the feminism of 1969 was able to build itself upon.

In 1949, Simone de Beauvoir published *The Second Sex*, translated to English in 1952, this influential work discussed the social construction of female identities as the *other* in society.⁸ This book largely altered conversations about gender in society, and in 1963 Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, a book that addressed the 'problem with no name.' A large number of feminists cite Friedan as the start of second wave feminism because her book vocalized the issues that white, middle-class women had been experiencing. Having been educated and then relegated to staying home and caring for their houses and children, women were struggling with the expectations society had for them and managing their own happiness and wellbeing.⁹

Friedan's additions to feminism lie less in the intellectual contributions of her book, although these were significant to the development of feminist theory, and more in who she was able to reach with her work. Friedan engaged women who had not necessarily understood feminism before 1963, widening the reach of the women's movement and gaining voices more likely to be listened to in the political conversation. Notably, these would be the same women who would have the most access to, and the most impact, on college campuses. Three years later,

⁸ Susan Archer Mann, *Doing Feminist Theory From Modernity to Post Modernity* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 129.

⁹ Ibid.

in 1966, the National Organization for Women (NOW) was formed to publicly engage with the conversations born out of feminism.¹⁰ This would be joined in 1968 by the Women's Liberation Movement, a more radical organization that focused on educating women about social gender norms through 'consciousness raising.'¹¹

To be clear, the rise of white middle-class women as feminist activists certainly impacted the level of radicalism called for by feminists: the calls for equality looked different when there were women asking to be allowed to leave the house and ignoring the fact that plenty of women have had to work for most of their lives, but it did bring national attention to the growing feminist movement. Through these groups and consciousness raising, women were finding the words to explain the sexual harassment and abuse they had been experiencing for generations, as well as the gendered norms that defined daily life. The experience of speaking these problems was in itself, quite radical. In turn, this movement gave space for the birth of radical feminism. Embodied in the sixties by the radical feminist Shulamith Firestone, "radical feminism entails a women-centered revolutionary politics that is conscious of how men in particular and patriarchal institutions in general benefit from control over women's lives and bodies"¹²

Feminism, as it became increasingly radical and started to call for social revolution, began to focus on the education of women as a means of shaping revolution. Building off of the impact that consciousness raising, or community education had left on the growth of women's liberation, a more formal education that could expand the movement even further made sense for

¹⁰ Sara M. Evans, "Beyond Declension: Feminist Radicalism in the 1970s and 1980s," in *The World the Sixties Made: Politics and Culture in Recent America*, ed. Van Goose (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 54.

¹¹ Evans, "Beyond Declension: Feminist Radicalism in the 1970s and 1980s," 55.

¹² Mann, *Doing Feminist Theory From Modernity to Post Modernity*, 79.

feminism. Regarding the radical nature of the women's movement, a prominent women's studies activist said that "the prime goal of a feminist revolution is the elimination of patriarchal rule."¹³ Feminist activists then, decided that feminism should start to move into the university, one of the aforementioned patriarchal institutions that benefits from control over women's lives and certainly exhibited patriarchal rule. The idea of women's studies was created from these histories, it became the movement of feminism into the academy and the combination of scholarship with the activism and politics of the women's movement.¹⁴ The idea that women could exist within an elite academic space, much less study the gendered constructs of their own society from a university and its hallowed halls, was an inherently revolutionary one.

But, women's studies programming was not born into a place that was ready for the radicalization that these women sought. Universities were often hostile to women at this time, many only having started to accept women as students within the past few years.¹⁵ The truth is that even when women did have access to universities, white women had long had access to women's colleges and public universities, they were never truly expected to be able to use their degrees after they graduated. Besides, women's colleges were not really meant to educate women in the same way that men's colleges were meant to educate men. The separation between men and women allowed for women to have their own claim to education while maintaining the power of the true and rigorous academy at the men's institutions.

¹³ Marilyn Webb, "Feminist Studies: Frill or Necessity?," in *And Jill Came Tumbling After: Sexism in American Education*, ed. Judith Stacey, Susan Béreaud, and Joan Daniels (New York, New York: Dell Publishing Co, Inc, 1974), 410.

¹⁴ Coyner, "Women's Studies," 349.

¹⁵ Most elite, private universities had just started to accept women students at the tail end of the 1960s. Notably, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and others made the switch to full coeducation at this time period. Nancy Weiss Malkiel, *"Keep The Damned Women Out" The Struggle for Coeducation* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016).

Women were expected to go to school in order to find a husband, the degree was merely something that could be attained along the way to claiming their ultimate prize.¹⁶ In an essay about sexism in the university, women's studies activist Florence Howe quoted a professor saying "there, there, (...) don't cry about that paper. In a few years, you'll be washing dishes and you won't even remember this course."¹⁷ The attitude of the university was such that women did not belong in its hierarchies, even when they were allowed to exist within them.

This attitude towards women was true at Georgetown University as well. In this time period, women had been allowed in the School of Nursing and Health Sciences to train to become nurses but were not allowed in the College of Arts and Sciences, the largest undergraduate body in the University, until 1969. In 1965, Luci Baines Johnson, the daughter of President Johnson, then a student in the Georgetown school of Nursing and Health Studies, chose to leave her studies behind in order to get married.¹⁸ It is clear that the idea that women could not be both wife and worker was quite normal at the time, considering the fact that the president's daughter, while the entire country was watching, chose to step away from her career opportunities in order to get married.

Gendered norms and sexist professors did not stop women from attending universities, however they did hinder the success of women when they did arrive at the university. Despite women attending college at higher rates, there were fewer women in faculty positions in the

¹⁶ Paula Fass S., "The Female Paradox: Higher Education for Women, 1945-1963," in *The History of Higher Education*, Second Edition (Simon & Schuster Custom Publishing, 1997), 716.

¹⁷ Florence Howe, "The Education of Women," in *And Jill Came Tumbling After: Sexism in American Education*, ed. Judith Stacey, Susan Béreaud, and Joan Daniels (New York, New York: Dell Publishing Co, Inc, 1974), 74.

¹⁸ "Stay in School or Get Married? In 1965, the President's Daughter Had to Choose." Washington Post, accessed February 24, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/stay-in-school-or-get-married-in-1965-the-presidents-daughter-had-to-choose/2018/05/20/760c3d86-5acf-11e8-b656-a5f8c2a9295d_story.html.

1970s than there were in the 1930s.¹⁹ The pace of social change at universities was slow; activists were quick to note that little had changed at universities in the past and might be slow to change in the future.²⁰ In 1980, a full ten years after the first women's studies program in the country, fewer than fifty percent of female faculty members at American universities had tenure, in comparison to over seventy percent for male faculty members.²¹ Even after the creation of a discipline that was almost exclusively taught by women, less than half of female faculty had tenure. That statistic does not even require equal hiring practices, just equal opportunities for advancement. In significant ways universities were still resisting any sort of structural change in relation to women. Furthermore, the social roles into which women were forced made higher education for women quite difficult, not to mention harder to justify given limited professional or leadership possibilities that their education might point towards.²²

These statistics suggest that the university was not truly the place for women at the time, which should not have precluded the movement of feminism into the academy on its own. However, the political change that the women's studies movement was calling for did not align at all with the structure of the university was at the time. Feminist scholar Marilyn Webb described the university as a place in which, "rather than building collectivity, they divide by competitiveness and grade hierarchies. Rather than creating group solidarity, they create an intellectual elite whose social status, but not real power, is meant to be above those who have

¹⁹ Florence Howe, "The Education of Women," 64.

²⁰ "After all, the curriculum at most colleges underwent few major changes [...] until near the beginning of this century." National Institute of Education, "Re-Entry Women Involved in Women's Studies," *Women's Studies Monograph Series*, February 1980, Box 25, Women's Studies Pamphlet Collection, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries.

²¹ Catherine Clinton, "Women's Graves of Academe," *New York Times*, November 5, 1980.

²² Fass, "The Female Paradox: Higher Education for Women, 1945-1963," 716-717.

never received a higher education.”²³ The social stratification created by the structure of the university was in conflict with the work that women’s studies hoped to achieve in the world. Women’s studies was trying to do more than earn an equal place in the university and social hierarchy that men had created, they were trying to break down the structure of this hierarchy and rebuild it so that it might look more egalitarian or cooperative.

In one of her many essays about creating a university space more receptive to female students, Rich wrote that “immense forces in the university, as in the whole patriarchal society, are intrinsically opposed to anything resembling an actual feminist renaissance, wherever that process appears to be a serious undertaking and not merely a piece of decorative reformism.”²⁴ In other words, even as women were allowed into universities, they were rarely allowed to make the changes that they hoped to make within them. Universities were simply too unwilling to bend in their traditions to allow newer members of their communities to reimagine the practice of education.

