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Blackmore, Jill 2013, Within/against: feminist theory as praxis in higher education research, *in Theory and Method in Higher Education Research*, Emerald Group Publishing, London, UK, pp.175-198.

## **Available from Deakin Research Online:**

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# WITHIN/AGAINST: FEMINIST THEORY AS PRACTICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH

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## ABSTRACT

This chapter will explore how different feminist theories and theorists have informed what counts as research, what is defined as a research issue, and methodological approaches to research in higher education. It will consider the theoretical and methodological tools feminist academics have mobilized in order to develop more powerful explanations of how gender and other forms of difference work in the relation to the positioning of the individual, higher education and the nation state within globalized economies. It pays particular regard to the feminist political project of social justice.

## INTRODUCTION

Feminism as an international social, political and epistemological movement has, through its activism, claimed access to higher education rather than have access bestowed through the entitlement of gender, race, ethnicity or class. Education has been for feminists a site of social reproduction of gender, and of individual and collective social and economic change (Arnot, 2002). But access did not necessarily mean equal participation or gaining the sense of entitlement accorded full members of the academy. Being female in higher education often meant being positioned as lesser, an outsider, or a token within male-dominated structures (Acker, 2000). While universities are now numerically feminized, many women still consider universities or sites within them as 'chilly cultures' (Brooks & Mackinnon, 2001). Indeed women are not 'taking over' where power is concentrated (Quinn, 2003). Although women as undergraduate students are becoming dominant in the health sciences and law, they continue to be concentrated as academics in the disciplines of the arts, education, humanities and social sciences. These fields are increasingly vulnerable as universities become corporatized due to the driving instrumental and economic logic of managerialism, markets, entrepreneurialism and innovation, the last often equated to science and technology (Deem, 2003).

Women and girls continue to over-perform in higher education, but are under-rewarded in the work place for equivalent credentials, with an enduring gender pay gap that has increased not decreased in some instances for example Australia (Graduate Council, 2012). Women's move into middle management as heads of schools and deans coincided with radical restructuring, which replaced collegial modes of decision-making with executive management. Gender equity policies have been mainstreamed within human resources as part of serial restructurings of the academy, reasserting the gender division of labour in terms of what counts, who counts, who teaches and who researches (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Glazer-Raymo, 2008). The rise of entrepreneurial universities in the context of globalized academic capitalism means increasingly that flexibility and mobility, as well as continuity and longevity, are essential to achieving high status research and executive management positions, again favouring those without ongoing familial responsibilities (Metcalfe & Slaughter, 2008). A feminist analysis of the academy is 'unfinished business'.

Within the academy, feminist scholars initially focused on previously neglected issues in mainstream higher education research, including the exclusionary cultures of the disciplinary fields of science and technology (Harding, 1987), marginalization of the humanities and social sciences, pedagogy (Luke & Gore, 1992), curriculum and assessment (Mayberry & Rose, 1999). They initiated research in higher education on the intersection of gender with class (Reay, 1997, Skeggs, 1997), race (Collins, 1990, Mirza, 1993), sexuality (Butler, 1990), ethnicity (Ahmed, 2012) and, post 9/11, religion and culture (Shah, 2010) and what this meant for student and academic identities. Feminist research in higher education also foregrounded affectivity, embodiment and culture, both within research fields but also in their analyses of higher education (Grosz, 1993). In the context of the challenges of globalization in higher education (Jackson & Letherby, 2007, Luke, 2001), and its processes of internationalization and privatization (Metcalf & Slaughter, 2008), feminists have analysed the gendered and racialized nature of leadership and organizational restructuring (Acker, 2000, Blackmore & Sachs, 2007, Brooks & MacKinnon, 2001, Deem, 2003), accountability (Morley, 2003) and governance (Blackmore, 2011, Riegraf, Aulenbacher, Kirsch-Auwarter, & Muller, 2010), and their impact on the conditions of possibility for equity within the academy.