Were universities willing to bend for other social change movements that were happening at the time? The women’s liberation movement, clearly, was not the only social change movement happening in this decade. Of equal importance to the foundation of women’s studies ideology was the influence that the Civil Rights Movement and the anti-war movement had created on American Society. In fact, the creation of women’s studies programs is directly tied to the Civil Rights Movement, as well as the creation of black studies programs at institutions across the country.

²³ Rich, “Women’s Studies—Renaissance or Revolution?,” 126.

²⁴ Adrienne Rich, “Toward A Woman-Centered University,” in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, n.d.), 125.

Women's studies owes much of its success to the creation of black studies programs because it was able to benefit from the activism of the students who had already struggled to create new curriculum.²⁵ The people pushing to create black studies programs were familiar with institutional resistance to diversifying curricula, many of the black studies activists lost their jobs in their attempts to change university classes, universities clearly were not ready for the activism they were creating.²⁶ The women who led the push for women's studies inherited the benefits of this radical action: universities were a little bit more prepared for calls for academic change, and often women's studies activists did not bear the extent of the burden that black studies activists did. Any attempt that was made to change the hierarchical norms of the American college and university system in the 1960s was therefore done in the name of radical action that was started by black studies activists and earlier Civil Rights Activists. Nevertheless, women's studies, in many ways, failed to meet the needs of the black students from whom it had benefited.

Not long after women's studies entered the academy on the heels of the black studies movement, a new field of study emerged called black women's studies. This field was meant to fill the gaps created by two disciplines that repeatedly overlooked the lives of black women, the misguided but long-lasting scholarly tendency to all black people as male and all women as white.²⁷ These failures on the part of the women's studies movement are significant because they suggest that the movement was not as radical as it claimed to be when it came to creating an

²⁵ Catharine Stimpson, "The New Feminism and Women's Studies," in *Women on Campus: The Unfinished Liberation* (Change Magazine, 1975), 73.

²⁶ Ann Cathey Carver, "Building Coalitions between Women's Studies and Black Studies: What Are the Realities?," *Women's Studies Newsletter* 8, no. 3 (1980): 16.

²⁷ Beverly Guy-Sheftall, "Black Women's Studies: The Interface of Women's Studies and Black Studies." *Phylon* 49, no. 1/2 (1992): 33. www.jstor.org/stable/3132615.

equitable university. The failures would only serve to reinforce, once again, beliefs about feminism as a movement for white, middle-class women.

As an academic movement that gained inspiration and momentum from the Civil Rights movement and the push for black studies on campuses, women's studies quickly alienated some of the people and movements from which it had gotten its power. The later disenfranchisement of black students at the hands of women's studies suggests a willingness on the part of feminism to capitulate on certain ideals, something that becomes key when understanding the feminist ideals that women's studies had to give up in order to become part of the university hierarchy. The inclusion of this particular exclusion by women's studies should not suggest that the programs were complete failures, but rather that the revolution they enacted was not always as welcoming, or as socially radical, as it should have been.

This is not to say, however, that women's studies did not achieve some of its revolutionary goals. Women's studies was revolutionary in other ways, it allowed women to enter the university and it allowed scholars to study women while in the academy. In 1969, women were not considered valid subjects for academic study: why study a group of people who had not contributed to the master narrative of American History? Gloria Bowles, an activist who would later become the coordinator for Women's Studies at University of California, Berkeley, received her Ph.D. in comparative literature. She later explained that when she took her seven days of examinations on the literature of three different languages, "there was not a single woman writer on the voluminous reading list for those exams."²⁸ The work that was being done

²⁸ Gloria Bowles, "From the Bottom Up" in *The Politics of Women's Studies: Testimony from Thirty Founding Mothers*, ed. Florence Howe, vol. I, The Women's Studies History Series (New York, New York: The Feminist Press, 2000), 143.

in the academy was “intellectually arid,”²⁹ it was not producing knowledge nearly as representative or inclusive as the students who had been doing the studying.

So it was the radical nature of change called upon by the women studies scholars that was in contrast with the universities themselves. The idea of asking a for the creation of a program that analytically handled subject matter in a way that nothing ever had was, in many ways, ridiculous to those in the universities. Scholarship, as it had always existed prior to the advent of women’s studies, had been male-centric. Even changing interdisciplinary programs like black studies had not dramatically changed the gender dynamic of who it was acceptable to study in the classroom. The academy was often criticized by feminist academics as “a man-centered university, a breeding ground not of humanism, but of masculine privilege.”³⁰ Unsurprisingly, male academics found the new women’s studies programs to be ‘un-academic,’³¹ their understanding of academic having to do with the traditional, accepted forms of knowledge that had been practiced for centuries.

The tension between the stronghold of masculine privilege and the need to create an entirely new form of knowledge was strong. Realistically, women knew that the existence of the university as it stood was in contrast to the world that they wanted to create. Higher education had been intentionally erasing women from history books for centuries and declaring that women’s contributions were not worthy of study.³² To change a place like that, one that had so intentionally worked in contrast to the newfound feminist goals and was unlikely to change (not

²⁹ Webb, “The New Feminism and Women’s Studies,” 76.

³⁰ Rich, “Toward a Woman-Centered University,” 127.

³¹ James Atlas, “On Campus: The Battle of the Books,” *The New York Times*, June 5, 1988, sec. Magazine.

³² “It is not simply that women artists have been omitted from the curriculum: we have taught students that there were none.” Florence Howe, “Women and the Power to Change,” in *Women and the Power to Change*, ed. Florence Howe (New York, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1975), 158.

much had changed with the advent of black studies) with extensive work, mandated an idealism that bordered on ridiculous.

But that did not stop them. Despite the centuries of ‘men’s studies’ and the long history of failed political change within universities, women’s studies held on to an idealized understanding of their ability to completely overthrow the academic world in which they had grown up. Proposals for new women-centered academic programs preached ideals of justice and equality, and they were not completely misguided. The proposal for a women’s studies minor at Georgetown University said: “it is clear that the promotion of ‘social’ as well as intellectual ‘justice’ would be served by the institution of a Women's Studies Program in which women's issues and experiences, both historical and cross-cultural, would be examined critically and analytically.”³³ The justification for a women’s studies program at Georgetown was one based in the idea that teaching a different curriculum would help create a more just world. It is hard to say that it would not have, changing traditional voices and offering new perspectives on its own would likely have created a more just academy. Josephine Donovan, who helped found the Program at the University of New Hampshire, said of her women’s studies work, “not only was the subject matter new, but we also wanted to transform the university, to make it more democratic and egalitarian.”³⁴

Florence Howe, when discussing previous iterations of feminist movements said that in no earlier version of feminism had activists questioned male control over “*over the curriculum* or

³³ “Draft Proposal No. 2: Interdisciplinary Women’s Studies Program,” October 1982. Georgetown University Booth Family Center for Special Collections.

³⁴ Josephine Donovan, “A Cause of Our Own,” in *The Politics of Women’s Studies: Testimony from Thirty Founding Mothers*, ed. Florence Howe, vol. I, The Women’s Studies History Series (New York, New York: The Feminist Press, 2000), 97.

knowledge in general.” The new feminist movement, however, was going to directly engage with challenging accepted conceptions of knowledge.

Howe continued with her understanding of challenging accepted means of knowing when she says “let us reexamine the whole question, all the questions. Let us take nothing for granted. Most definitely, let us refuse to pass on that ‘received heritage’ without examining its cultural bias.” To be clear, this desire to change everything, at its most basic and structural level cannot be overstated. Achieving justice through a curriculum, one organized by women no less? That was a radical idea, and that was the goal of women’s studies programs. To say that some of the radicalism of the feminist movement had to be sacrificed when entering the university, given its unchanging tendencies should not be too surprising.

Even at Georgetown University, where a Women’s Studies Minor was not approved until 1987, professors continued to believe in the ability of the programs to create positive change long after the university had failed to deliver on its programming. Leona Fisher would later say that women’s studies would help promote justice and that “the valorization of women in the curriculum would lead to a campus ‘climate’ much more favorable to change in other areas.³⁵” Women’s studies was driven by feminism, yes, but also by an idealism about the possibility of achieving justice within an hierarchical institution with the change of curriculum and some policy. This stands in such stark contrast to the way that the universities viewed these programs.

Even the nature of university record keeping for these programs suggests universities did not find them important. Often times, institutions did not keep records of the creation of women’s studies programming: what is the point of recording the creation of something that

³⁵ Fisher, “The Challenge of Women’s Studies,” 242

would just disappear in a few years?³⁶ When trying to find information about the creation of the women's studies programs at Georgetown University there was little institutional knowledge in the archives. Most of the documents that were available were records from the personal collection of documents that one of the deans involved with the creation of the program had decided to save. The majority of the important documents had been printed on one-off colored sheets of paper, afterthoughts of records to archive for a future person who might also think that the work that women did in creating changes to the academy might find important. Record keeping at these institutions matters because it is a reflection of the values of an administration. When the archives have little information about institutional history: who does? Where can it be found?