A key strategy of the early stages of the women's movement was consciousness raising and providing safe venues for women to meet and debate how gender impacted on their lives. Within the academy Women's Studies programs claimed an institutional and disciplinary space for alternative knowledge and practices, from which to contest mainstream epistemologies, pedagogies and organizational practices (Alcoff & Potter, 1993, Burt & Code, 1995, Mayberry & Rose, 1999). Feminist critiques of the exclusionary processes of knowledge production of the academy led to a proliferation of feminist journals across all disciplines – for example *Signs*, *Feminist Review*, *Journal of Women's History*, *Gender and Education* – although interestingly without a specialist journal on gender and higher education. Hart's (2006) review of mainstream higher education journals from 1992 to 2002 found that *The Journal of Higher Education*, *Review of Higher Education and Research in Higher Education* published fewer than 10 articles on gender, while feminist higher education research was widely published in high status peer-reviewed journals in sociology, history, psychology, geography, policy studies and cultural studies (Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011). Women's studies programs have been gradually eroded, in part due to the re-focus on the social relations of gender and the new pro-feminist sociology of masculinity (e.g. Connell, 2005, Hearn, 2004).

Early 21st century debates circle around whether we are in a post-feminist era or whether gender equity has stalled in higher education (Husu & Morley, 2010). Gender is no longer an equity category in universities for students, although the under-representation of women in executive leadership and the professoriate continues to be a policy issue. In part this ambivalence is a consequence of the mainstreaming of feminist theory and equity discourses; the rise of social conservatism fuelled by economic and religious fundamentalism; and media discourses, some of which are anti-feminist, others that cultivate the notion that women have equality, and others that see feminism as irrelevant to younger generations.

### **FEMINIST RESEARCH AS PRACTICE**

The relationship between feminist theory, research methodologies and changing academic cultures is intertwined, as is the relationship between the women's movement, feminist epistemology and gender politics. Higher education is both the site of production of feminist theorizing and methodological approaches, as well as a focus of their inquiry. Theorizing social justice has been at the core of feminist praxis around issues of equity, access and participation in higher education, as well as society and the economy (Fraser, 1997, Walker, 2006). The bodily presence of women themselves within the academy was/is seen to be transgressive (Davies, 2006), as the female body signifies 'gender trouble' (Butler, 1990, Grosz, 1993, Jaggar & Bordo, 1989). According to Lather (1991), feminist academics have existed within/against dominant cultures' ways of being and knowing. Women's presence has challenged dominant ontologies, epistemologies and practices

within the academy, by not only including women as subjects as well as objects of research, but through the feminist ambition to change the academy itself, to make it more inclusive and representative of the social and economic life world (Burt & Code, 1995). This activism from within sought to recognize women's experience in ways that were more democratic, ethical and empowering for students and academics.

For feminists, research is praxis, in that theory and practice are interconnected, and that any distinctions between theory/methodology/method are false. A feminist ethics and the purpose of equity underpins how one practices research. Feminist scholars have raised significant methodological and ethical issues around voice as well as ownership of knowledge, and how women's symbolic and discursive representation impacts on women's sense of identity (Gatenby & Humphries, 2000). Feminists have sought to change the content of university courses, modes of teaching, foci of research and modes of leadership within the academy (Morley & Walsh, 1995). Much research has been on practices of exclusion and the development of inclusive policies, strategies and cultures, often drawing on their collective experiences as managers and academics (Acker, 2000; Deem, 2003). Not only did feminist academics challenge the university's gendered division of labour, in which women tend to teach and support students, and men research and lead (Morley, 1996), but they also challenged dichotomies between the public and private, which allow universities to privatize and ignore the physical and emotional labour of the domestic which sustains academic workplaces (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007). Feminist concerns are about transparency with regard to the assumptions and concepts that are utilized, the power relations embedded in research methods, the diversity of women's experiences and the use, intent and impact of research with regard to lived experience (Reinharz, 1992).

Much feminist research has been about advocacy within and outside the academy for equity, simultaneously working with and theorizing social movements. Research has been seen to be powerful in terms of recognizing women as co-producers of knowledge through participatory action research (Karach & Roach, 1992). Feminists recognized how research can disempower others through making women objects of research (Reinharz, 1992). The feminist academic practice of situating oneself within the research is about recognising the power relations between the researcher and the researched, but also making explicit the values underpinning the theoretical positions researchers brought to their analysis. As Morley (1996, p. 4) argued:

What constitutes valid and reliable feminist knowledge is a key question. As assertions of 'knowledge' frequently both produced and guarantee domination and power, there is a problem as to how feminism can legitimately claim to be a site of knowledge about the oppression of women without reproducing the power relations in questions.