Women's studies, with its feminist ideas about re-making the hierarchy of the university was fundamentally at odds with the structure and practice of the traditional university. They were clearly entering a somewhat hostile environment, one that left little record of the discipline altering work that these activists were doing. Women's studies programs were forced to sacrifice ideals as they tried to adapt to a system that would allow them to spread wider knowledge about women's lives. In being forced to adjust to systems of power that did not allow for their own visions, they had to lose pieces of the feminism that had been the battle cry for entering the university in the first place. Finding themselves in a patriarchal environment, activists realized that "the question is no longer whether women (or non-whites) are intellectually and 'by nature' equipped for higher education, but whether this male-created, male-dominated structure is really

³⁶ Kathryn Kish Sklar, "The Women's Studies Moment: 1972," in *The Politics of Women's Studies: Testimony from Thirty Founding Mothers*, ed. Florence Howe, vol. I, The Women's Studies History Series (New York, New York: The Feminist Press, 2000), 131.

capable of serving the humanism and freedom it professes.”³⁷ Seeking to find and share the freedom professed by the academy, women’s studies activists worked hard to integrate themselves into the schools, to toe the line between activism and being the well-behaved scholars that they had to prove to the university that women could be.

Early on in the creation of feminist academic programming, Rich had declared that: “there can be no authentic feminist culture which is not in rebellion, which does not rescue us from the Great Silence and, in renaming, open the way to action--which does not lead to power. I see no either/or for us.”³⁸ The authentic feminist culture of rebellion started to slip as women’s studies entered the university, something that will be dissected in the next chapter, but the fundamental desire for change stayed with the women who fought for the creation of this new academic study.

³⁷ Rich, “Toward a Woman Centered University,” 133.

³⁸ Rich, “Toward a Woman Centered University,” 126

CHAPTER II:

Did We Sell Out to The Establishment?

The test of women's studies on campus will not finally be the proliferation of courses or programs, but their effect on the rest of the curriculum.

—Florence Howe, “Women and the Power to Change”

The questions about whether the university was the natural next step for the women's movement were borne out in the conversations about the contradictions between the ideology of the programs and the ideology of the universities. The ideological roots of the Women's Studies Movement, radical and ready to transform the structures with which they came into contact, often found themselves at odds with the nature of decision making processes within American universities. Well known among feminist scholars, women's studies programs were the results of the activism of women, both faculty and students, across the country who demanded change to the male dominated programming. The reality of actually creating these programs, however, was usually far less radical. Coming off of an era of rapid coeducation at institutions that had maintained their 'elite and male' status for a long time, the male-run institutions were reluctant to come around to a changing student population, much less a changing curriculum.

The national adoption of women's studies programs often had much more to do with the political needs of a school at the time rather than the actual belief of the administration that the programming itself would fit well at a given institution. Often, administrators were driven by a desire for recognition of their feminist leanings and willingness to appease the women of the United States. This chapter will engage with the tensions between administrative needs and feminist goals in order to more closely view the challenge of acclimating a social change movement into an institution.

This reluctance on the part of the administration to allow a change to curriculum to suit women's activists was not unusual. Academic programs are historically slow to change and men were already ignoring women's suggestions both inside and outside of academia. Additionally, women were historically considered un-academic, so administrators felt little need to listen to a group that did not have significant amounts of power within their institutions.

While women were organizing grassroots efforts to create classes that lined up with their feminist belief systems and trying to convince institutions that these politics mattered, universities did not care much about furthering women's rights at all. Rather, political appeasement was a key factor in making decisions about how to change the curriculum, and the student body, at these institutions. The same is true about the move of elite institutions into coeducation in the same time frame.³⁹ The move towards coeducation was not, as one might imagine, a result of the social movements of the sixties or even because giving women access to the same education as men was viewed as the progressive thing to do. Instead, the decision to allow women into elite higher education was often made to appease the political needs of the school.

In the case of Princeton University, President Robert F. Goheen realized that he had been losing out on some of the smartest students in the country as they chose to bypass his university to attend schools with full coeducation. The eventual decision to go coeducational was significantly impacted by the people, and the funding, that the school was losing in being single sex.⁴⁰ By allowing women to apply, administrators were able to double the talent in the applicant

³⁹ Nancy Weiss Malkiel, *"Keep The Damned Women Out" The Struggle for Coeducation* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016).

⁴⁰ "Increasing numbers of the ablest seniors in both the public and private schools that had been Princeton's biggest feeders were choosing not to come here because of our monasticism" Robert F. Goheen, "A President Recalls Coeducation, Daily Princetonian, Apr. 13, 1989, quoted in Malkiel, *"Keep The Damned Women Out,"* 84.

pool as well as appeal to potential male undergraduates who were uninterested in attending a single-sex school.

In short, changes that looked like major shifts in gender norms at colleges and universities often were not closely tied to gendered standards. In a parallel, when Georgetown University made the official decision to grant an official minor in women's studies in 1986 for the year of 1987, the committee approved the decision in part because Georgetown had been losing students to George Washington University.⁴¹ The creation of women's studies programming fits nicely into this paradigm of political decision-making because programs were created for different reasons. Sometimes to appease activists, sometimes to regain control of the market of potential students. When these decisions were made to benefit the administration, women's studies was forced to modulate itself and become part of the academy in order to maintain its status, and ability to educate students, within it.

Since women's studies programs were coming into being at a time of rapid coeducation, which is to say at a time when more women were being allowed into institutions than ever before, how did the women's movement interact with this new student body? Did the admittance of women, in combination with radical women's studies programming, shift the patriarchal paradigms of institutions? Not necessarily. As more women entered spaces of higher education and the women's movement spread notions of education by, about, and for women, the tensions between becoming part of the university and revolution only grew. Assuming new roles in the academy created tensions in the academy as they were institutionalized, there were trade-offs for women's studies. The new programming lost some of its edge as it lost power and had to

⁴¹ "Minutes from College Executive Council Meeting." Georgetown University, February 25, 1987. Washington D.C. Georgetown University Special Collections.

accommodate traditional structures, instead of the anti-hierarchical goals, in order to gain positions.

These exact tensions played out in 1973-74 at San Diego State College. As previously mentioned, in 1969 San Diego State College was one of two institutions of higher education with a women's studies program. The creation of this program was a watershed moment for higher education in that it would open doors for women, and later to other students, to start engaging in questions of identity and how it can shape academic and lived experiences.

In 1974, the founders of that first program, the ones who had launched a revolutionary venture, left the program that they had created.⁴² They walked away from their classrooms and their academic research and they decided that they would make a larger impact on society by doing community work. What was behind their decision to leave the school? What did they say about the need to leave?

They said that San Diego State College was too political, that the structure and practice of the university could not exist with the feminist ideals that their women's studies program was trying to teach to its students. So, to embody their activism and resistance, they left, and they left this statement regarding their decision:

We have realized that professionalizing Women's Studies and the institutionalizing of this program is part of the strategy of those in power in the university.... A collective program like San Diego's either must develop into a traditional elitist approach to education, or the women who have maintained the collective approach will be fired and replaced by women who are not committed to student interests or needs. In either case, Women's Studies as we have known it, is incompatible with the institution and is eliminated.⁴³

⁴² Marilyn J Boxer, "For and About Women: The Theory and Practice of Women's Studies in the United States," *Signs* 7, no. 3, (Spring 1982): 670.

⁴³ Women's Studies Board, San Diego State College, *Women's Studies and Socialist Feminism*, (April 20, 1974): 5-7 quoted in Boxer, "For and about Women: The Theory and Practice of Women's Studies, 670.

This statement engages with the different ways of understanding these programs: there is the ‘traditional elitist approach’ which is representative of the power dynamics that usually exist within the university. This is the vision of the university as an unchanging entity that the founders of the San Diego program chose to walk away from, the one that thrives on elitism and exclusion. This statement also highlights the choice that newcomers to the academy must face: choose to adapt or leave. A choice like this was made more difficult by the fact that the administration was trying to tame the programs for its own benefit.

The women at San Diego chose to go, arguably choosing to side with their ‘feminist ideals’ in place of academic prestige. Not everyone in the country made the same choices, but the ones that chose to stay at universities inevitably experienced the same tensions. This matters, the struggle between the university and women’s studies regarding institutionalization reflects a tendency on the part of the university to resist change and limit the people with the power to ask questions about society. The question then becomes what matters more? Sticking with feminist ideals and leaving, or trying to accommodate to the schools to maintain representation?

If the fact that the founders of the women’s studies movement were pressured to diminish their ambitions does not impress enough upon the reader regarding the elitist nature of universities or their resistance to change, maybe the history of the creation of this first program at San Diego State will change that. The program at San Diego State was created, unquestionably, out of the hard work and activism of the women who wanted to gain academic recognition for women’s lives. This should not be forgotten or undercut. However, the program

itself, was created in part because the Dean of the College of Arts and Letters wanted “credit for building the nation’s first Women’s Studies Program.”⁴⁴

That the movement for a more representative academy was kickstarted by a man who wanted extra credit for his benevolence is not surprising, and unfortunately very much in line with the way that women experienced these schools.

As with most other institutions, political change at Georgetown was slow. The aforementioned first class in the vein of Women’s Studies did not give space to an Introduction to Women’s Studies course, a staple of any program, until the year 1983.⁴⁵ In the same year, members of the Georgetown community drafted the first proposal for a recognized Women’s Studies Program in 1983. The minor would not receive approval from the University until 1987. Minutes from the College Executive Council Meeting at which this decision was made in 1987 suggest that the primary reason for the acceptance of the program was the need to remain current with what other schools were doing⁴⁶

Georgetown, in its delayed approval of a program that had been a long time coming (seventeen years after women’s studies first popped up and fourteen years after they really flourished in 1973) represents a political move on the part university administration to appease the students who had been bothering them. In a later reflection about the Women’s Studies Program at Georgetown, Leona Fisher would bemoan the fact that the University offered little support (and even less money) to the “handful of women and men who have been willing to

⁴⁴ Roberta Salper, “San Diego State 1970: The Initial Year of the Nation’s First Women’s Studies Program,” *Feminist Studies* 37, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 661.

⁴⁵ Fisher, “Questions for a Transformed Future,” 241.

⁴⁶ “Minutes from College Executive Council Meeting” (Georgetown University, February 25, 1987), Washington D.C. Georgetown University Special Collections.

work slowly, patiently, and tirelessly for change.”⁴⁷ The approval of the program was not, in any way, a progressive move nor an attempt at inclusion on the part of the university, rather it appears to have been an attempt to garner support for the work Georgetown was doing to ‘support women’ and stay on top of trends. Would it even be surprising to mention that members of the College Executive Council stated at the meeting in which they approved the new women’s studies programming that they were concerned that these programs were still a fad, unworthy of attention from an institution like Georgetown?

It turned out that even after having done the hard work of creating these programs within universities, working to maintain good graces in the university and other issues was not an easy thing to do. In fact, sometimes the very success of the programs on the campuses is what caused the problems and tensions between elitism and feminism. Thinking back to the political moves that were made to allow women into institutions, or the ones that were made to politically appease the social left when it wanted women’s studies programs, then it is easier to understand why the founders of women’s studies were so fed up with the school that they had tried to change. They had been given a small corner of the school, one that was given with the hopes of appeasing the radicals and quieting their resistance all the while giving the college the notoriety of liberalism and forward-thinking administrators. Their battle cries for an upheaval in the system had left them with, in the words of the Dean of Women’s Studies at Yale “‘a tiny little toe-hold given [them] us by a benevolent patriarchy’ with ‘no money of [their] our own.’”⁴⁸

Even the ‘tiny toe-hold’ had to be fought for though. Women had to organize themselves in order to get representative programming. At Georgetown University, in 1975, a mere five

⁴⁷ Fisher, “Questions for a Transformed Future,” 241.

⁴⁸ Nan Robertson, “Women at Yale: Looking Back at a Decade of Change,” *New York Times*, October 29, 1979.

years after women were first allowed to enter the College, Rosalind Cowie and Anne Sullivan, employees of the University at the time, organized a course called “Women in the Arts and Sciences.” The university did not make any institutional changes in response. The course fit in well with the narrative of women having to band together to demand curriculum that reflected their lives⁴⁹ because this inaugural class involved guest lectures from approximately twelve female professors on campus.⁵⁰ Female professors, six years after the first women’s studies classes in the country, needed to take time out of their already full schedules in order to teach a class to which university did not offer any institutional recognition. This attempt to kick start a gender studies curriculum was part of the emergent trend of the decade, but it would take another ten years to actually get a minor at Georgetown.

Despite pushback and control from administration and alumni, women’s studies did manage to alter the landscape of higher education. After San Diego and Cornell took the lead in establishing a new type of academic programming, the country caught on. By 1977, there were 276 women’s studies programs on campuses across the country. Not only were these programs teaching classes, but they were also offering B.A. and M.A. degrees, and Cornell was offering the first graduate minor in women’s studies in the country.⁵¹ This reflects a massive shift in curriculum within higher education across the country, but the question remained: how

⁴⁹ “Women’s studies is a grass roots movement, mainly of young graduate students and undergraduates and young, nontenured faculty. It has developed without official administrative sanction, and occasionally despite departmental hostility. On most campuses still, it operates as an ‘underground’ academic enterprise, without the legitimacy of tenured faculty and generous budgets or large offices.” Howe, *Women and the Power to Change*, 8-9.

⁵⁰ “Dorothy Brown, History; Katherine Bick; Biology, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Government; Darlene Howard, English; Leila Young, Sociology; Beth MeKeown, Cornelia Dimmit; Theology; Deborah Boedecker, Classics) volunteered to give one lecture and to conduct a discussion on the status and/or study of women in their respective fields.” “Draft Proposal No. 2: Interdisciplinary Women’s Studies Program,” October 1982, Georgetown University Booth Family Center for Special Collections.

⁵¹ Florence Howe and Frances Kelley, “Fact Sheet on Women’s Studies Programs in 1977,” *Women’s Studies Newsletter* 5, no. 4 (1977): 17–17.

revolutionary was a program that had to fit itself into the academy? How revolutionary can anything that is handed down from the administration truly be?

As classrooms started to widen the scope of the history and the authors that they studied, a concurrent shift happened in the number of women who attended universities. This shift was particularly concentrated in the number of women who went back to universities, many having left before receiving their degrees. By 1980, the National Institute of Education reported that the women's studies movement had played a critical role in the return of 're-entry' women to universities.⁵² By this year, one-third of college attendees were twenty-five or older, and "the proportion of those who were thirty-five years or older rose to 12.3 percent in 1979."⁵³ Women started pouring back into schools, the women's movement coinciding with and likely causing an "enormous increase of women students at two-year colleges."⁵⁴ These same two-year schools accounted for forty percent of the new women's studies program growth in 1977.⁵⁵

Women's studies programs were not only growing rapidly but also affecting large-scale change in the number of women who attended post-secondary institutions. Barbara Miller Solomon, a feminist scholar who has worked on the history of women in education would later say this: "We recall that a few eighteenth-century matrons, who had been denied liberal study, recognized the need for educating the younger generation. Two hundred years later the circle of

⁵² Re-entry women could be considered women who were getting B.A. degrees having left previously, having never attended school, or those going back after an extended absence to get an M.A. or Ph.D. National Institute of Education, "Re-Entry Women Involved in Women's Studies," Women's Studies Monograph Series, February 1980, Box 25, Women's Studies Pamphlet Collection, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries.

⁵³ "New Trend at College: Women Studies," *The New York Times*, January 7, 1971.

⁵⁴ Barbara Miller Soloman, *In the Company of Educated Women*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 205.

⁵⁵ Howe and Kelly, "Fact Sheet on Women's Studies Programs in 1977," 17.

history is complete; older women now seek the education the younger ones take for granted.”⁵⁶ That the women’s studies movement contributed to a change like that is nothing short of remarkable, women claiming education for themselves represents a crucial shift in social paradigms and feminist successes.

If women’s studies programs were bringing new people to campuses and altering incoming student bodies, they also made an impact on the people who were already on campus. New women’s studies programs were able to attract different students to classes, in 1971 a women’s studies seminar at Princeton had nine students, eight of whom were male and most of whom had started to believe in women’s liberation after starting the class.⁵⁷ That in itself, a majority male feminist studies class, is a significant impact on a college campus. A Cornell senior, Ella Kusnetz, said in the same year that women’s studies courses changed her view of academics and that she wished she had been able to take the classes when she was a freshman.⁵⁸

To gain a following of male and female students who believe in the work on women’s studies was certainly a success in the programs, and the spread of feminism on campuses as a byproduct of these classes was also an important marker as the classes grew in popularity. One student, a re-entry woman, when asked about her exposure to feminism said “‘I could have gone all of my life being a feminist without knowing it.’ She underlined the importance of women’s studies in making women aware of the potentialities offered to them by their education. By becoming students these women gained self-knowledge as well as academic knowledge.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Soloman, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 206.

⁵⁷ “New Trend at College: Women Studies,” *The New York Times*, January 7, 1971.

⁵⁸ “New Trend at College: Women Studies,” *The New York Times*, January 7, 1971.

⁵⁹ Soloman, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 206.

There can be little question about the success that this reflects: if feminism was spreading through women's studies classrooms it would appear as if they were doing exactly what they were meant to do. Especially if this is considered in the context of all the women who came back to school with the advent of women's studies, people who received educations that were not offered in the previous decades. This is truly an important part of the development of these programs. Not only was it successful, but it was also kind of subversive: taking students from other classes and asking them to study something that had not yet been deemed wholly appropriate for the academy was a means of changing the dynamics of the university: one of the goals that had been mentioned outright when these programs were created.