But not all research on gender in higher education is feminist, and not all feminist researchers are activists inside or outside the academy. Many scholars undertake research on gender in higher education that is not informed by feminist theory, that treats gender as a factor or variable contributing to particular outcomes that can be controlled through statistical analysis, and do not see gender as socially constituting identity, structures, processes and practices in organizations and everyday life (Blackmore, 2009). Such analyses tend to see methods (e.g. interview, multivariate analyses) as well the concepts and research processes as gender-neutral.

Stanley and Wise (1993) argue that it is better to refer to a feminist epistemology rather than a feminist method; feminists do not rely on a particular method or technique, but rather begin their inquiry from a woman's standpoint. This search for rich data about women's experiences disposed feminists towards qualitative methods, which made research feasible given their lack of funding and subordinate positions in the academy (Jones, 2006).

Autobiography in the form of testimonial is being adopted by those historically new to the academy not to confess sins but to be seen as well as to see. Alienated not only from the everyday, but from the university itself, they turn their intellects against it, breaking

out of the academic's traditionally passive role as the guardian of authority to transform the self over and against that authority. (Jolly, 2005, p. 215)

Feminists and those concerned with recognition of race and cultural difference also saw auto-biography as a mechanism for democratising the academy by providing a voice from within the ivory tower (Currie, Thiele, & Harris, 2002) through narratives that talked about emotions and the embodied gendered and racialized practices, discourses and organization of academic work (Asher, 2010). Others criticized auto-ethnography for nurturing a cult of academic self-indulgence and celebrity, often from the position of dominant masculinity and whiteness (Frankenberg, 1993). But it is how feminists define the problem/question, the positioning of self, the conceptual framework or methodology, the glue which binds the collection of data and how it is informed by feminist theory, as well as the analysis, which constitutes feminist research (Ramazaglou & Holland, 2002). Feminist research tends to be undertaken by those who identify as feminists and use feminist theory to identify questions and respect a feminist ethics, while recognising the researcher's position. They seek theories that have strong explanatory power and provide ways of theorizing how difference and social change work (Weedon, 1999). Feminist ambivalence towards quantitative research methods arises from its tendency to obliterate the complexity of how context, discourses, processes and practices produce gender subjectivities and relations of power, or reduces gender to a statistical variable. Furthermore, quantitative research often claims to be objective and generalizable across different contexts, whereas feminist researchers would argue that situatedness, intersectionality and difference are key to understanding the lifeworld (Dill, 2009). What feminists opposed was the privileging of quantitative research as the norm in social science research, particularly in psychology, to the detriment of other forms of evidence that address the nuances of difference within social relationships and subtleties of culture in families, work and organizational life (Gilligan, 1984).

Indeed, feminists remain astutely aware as to the use-value of large scale quantitative studies to map and identify patterns of gender inequality, and as indicators of the consequences of policy, about the need for generalizing across the similarity of women's experience arising from recognition of their often shared subordinate positioning within most institutions, societies and economies (Danner, Fort, & Young, 1999). Meta-analyses map wider social, economic and political structures and patterns of gender inequality institutionally, nationally and cross nationally; meso-analyses unpack organizational conditions, structures and processes; while micro-analyses focus on how these articulate through everyday material and social relations of gender and power.

### **FEMINISTS THEORIZING AND RESEARCHING WAYS OF BEING AND KNOWING**

Based on the feminist position that the personal is political (David, 2003) feminist theory critiqued methodological bias by making explicit the epistemological and ontological assumptions embedded in different research approaches (Anderson, Armitage, Jack, & Wittner, 1990, Gluck & Patai, 1991). They drew upon multiple disciplinary theoretical fields, such as philosophy, sociology, politics, geography and economics, to explore relations of power, difference and exclusion (Weedon, 1999). In challenging Enlightenment disciplinary structures and power/knowledge associations within the disciplines, in terms of the ways in which knowledge was constituted and how research is done, feminists are positioned within/ against dominant epistemologies and the organization of universities that leave unquestioned particular foundational knowledges, scientific methods and academic hierarchies.