With that being said however, with time and recognition from universities, this success turned from signifying the ability to create meaningful change in the universities to being part of the system of the university. This happened in two different ways: the first of which was the co-opting of female energies and activism for male gain: using women as a political tool to benefit the university. The second had to do with the structure of the university and the impact that number of students interested in a course, referred to in women's studies scholarship as *body count*, had a direct impact on the success of the messaging.

To understand the importance of body count on women's studies program put it in the context of any new academic program: when there are enough people interested, the school feels somewhat obligated to support it. This becomes a tightrope act at these institutions though: at some schools, it is easy to recruit people for classes, lots of students want to take the classes and learn about gender and feminist theory. Once these programs started to succeed though, the university wanted a tighter leash around the programs; they wanted to be able to control what

was being taught at their school, and this could prevent women's studies programs from achieving their original goals.

Clearly, people were interested in the programs on college campuses. When more people start enrolling in women's studies courses, the programs, and their respective institutions, get more press. In 1970, Newsweek called women's studies 'the hottest new wrinkle in higher education,'⁶⁰ and press coverage only picked up from there. As students flocked to courses there was more pressure from the university to control them. Women's studies creators came into universities trying to fundamentally change how they worked: this was a crucial underpinning of the feminist work that they were doing. This played out differently at different universities, but it often meant classes taught in graduate student or professor's apartments instead of in classrooms, or community oriented events.⁶¹ However, this did not line up with the traditional narrative of academia, so the universities wanted to control the work that was happening and undermined the very change that women's studies was trying to create. Essentially, women's studies was built on the idea of radically altering the university. When the discipline started to become popular and universities wanted to control it, it lost the edge that had made it unique because it was supervised. When the university can threaten to cut funding from a program if it lobs too much criticism at the university itself, then the program is likely to do a lot less criticizing than it had originally hoped to.

In other schools there was not enough interest in the classes: and women's studies classes suffered in these locations as well. Professor Josephine Donovan explained, in a *Cause of Our*

⁶⁰ Newsweek, October 26, 1970 quoted in Boxer, *When Women Ask the Questions*, 8.

⁶¹ Josephine Donovan, "A Cause of Our Own," in *The Politics of Women's Studies: Testimony from Thirty Founding Mothers*, ed. Florence Howe, vol. I, The Women's Studies History Series (New York, New York: The Feminist Press, 2000), 97.

Own, that she had proposed a women's studies program at the University of Kentucky and it was flatly denied because they did not have enough people interested in the programming.⁶² This is a problem because without having access to make the programming available there is no shot at ever really getting the programming, and as mentioned previously when schools only do things for political gain then this will make little difference as to the outcome of the work that they will eventually do.

The success of these programs often had a way of detracting from the goals of the programs to create meaningful and lasting change to the nature of knowledge production and gathering at the universities. "Having begun, women's studies is now following those traditional patterns of academic growth that confer both credentials and academic respectability."⁶³ As women's studies began to succeed and attract more students, then they had to become more like the rest of the university. The problem with this is not that the rest of the university was inherently wrongheaded, but rather that so much of it was based on traditional and male-centered notions of academia.

Notably, Women's Studies programs were entering the academy at a decent time for some change, new interdisciplinary programs, like American Studies, had started to pop up on different campuses as part of a reimagination of the curriculum. But therein was the problem: women's studies was not looking to become worthy of academia by joining the newly accepted

⁶² "I was chagrined by the committee's decision, because I thought we had prepared an intelligent, well-written, and well-reasoned proposal. I soon came to realize, however, that to paraphrase Mae West, 'reason had nothing to do with it.' As Catharine Stimpson explained to me on a visit to campus shortly thereafter, 'You didn't have the numbers.' It has been, alas, a matter of power. This realization about the academic world has been one of the hardest for me to accept. I am still astounded that a place allegedly devoted to thoughtful inquiry, the pursuit of knowledge, the careful examination of evidence, operates largely like any political institution on the basis of who has power, who has the numbers---not just on who has the most intelligent plan, the most reasonable argument, or justice on her side." Donovan, "A Cause of Our Own," 98-99.

⁶³ Catharine Stimpson, "The New Feminism and Women's Studies," in *Women on Campus: The Unfinished Liberation* (Change Magazine, 1975), 70.

realm of interdisciplinary studies. Surviving within the academy, reaching students and changing lives with scholarship, meant justifying everything a program did as worthy of academia. This meant less energy was spent on changing the nature of academics and more was spent on conforming to the ideals of the academy as they already had already existed. In other words, as interdisciplinary programs moved into places of comfort on campuses, they moved away from their interdisciplinary roots and towards a more disciplined academic practice, feeding off of the benefits of academic recognition and power.⁶⁴ This was a mandatory adaptation: even though "interdisciplinary studies programs have 'settled in' they 'continue to exist within an environment where unrelenting disciplinary claims to knowledge hold sway.'⁶⁵ Women's studies was then, entering the academy as a more palatable form of resistance instead of the fiery kind that they had hoped for.

Women's studies did catch on in the academy, but the co-opting of energies and activism for administrative political gain took much of the edge off of the feminist resistance that activists originally intended. It is significant that the programs were demanded and started by women and that grassroots activism was the foundation on which these programs were built. This grassroots reality gives historical agency to a group of people that had so long been denied it, both in the real world and within the classroom. Also significant to the legacy of the programs is the impact that they had on the rest of the campus: they brought women back to school in record numbers and they had wider impacts on the way that the academy viewed and studied gender. With that being said, that the programs succeeded within the university sometimes had too much to do with the goals of the people running the schools and too little to do with the intellectual work being

⁶⁴ Tanya Augsberg and Henry Stuart, eds. "Introduction" *The Politics of Interdisciplinary Studies: Essays on Transformations In American Undergraduate Programs*. North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009, 7.

⁶⁵ (Katz 2001, 522) quoted in Augsberg and Stuart, *The Politics of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 7.

done within the programs. In the words of Josephine Donovan, “Women’s Studies has been successful, not because it is an exciting, intellectually challenging, and rigorously demanding field of scholarship and knowledge, or because it is right and just, but because we have the numbers. It’s still a matter of ‘body count.’”⁶⁶ And isn’t that, after all of the cries for revolution, just a little bit disappointing?

⁶⁶ Josephine Donovan, “A Cause of Our Own,” 99.

CHAPTER III:

Resistance from Within

Why do we educate women? Cynically, I might answer, to keep them off the streets. Certainly, we are not thinking of them even as we do think of men- as the future engineers and administrators of a complex bureaucracy.

—Florence Howe, *and Jill Came Tumbling After*

Thus far, this thesis has engaged with the idea of institutional resistance, or the idea that Women's Studies activists often found themselves at odds with the universities into which they were integrating. The impact that this resistance had on the programs was significant; the people who were in power within institutions while Women's Studies was taking shape were able to help define what shape the programs took. Institutional resistance is a critical part of the story of these programs because it reflects the broad narrative regarding the struggle to gain traction in a space that did not believe that the struggle should exist. While all of this is important, there is more to the story when discussing the tensions involved in the creation of Women's Studies as an academic discipline and it involves the more complicated, and surprising resistance surrounding women's studies programs. That is the resistance from within or the resistance found amongst feminist activists.

Pushback from feminist activists would be easy to gloss over in the grand scheme of the Women's Liberation Movement because it pushes against the traditional narrative of feminism versus the patriarchal institution. Nevertheless, it is important to analyze the conversations happening among feminists regarding the contradictions of feminist education because it offers a window into the impact that these particular conversations had on the final products of Women's Studies Programs. Additionally, it would be irresponsible to skim over this part of the history of

Women's Studies because it would remove agency from the women and activists who fought to create change in the academy.

To focus on Women's Studies activists and the women's movement from which they came requires a discussion of the women who started to question the merits of Women's Studies programming in universities. Women's Studies, born out of the feminist movement, was a widespread movement that encapsulated hundreds of different women on plenty of different campuses, it was, by no means, a monolithic movement.⁶⁷ There were quite a few activists who questioned the very nature of studying feminism in the academy. By questioning the validity of their own participation in the academy, women's studies scholars and activists gave people who did not believe women should be in the academy ammunition with which to criticize female academics.

This chapter will start to unpack some of these sentiments in the context of the history of separate education for women, in order to give a better sense of the academic world into which women's studies was trying to enter. There were three major tensions or criticisms from within the movement. The first had to do with overcoming the idea of a separate education for women that, for once, was not based in sexist ideas. The second was related to the pressure to conform to traditional male-based hierarchies, and the third involved the perceived binary between activism and the academy.

Despite the struggles of entering into the university and trying to gain and maintain status within these institutions, as well as the work that went into trying to manage all of the daily operations, once Women's Studies Programs were established, the original challenge remained:

⁶⁷ Stimpson, "The New Feminism and Women's Studies," 74.

create an academic space that truly lived up to the ideas of justice that had been professed in the beginning.

The desire to change and overthrow systems of power left Women's Studies Activists open to divisions or "impulses" that could lead to the destruction of Women's Studies from within. As women started to gain small amounts of power in the university structure, there was concern that the power they were gaining was bad overall because of the nature of the power that feminism was trying to deconstruct. Stimpson describes these tensions as academic tensions that come from power dynamics, stating, with sarcasm, "women have apparently accepted the theory that womanliness and power may never converge in one person."⁶⁸ In short, once Women's Studies programs were established at universities, the tensions present at their founding became long standing debates and disagreements about how best to run the programs.

The tensions between the idealized sense of justice that these women were trying to create and reality within the programs were always obvious, but there is more to it than that. The fundamental ideology behind women's studies was rooted in a belief that scholarship mattered; scholarship mattered because it influenced education, which influenced how powerful people saw the world. It is not hard to imagine that, despite the challenges of working within the university, plenty of women's movement activists truly wanted women's studies, in some form, in the academy.

To put it simply though, not everyone felt this way. The idea of a curricular addition that would focus on women, and be taught mainly to women, did not appeal to everyone. It was not necessarily that the opponents within the Women's Liberation Movement did not want women to be studied, rather they were deeply concerned with the university as well as with the idea of

⁶⁸ Catherine R. Stimpson, "What matter mind: A theory about the practice of Women's Studies" *Women's Studies* 1, (1973): 293.

scholarship. Furthermore, the notion of a curriculum that would continue to separate women's needs and education from the rest of the academic world, did not seem particularly progressive.

For most of American history, women were not allowed to access the same education as men, which is to say that the history of a separate curriculum for women is grounded in heavily gender-stereotyped beliefs about the role of women in society. The early history went as one would likely expect: women were taught to sew at home while men went to school, but even as women gained access to public school, they often were expected to leave school in order to help at home. Time brought changes in the form of women's colleges and higher education but change was slow, and female students were only allowed access to humanities classes and other such things that would fit their soft sensibilities and prepare them for marriage.⁶⁹ Again, time offers changes, and for a period during the Cold War women were encouraged to study sciences like their male counterparts, but the overwhelming narrative remains that women go to school to marry.⁷⁰

The end of World War II brought women into schools at high rates, women were actively competing with the men who were gaining access to expanding higher education through the GI Bill. While there was progress being made in attendance levels for women at institutions, there was little progress being made in regards to the curriculum or the roles that women were expected to fill after graduation. As an example of this problem, in 1931, at the reunion of the New Jersey College for Women, Dean Mabel S. Douglass warned alumnae about the "danger

⁶⁹ "Women undergraduates were absorbed in the here and now where dates and future marriage formed the most urgent part of their self-image as women" Fass, "The Female Paradox: Higher Education for Women, 1945-1963," 716.

⁷⁰ When the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, they ignited fear within the United States that the US was behind on science education, which created space for women within science labs. Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York, New York: Penguin Group, 2000), 42.

years after college.”⁷¹ The dean of the women’s college was warning women that the world into which they had recently entered would try to make their education useless, would ask them to devote too much time to childrearing and their marriages and cause misery. Twenty years later, when women were attending coeducational institutions at the end of the war, this was still a serious concern: a valuable woman’s education involved classes that would prepare women to be mothers, teaching them to cook and care for the people in their lives.⁷²

The traditional critiques thrown at the Women’s Movement apply here and should be mentioned; the view that women were at risk of petty lives after having been given the opportunity to attend higher education suggests both racial and class privilege: women of color and working class women were not included in these conversations. Nevertheless, the rhetoric around women’s education mattered because it set the stage for what women were expected to do with their lives. In 1957 when Gordon C. Blackwell was giving his opening address as the incoming chancellor of the North Carolina Women’s College he said this: “the educational needs of women relate to her potential roles as homemaker, mother, citizen, worker and an attractively intelligent person. If a career becomes a reality for a women, it may be of the split type occupying only a brief period before marriage.”⁷³

By 1968, the National Organization for Women (NOW), so fed up with the unequal expectations that surrounded education for men and for women, demanded in its Bill of Rights “the right of women to be educated to their full potential equally with men [. . .] eliminating all discrimination and segregation by sex, written and unwritten, at all levels of education, including

⁷¹ “College Women Told to Resist Petty Lives,” *The New York Times*, October 18, 1931.

⁷² Soloman, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 192.

⁷³ Gordon C. Blackwell, 1957 quoted in Paula Fass, “The Female Paradox,” 705.

colleges”⁷⁴ All of this is to say that by the time Women’s Studies Programs were in the process of creation, America had gone through a lot of sexist versions of education for women and women were finally gaining access to liberal arts education after centuries of being denied it. To phrase this differently, by 1969 women were demanding that they gain equal access to education that their male counterparts had always had access to.

This demand led to an interesting tension in the context of women who were trying to create a new curriculum: everything that had been considered academic up until this point had been male-centered. Did that mean that just as women were gaining access to the gates that they had always been kept outside of, the re-writing of the academic curriculum would welcome something that was not academic?⁷⁵ On top of all of that, with its attempt to change the curriculum and invite politics into the classroom, Women’s Studies was upsetting the traditional notion of the academy as based in a sense of perfect neutrality.⁷⁶

Women’s Studies, then, was full of people who were nervous about the idea of creating a new, and separate type of scholarship. Not only because it could have resulted in the divorce of this type of academia from the respected version of the academy, but also because it could have resulted in the divorce of women as a whole from the idea of academia. This discomfort played

⁷⁴ Mann, *Doing Feminist Theory From Modernity to Post Modernity*, 58.

⁷⁵ The creation of women’s studies programs did coincide with women entering more universities, Georgetown University, for example, first allowed women in the College of Arts and Sciences in 1969, the same year as the first women’s studies program. The New York Times reported significant doubt among academics regarding women’s studies: “yet considerable numbers of academics continue to view the whole idea with suspicion, disdain or indifference. To them, women's studies presents a low order of scholarly endeavor – ‘safe,’ ‘biased,’ ‘smacking of a party line’ - and a further ‘politicization’ of the university.” Walter Goodman, “Women’s Studies: The Debate Continues.” *The New York Times*. April 22, 1984.

⁷⁶ This neutrality never truly existed. Scholarship cannot be completely separated from the people who are doing the work, identity and politics always influence the way that anyone asks a question. For a long time, however, scholarship was believed to be neutral and cold, this was a fiction designed to favor the voices of the men who could claim neutrality and exclude people who could be swayed by their emotions.

out perfectly in the debate that activists and academics had about the idea of Women's Studies as a department or as an interdisciplinary program at institutions of higher education.

Departments were the vision of the traditional academy. A department is, and has been for most of recent history, where the respected academics get to do their respected academic work with protection and job security from the university. In conversation with the struggles that activists were having while trying to change notions about academia, a department did not seem like a perfect fit. It was a lofty institutional goal. However, a department would have come with perks: a department at a university would allow students to gain Ph.D.'s in Women's Studies and contribute significant research to the budding field. It would allow for tenure and, potentially, money to be funneled into new scholarship in ways that a program would not allow for.

The problem of the department, especially in the early stages of the creation of these programs, was the fear that the department would separate women from the rest of the academy. This type of separation would mean that women's studies would not actually have the impact that it was meant to have on the academy, which Adrienne Rich summed up by saying: "Women's studies can be institutionalized, therefore perceived, as an "alternate lifestyle" of the mind. Until every classroom and syllabus in the self-described "mainstream" is persistently being criticized for the androcentrism, its binary assumptions, its contribution to the great Silence, we have not gone far enough."⁷⁷

If this is the true concern, and if the ultimate goal of the Women's Studies movement was to impact all of the curriculum and make sure that every classroom was questioning its pre-conceived ideas about gender, then maybe a department was not the best means of achieving success within a university. This is certainly how some women felt: that an interdisciplinary

⁷⁷ Rich, "Women's Studies—Renaissance or Revolution?," 123.

program would be a better fit for Women's Studies. The concerns about this, however, were also rampant. Programs would mean a lack of access to institutional money, lack of access to tenure, and minimal classes offered within the field of Women's Studies.

The debate between the idea of the department and the program can appear small to people looking at Women's Studies from the outside, but it was not. This debate was emblematic of the control that activists were trying to embody within the academy; this was their chance to radically alter the academy that they had been handed and re-write history. So, while the debate seems trivial, it was actually crucial. These conversations were discussions about the type of program or department or academic corner that women would get to define and shape, and the conversations themselves were as radical and as important as the changes that would eventually be made to the academy.

Debates about the creation of Women's Studies amongst feminist scholars extended beyond the basic debate about programs vs. departments, and into conversations about whether or not higher education was the best place for studying women's lives and contributions to history.

Marilynn Webb, a Women's Studies activist described higher education as a double edged sword. It was something that could be used to advance individual positions in life, this is why immigrants, people of color and women had been fighting for access to it in the United States for so long. Higher education though, also creates hierarchies among the people who are trying to access it.