Feminists rejected two fundamental positions. First, the Enlightenment binaries embedded in disciplinary fields such as philosophy, psychology, science and sociology, between mind/body, rational/emotional, which simplistically mapped onto male/female 'differences' positioning women as subordinate or lesser, overwhelmed in by their emotions, more empathetic and caring but controlled by their uncontrollable bodies, while depicting men as 'naturally' more rational, unemotional, objective and disembodied (i.e. biological essentialism). The second objection was to the universalization of the male experience embedded in social theory (Harding, 1986).

Women were the objects of research but absent in terms of how research was conceptualized. Empirical studies often disregarded the experience of women, assuming a gender-neutral individual. While the Enlightenment supplanted religion with science, it universalized the white Western male experience. This perspective, articulated in and through the methods of logical positivism, which dominated sociology, economics and psychology during the 1950s and 1960s, claimed that fact could be distinguished from value and that randomized samples in statistical methods could identify linear relationships between variables in ways that were both objective and generalizable. During the 1970s, the new sociology of knowledge (Young, 1971) and feminist scholars argued from different standpoints that all knowledge was socially and historically constituted in ways that advantaged those in power. Millman and Kanter (1975, pp. 281–284) identified five courses of androcentricism in science and social science: important areas of social inquiry, such as emotions, were overlooked; the focus was on the public to the neglect of the private, including community life; sociology undertaken by largely male investigators assumed a single society, and that men and women experienced the same worlds; sex was treated as a factor in behaviour rather than gender as an explanatory variable; and certain methodologies (quantitative) failed to elicit the powerful explanations provided by alternative approaches (qualitative). This highlighting of androcentricism extended to how power went to those who defined what counts as valued knowledge. Values, feminists argued, underpinned all theories and methods. Harding (1986), a founder of feminist standpoint theory, argued that it was not the women who were the problem for science, but that science was problematic for women. She moved on from seeking to improve science to transforming how we understand science to achieve emancipatory ends. The radical feminist position was that:

the epistemologies, metaphysics, ethics and politics of the dominant forms of science are androcentric and mutually supportive; that despite Western cultural belief in science's intrinsic progressivism science today serves primarily regressive social tendencies; and the social structure of science, many of its applications and technologies, its modes of defining research problems and designing experiments, its way of constructing and conferring meanings are not only sexist but also racist, classist and culturally coercive. In their analyses of how gender symbolism, the social division of labour by gender and the construction of individual gender identity have affected the history and philosophy of science, feminist thinkers have challenged the intellectual and social orders of their very foundations. (p. 9)

Arguing from the position that theory/methodology/method are indistinguishable, and that theory provides analytical tools or concepts that inform method, feminist scholars critically deconstructed key concepts within dominant methodologies. The biological concept of sex difference, encapsulated in sex role and socialization theory, was replaced by the socially constituted concept of gender difference. Socialization theory was seen to position women as passive subjects enculturated into static, structurally determined gender roles that reduced their agency. Concepts such as academic merit and definitions of what constitutes a profession were scrutinized in terms of how they favoured men, and reproduced particular class/gender relations around notions of merit (Burton, 1999). Feminist economists questioned human capital theory as portraying an unrealized disembodied, rational, self-managing individual self-maximizing their choice, premised upon the universalization of the white middle-class male experience and ignoring human relations and responsibilities, indicating how evidence showed women were discriminated against (Ferber & Nelson, 1993).

### **GENDERING ORGANIZATIONS**

Given the lack of empirical data on women's experiences in the academy, together with their location lower down the ranks of academy during the 1980s and 1990s without research resources, feminist researchers relied on their own experiences to develop a knowledge base within higher education. This relied on reflexivity about how they were located within the academy and for them to 'situate themselves' (Morley, 1996, p. 11). Such critical analyses of their everyday experiences

were represented and analysed through social and political histories (Arnot & Weiler, 1993), individual and collective oral histories (Gluck & Patai, 1991), auto-ethnography (Jones et al., 2013), life course histories (Riegraf et al., 2010), narrative methodology (Bloom, 1998), genealogies and case studies of universities (Glazer- Raymo, 2008). Feminist inquiries documenting the everyday language and practices of exclusion lent themselves to qualitative studies based on interview as 'conversation', as 'therapy' and as 'confession', to the deconstruction of discourses and practices of discrimination and the exclusion of women's experience through linguistic and discourse analysis, semiotics and analysing visual and cultural representations of women in the academy (Reinharz, 1992).