What does higher education for women mean in this regard? That some women are being trained as a separate class, a class above those women who are not being trained. Furthermore, intellectual acrobatics and the mystification of knowledge are just the tools

used to make those who have not been given a higher education feel that they are inferior and therefore deserve to be ruled.⁷⁸

The onset of women's studies programming meant that there were new people in the academy thinking about the structures of inequality in new ways, this was hugely important to the success of feminism and the Women's Liberation Movement. However, when a group of anti-hierarchical, anti-elitist women entered the academy and started work on systems of oppression in society they often started to question the very nature (hierarchical and patriarchal) of the universities. Was higher education worth entering, or did it mean selling out? For her part, Webb did say that she thought the existence of Women's Studies within higher education (as opposed to consciousness raising in the community) was possible, "only if we do not lose sight of what we are about."⁷⁹

Not every woman involved in this work felt the same way that Webb did, and the discord is significant because it starts to alter the way that the programs take shape. This discord and distrust in the academy is visible when the Women's Studies Professors leave San Diego State because they elected to do community work instead. This played out in an attempt to extend the university beyond itself, to move out into the community to shape and change who and what belonged in certain spaces. Professors and graduate students tried to challenge the nature of academic learning by hosting classes in community centers so that they could educate the broader public. One professor described having input on their program from enrolled students as

⁷⁸ Webb, "Women's Studies: Frill or Necessity?", 420.

⁷⁹ Webb, "Women's Studies: Frill or Necessity?", 422.

well as members of the broader community, a reflection of the desire for classes that would educate wider audiences.⁸⁰

The common belief amongst the people looking to extend out of the university was that the university was an insular world at the time, it was not a place that was easy to access. Rather, it was a place that only the most privileged had access to, one that universities had actively worked to ensure was only accessible by certain, appropriate, people. For that reason, people who were trying to change the university knew that they also had to try to change the world outside the university, which meant education for more than just the elite. In other words, it meant teaching outside of ivory towers.⁸¹

There are other ways that the professors in the programs looked to change classroom dynamics: changing where classrooms are held and who is invited. As has been mentioned in previous chapters, professors and graduate students would hold their classes in their apartments in order to change the traditional dynamic of the classroom.⁸² Women's Studies professors also chose to emphasize a non-hierarchical pedagogical approach to their classes, a learning model in which the students were teaching as much as the professors were. This meant a reimagination of the classroom, the movement of desks into circles, an emphasis on group work and teaching, and reflection papers.⁸³ San Francisco State University, as an interesting way of counteracting the

⁸⁰ Elizabeth Laprovsky Kennedy. "Dreams of Social Justice," in *The Politics of Women's Studies: Testimony from Thirty Founding Mothers*, ed. Florence Howe, vol. I, The Women's Studies History Series (New York, New York: The Feminist Press, 2000), 253.

⁸¹ "I assume we are concerned here with women's studies in their broadest possible meaning. Programs in the university, yes: but, more significantly, I believe, that spreading the university-without-walls which has taken root across the country and in many other parts of the world during the last few years." Rich, "Women's Studies—Renaissance or Revolution?," 123.

⁸² Josephine Donovan, "A Cause of Our Own," 97.

¹⁷ Josephine Donovan, "A Cause of Our Own," 98.

traditional forces of the university, choose to hire noncredentialed activists as teachers in their classrooms instead of tenured professors.⁸⁴

Despite all of the changes that feminists made after they had successfully ‘infiltrated the academy’ they were still criticizing the work that they were doing. In doing so they were sort of chasing themselves out of jobs, “women who say that any scholarship is inevitably politically sterile are themselves a part of the academy. Degrading the academy, they degrade their own place.”⁸⁵ This cycle of integration into the university to promote feminist scholarship, creation of feminist scholarship, and then questioning of the very nature of scholarship as potentially anti-feminist created a never-ending loop from which there were no winners.

Conversations such as this one lead to what people consider, the “perceived binary between activism and the academy.”⁸⁶ This was, and remains today, an interesting contradiction because the argument was convoluted. There were activists who argued that there was such a binary, that a professor or a student could not be fully feminist because she would not be on the streets protesting at all times, she would be sitting in a classroom or at a desk in the library. And while, yes, that was, and remains to be true, it was not possible for these women to be in two places at once, the reality is that activism and studying did not, and do not, necessarily have to be mutually exclusive. There was an idea that the women engaging in these particular academic conversations were not doing the work that they needed to be doing in protest form,⁸⁷ but often women who were studying the issues of sexism and gender constructs were doing work that

⁸⁴ Boxer, *When Women Ask the Questions*, 166.

⁸⁵ Catherine R. Stimpson, “What matter mind: A theory about the practice of Women’s Studies” *Women’s Studies* 1, (1973): 296.

⁸⁶ Catherine R. Stimpson, “What matter mind: A theory about the practice of Women’s Studies,” 296.

⁸⁷ Catherine R. Stimpson, “What matter mind: A theory about the practice of Women’s Studies,” 296.

would help deconstruct notions of power in society. The binary between activism and the academy is not actually a binary at all, rather it is a spectrum that should allow for people involved in scholarship and social change work to do both if they so choose. There will always be debates about where on the spectrum any specific individual should fall to ensure they are maximizing their utility, but these questions are harder to engage in because they continue to exist today. The creation of Women's Studies programs did little to calm those questions and simply raised them in new contexts.

The perceived binary between activism and the academy would come to define a significant portion of the rhetoric around women's studies after the time period that was examined for this thesis and creates a significant amount of feminist theory about the value of academic work. Does this perceived binary, and the people who fall on either side of it, ever become irrelevant? Unclear, it has to depend on the value that is placed on an education in this society and the value of an education in the eyes of people trying to create feminist change.

At the core of the tensions between women fighting for Women's Studies Programs and those who were questioning them is a question about the political benefit of a place in the academy. Activist and academic Sandra Coyner describes this conflict between feminists who wanted the creation of women's studies and those who don't as a "pro-longed, frequently bitter struggle to justify women's studies among activists who find it too remote, too abstract, too hierarchical, too moderate, and sometimes too hostile to 'real' women who wish to be part of feminist social change."⁸⁸

It is easy to think that there was more benefit to having women's studies in the academy: after all, even if it involves selling out a little bit there is still work happening, women's history

⁸⁸ Coyner, "Women's Studies," 350.

was still being taught. There were, and are, arguments to be made for the validity of either side, however, the women who left behind the San Diego State Women's Studies Program made an important point when they left the academy. They describe their time in the academy as repeatedly being bogged down by "bureaucratic bullshit (BB),"⁸⁹ explaining that the pressures of trying to maintain their program, with its benefits, in the academy often meant that they spent more time dealing with paperwork than they did on their original goals of teaching and changing lives. They said, "if we do a lot of BB we can maintain the program, if we don't we lost it. After all, what we really wanted was a Women's Studies Program, wasn't it? Or did we really want women's lives to be dealt with as a reality in every class, in every aspect of the university? Well, after a while you forget what you really wanted, you just work to maintain what you've got."⁹⁰ If what women's studies activists were after was real change, and it was, then the university and all its extra work and time-wasting bureaucracy often got in the way.

⁸⁹ *Women's Studies and Socialist Feminism*, April 1974, quoted in Boxer, *When Women Ask the Questions*, 165.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

Women's studies is explicitly, intentionally feminist. But in the discipline of women's studies, we also believe that all teaching and scholarship have political agendas and significance, almost always to maintain the status quo and the power of the powerful. We are labeled political only because we do openly what everybody else does covertly — and because we attempt, at least sometimes, to challenge the status quo.

—Sandra Coyner, “Women's Studies”

In 1969, the first women's studies class was taught in an American university classroom. The new discipline changed the university: it brought it new students and new voices, and it altered the way that scholars approached questions about politics and the academy. Women's studies opened doors for new questions and new methods of scholarly research and gave credence to the voices of women's activists. The goal of the programs had been to remake knowledge and the process associated with learning new ideas, they undoubtedly achieved this. Women's studies activists, through their work, claimed an academic agency that women had not had access to in earlier periods in academic history.

In claiming a space for themselves at the academy, in demanding a seat at the ivy-covered table and their own rooms in the marble halls, feminist activists coming from the women's liberation movement of the 1960s were faced with the fact that they had to give up some of their core feminist ideals.

This sacrifice stemmed from a few factors, it had to do with the fundamental mismatch of feminist anti-hierarchical views and a university system that was, and continues to be, built on ideas of elitism and exclusion. It was an unabashedly feminist movement and sometimes its ideals made integration difficult. The giving up of certain ideals was deeply related to the way that success has to be attained in the academy in order to maintain survival. Women's studies

wanted to education women, and when they decided the university was a good place to achieve that goal, they were forced to adapt to the structures of the university in order to continue to survive within it. Finding success within the academy often meant increased surveillance and control from the administration, which meant a decline in the radical, university-altering capacity of the programs. Finally, women's studies in the academy was further undermined when activists and scholars started to question the validity of feminism in the academy. When academics started to question the value of feminist scholarship, institutions had a hard time taking the programs seriously and were able to write them off as insignificant.