Seeing organizations as socially constituted facilitated analysis of how universities were gendered in terms of their history, division of labour and disciplinarity (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1996).

Organizations are seen by critical and feminist organizational theorists as gendering in terms of their structures, priorities, premises, processes and practices, as well as being racialized and sexualized (Ahmed, 2012). Unpacking and making explicit this structuring and the discourses that justify it required intensive case studies and critical ethnographies (Czarniawska, 1998, Czarniawska & Hopfl, 2002). Unpacking how power worked through the social relations of gender, in and between the institutions of family, work, the law and politics, was also suited to ethnographic approaches and later poststructuralist theories of discourse. Feminist standpoint theory (Harding, 1987, Smith, 1988) meant scholars reflected on both their invisibility within the academy as women, but also how their positioning provided a new way of understanding everyday life. Smith (1988) argued that sociology had been written from the standpoint of men. As an academic teaching women's studies in Canada, Smith felt marginalized from her experience of the academy, which rendered her private world as a mother and partner as irrelevant. Smith went from a critique of sociology to positing an alternative theory/methodology/method in which she mobilized the notion of the 'relations of ruling' that:

brings into view the intersection of the institutions organising and deregulating society with their gender subtext and theory basis in a gender division of labour. Relations of ruling is a concept that grasps power, organization, direction and regulation as more pervasively structured than can be expressed in traditional concepts provided by discourses of power. (1988, p. 3)

She saw these relations of ruling as intersecting with capitalism and patriarchy, as articulating local and particular actualities of women's lives into abstracted and generalized forms: that is an 'extralocal mode of ruling' which excluded women's experiences (Smith, 1988, p. 62). Institutional ethnographies work from texts and practices shaped and informed by those texts, tracking their articulations out locally and extra-locally to explore how they inform subjectivities and practices within the academy. More recently, cyber-ethnographies now document practices of cyberbullying in online environments, and there has been a shift in focus away from women's 'disadvantage' to cast the feminist gaze onto male 'advantage' within organizations, including the academy, on how theories of social, cultural and human capital reassert masculine versions of the world (Adkins & Skeggs, 2004).

### **THE EMBODIED, SEXUALIZED AND EMOTIONAL SUBJECT**

Seeing the personal as political and drawing on different methodological tools, feminist researchers illustrated theoretically and empirically how rationality and emotionality inform each other, and how the body and mind interact in ways that enrich accounts of the social, material and corporeal. Deep conversational interviews elicited knowledge of intimate social and sexual relations which shape women's lives and how power works through the material, the physical, the discursive and the emotional. Academic practices and organizational theory traditionally depicted emotions as feminine and a display of weakness, something to be managed, requiring control and both sexualized and racialized (Jaggar, 1989, Mirza, 1993). St Pierre and Pillow argued that:

The body has gained both attention and importance, not only in feminism and postmodern theories but also more broadly in social theory as the place from which to theorise, analyse, practice and critically reconsider the construction and reproduction of knowledge, power, class and culture. (2000, p. 199)

Lesbian studies and queer theory (Speer, 2005) focused on the affective, the body and sexuality, drawing on post-structuralist theories around notions of subjectivity and positionality. In examining these intense personal and observational encounters between researchers and researched, and the gender relations of universities, feminists were able to name the nuanced formal and informal processes that lead to exclusion, discrimination and oppression. This naming brought into the academy a new vocabulary, including terms such as sexual harassment that filtered into equal opportunity practices. The relationship between feminists in the academy and those working as equity practitioners during the 1980s was often mutually informing. Some feminists held positions in both arenas (Klein et al., 1985, Yeatman, 1993).