This thesis is an examination of institutional change at universities, a means of understanding how institutions resistant to change experienced a shift in what they allowed in their classrooms. It was born out of the simple question: who gets to decide what is taught in the academy? For too long, that answer was always: men. For the majority of American history, the books read in schools and the tales worshipped as cultural currency were the ones written by, and about, the men in power in society. The price of an education was not something worth wasting on a woman, much less something that should have included women or their lives as subject matter. By the time that World War II had ended and the GIs had come home and started going to school, American culture had shifted. The patriarchal norms were a little bit less entrenched than they had been previously.

To some extent, this is where this story begins. To say that this project was about the creation of women's studies would suggest that the minutia of curriculum change at the academic level is all that this thesis encompasses. Rather, the change of curriculum at institutions of higher education speaks to broader changing beliefs in American culture, changing beliefs

about gender and who was allowed to exist in the public eye. Women's studies, and its political leanings, came into the academy in a period of massive shifts in American social culture.

Studying education is a critical part of understanding American history: the people who are educated and the ideas and people that they learn about in school, reveal much about the values of society. It is in educational institutions that scholars decide which history to study and which subjects are valued, in turn, this translates into the people who are valued in that society. The quality of education determines what a society will become: the ideas that are taught in higher education could be said to reflect the hopes and dreams for the future of America.

Women's studies brought a new vision of that American future to the academy by bringing in a new version of American history. Women's studies radically altered higher education by redefining who was allowed to have a seat at the table, as well as what was discussed while sitting there. For all its gains and ambitions though, women's studies did not manage to break down and rebuild a new or different table. Does that matter? There are certainly reasons to think that it does not, that any integration into a system like the one of higher education was a win and it should not matter that there was not a complete revolution while this happened. This is partially true. It is also true, though, that if feminist ideals were so fundamentally opposed to the system of higher education as it existed that selling out to them felt like betrayal, then, maybe it was not worth it. If remaking the table was the only measure of success for the original women's studies movement, then the movement was not a success. Despite the best efforts of countless scholars and activists, the academy and its disciplines, its tenure track lines, and its values, look much the way that they did back in 1969.

The integration of feminism into the academy did, nevertheless, create a discipline that has carried on since its founding. Women's studies and its methodology are now mainstays on

college campuses, they produce new graduates and new scholarship annually. Marilyn Webb once said that when she thought about women's studies, she thought "more about 'Feminist' than [...] about 'studies.'"⁹¹ There are arguments to be made that after its incubation period, women's studies moved away from its radical foundations, that once it entered the academy and stayed there, it became something different. That the desire to overthrow academia seems to have faded with new generations of students. Women's studies has become much more tied to the university since its founding, the creation of departments, academic journals, and the tenure track would all suggest this. It all needs to be taken into consideration though, that most of women's studies is still unabashedly feminist.

It is that unabashedly feminist characteristic, the willingness to approach scholarship from a political angle, that may have been the longest lasting effect of the creation of women's studies programs. In short, women's studies, in its embrace of politics in the classroom, taught the academy that it was okay to announce its positionality. That acknowledging individual voices and biases can only make a project stronger. Besides, was there really such a thing as neutral scholarship, anyways? The radical idea of women's studies was that acknowledging politics and positions was a pre-requisite for any scholarship that would mean something. The historically 'neutral' academy, it turns out, was anything but. All education is inherently political, and choosing to pretend as if it is not is only missing the point.

Opening doors to conversations about positionality was critical. It has allowed for gains in recognition about access and privilege, and has altered the way that some of the academy approached knowledge. It means that there is a greater understanding now about the ways that higher education can perpetuate inequalities and harmful political narratives in its teaching

⁹¹Webb, "Feminist Studies: Frill or Necessity?," 410.

practices. In a world where the people who attend the most elite schools are often considered the most valuable members of society, addressing the impact of positionality altered the way that history was taught and understood in the academy. In that sense, women's studies did, in fact, radically alter the academy. By asking questions about who was allowed to be a part of the scholarly community they re-imagined the nature of scholarship: it can now be political and come from the voices of people who would not have been allowed in the academy before 1969.

All of this this happened fifty years ago with the creation of women's studies programs and the accompanying shifts in the academy. Fifty years before that, women were first allowed to vote in this country.

We shall someday be heeded, and when we shall have our amendment to the Constitution of the United States, everybody will think it was always so, just exactly as many young people think that all the privileges, all the freedom, all the enjoyments which woman now possesses always were hers. They have no idea of how every single inch of ground that she stands upon today has been gained by the hard work of some little handful of women of the past.⁹²

So said Susan B. Anthony about the vote, knowing that one day, women would not always know which battles had been fought and won that allowed them to be standing wherever they were in that moment. This sums up, in many ways, the nature of *In Her Own Words*; it has been an exploration into the ways that society and the academy tend to forget where they have come from and the people who have made life-changing gains in the past.

As a scholar talking about the ways that women's studies opened doors to questions of positionality, I should state that my positionality in this larger history matters. I am a student at

⁹² I would like to address the usage of a quote from a woman who, in many ways, created divisions among women's activists by intentionally excluding women of color, particularly black women, from the work that she was trying to do. This is not an intentional implication of the quote, but it is a fitting one. It represents a tension caused by intentional, and occasionally unintentional, exclusion of female voices of color by white women, a tension that was at the forefront of the movement to allow women onto university campuses and into the curricula, a movement of elitism that separates white women from black women and denies women equal access to things that they have the right to claim. Susan B. Anthony, 1894.

Georgetown University and I inhabit a place that my grandmother was not allowed to inhabit when she was my age. Phrased like that, the timeline of women's 'liberation' in academia is so incredibly short. In many ways, the work that I get to do now, that any woman or scholar of a non-traditional identity gets to do now in a space like Georgetown, is nothing short of miraculous.

It is not necessarily surprising, given the patriarchal timeline of American history, that women were not allowed in these spaces fifty years ago. It is somewhat surprising however, that it is not talked about on a regular basis. The truth is that in 2019, women's studies simply makes sense, but this project has highlighted all of the ways in which it did not always *just make sense*, or maybe the ways in which it still doesn't completely make sense. This should be a reminder about the necessity of both creating and studying history; that remembering can be as much of a political act as the creation of a new history. It is a reminder that the places that we, as scholars, inhabit were not always open to us, and that they are still not open to everyone.

The work of women's studies was often contradictory and confusing: debates amongst feminist scholars about whether or not scholarship could really be feminist made it only more so. But, women's studies is here, and in an academy that has not changed in decades, it offers a respite for those seeking to find an academy welcoming to a wider range of scholarly traditions. It is not free of bias nor completely freeing for all women, but it is certainly a start.

In 1994, bell hooks published her book, *Engaged Pedagogy: Teaching to Transgress*. Her work dealt with the work of education as a practice of freedom, something that educators and students could both practice as a form of liberation within the classroom. This pedagogy and its reliance on the experience of the feminist classroom, since hailed as landmark in both educational pedagogy and feminist theory, could not have existed without the sea change that

happened in higher education in the 1970s. The change, of course, was the creation of women's studies programs at universities in America. In this work, hooks examines the idea of the freedom that can be found in a feminist classroom, maybe bringing some sort of closure to the women who started to move towards women's studies in the early 70s.

The contributions of the theorists like bell hooks were left out of this project, it has a limited scope, in both time and focus. The scope of this project was limited to documents written by women's studies activists from 1965-1980, mostly concentrated between 1969-1978. This limitation allowed for a deep dive into the academic work produced by women's studies activists, but it did not allow for an engagement in the products of women's studies such as feminist theory. The exclusion of the voices of prominent feminist theorists has everything to do with the time restraints of a limited project. While the debates surrounding the founding of these programs is covered in depth in this research, the debates that continued to occur as programs grew are not mentioned. This would be a fascinating topic for future study: examining the movement of these intra-university tensions into the future.

Future projects could also look at other primary sources and engage with different journals as well as analyze these tensions in conversation with the tensions that exist today. A future study could be done into the feminist theory that engages with the idea of the exclusivity of classrooms and how to change it, a feminist goal for women's studies scholarship to be sure.

There is plenty of work left to be done. For all of the talk about interdisciplinary programs versus departments in the 1970s, by 2019, women's studies is not facing the same choices it originally was. Now, where women's studies programs have the most power, they are usually departments, supported, both financially and structurally by their home institutions. At Georgetown University, this is not the case. The Women and Gender Studies Program at

Georgetown is exactly that, a program. The professors teaching within it have no access to tenure. There are only two full time professors in the discipline, the rest are part time and many of them keep leaving the institution due to lack of support.

Women's studies has proven that the people who are allowed at the table, in the classroom, and in the university, greatly matter. The people with the power to ask the questions are the ones with the power to change the academy and the world as they exist today. Only time will tell if Georgetown University will prove that it understands that reality. Only time will tell who might be found, and which questions might be asked, in the future academy.

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