### **RESEARCHING THE POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE: THE TEXTUAL TURN**

While there is a commitment to equity, there is significant contestation and difference theoretically and methodologically amongst feminists, ranging from structuralist neo-Marxists through to cultural, radical, black, Asian, post-structuralist, indigenous and ethnic feminisms, challenging any essentialising tendency to treat women as a unitary category (Narayan, 2004). With the rise of multicultural activism and the politics of recognition during the 1980s (Fraser, 1997), black feminists such as Collins (1990) pointed to the invisibility of whiteness in feminist theory and research. Spivak (1988, p. 2), from a post-colonial position, pointed to the assumptions of Anglocentricism and Empire in feminist theoretical treatments of 'the other', Asian feminists such as Ong (1999) focused on issues of hybridity within culturally diverse populations, while indigenous feminists 'talked up to the white woman', indicating how indigenous women were missing in feminist discussions of citizenship (Moreton-Robinson, 1999; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). Each position struggled with the feminist dilemma over race/gender difference, because claiming recognition for particular racial or ethnic feminisms produced new essentialisms that readily became fixed rather than fluid. Due to their experiences of how the knowledge/power relationship worked in the academy, feminists were attracted to poststructuralists such as Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze and Irigaray as they addressed difference among and within the category of woman, and the contradictions and ambivalences of women's experience in rapidly changing postmodern times. Whereas radical feminists saw power as centred in patriarchy, and neo-Marxists saw power as located in the economy, Foucault's offered a more complex conceptualization of power as dispersed, of being able to be exercised in positive and negative ways, and of how power/discourse/knowledge relations were unpredictable. Post structuralism allayed feminist suspicions about power being masculine or negative. Genealogy and deconstruction became useful tools of analysis. Likewise, Bourdieu's recognition of how subjectivity is constituted over time through habits of practice, his selfreflective analysis of the academy and sociologist's location premised upon self-consciousness appealed to feminists (Chambers, 2005). Bourdieu's notion of higher education as a social field prompted analyses of how language, social relations and hierarchies of knowledge/power are reproduced within the academy, and led a resurgence of interest in gender/class relations (Adkins & Skeggs, 2004). Universities have been understood as sites of reproduction and production of particular capitals and academic habitus (e.g. Reay, 1997). While critical of both Foucault and Bourdieu for their lack of addressing agency and their limited reference to gender, feminists have worked on and over such theories to explicate ways of theorising social change and agency (e.g. McNay, 2000). Post-structuralist feminists have been criticized for their theoretical and methodological focus on the politics of recognition and difference, and on subjectivity and positionality, text and discourse. Paradoxically, this focus was at a time when neoliberal policies and economic globalization were transforming the material conditions of women detrimentally. That is, while post-structuralism was

useful for understanding cultural transformations, there was some disjuncture between feminist theory and method within the academy and wider social and economic transformations during the 1990s (Fraser, 1997).

### **FEMINIST PEDAGOGIES: COLLABORATION AND CO-AUTHORSHIP**

While feminist theory was one of many socially critical theories emerging from the 1970s new social movements, it worked within/against other critical theories. Feminists were critical of Habermasian critical theory that reasserted gendered dichotomies between the public and private spheres (Fraser, 1997). Others criticized the US-based critical pedagogy movement, drawing from Freire, for its inadequate theorizing of gender and power (Luke & Gore, 1992). Feminist academics sought to embed their principles of providing women's voice, democratic process and awareness raising through their pedagogical practice by reflecting on their own academic practices, classroom relationships, sexism, bullying and discriminatory practices in universities (Mayberry & Rose, 1999). They encouraged students to co-write and inform these debates. Focusing on pedagogy also raised issues about student resistance to feminism, feminist theory and their pedagogical practice. Drawing on standpoint epistemology, Quinn's (2003) analysis of female student experiences makes the case for Harding's 'strong reflexivity' (1993, p. 69) in a multi-sited case study approach. Quinn recognizes the sensitivity required in positioning oneself as a student, teacher and researcher with insider knowledge, and as a researcher on students and academics. Quinn (2003, p. 13) foregrounds how her sampling was influenced by her own disciplinary expertise, as the focus was not on determining what all students felt. Her approach was shaped by her mobility and familial responsibilities in the desire to retrieve 'personal and emotional meaning', as well as having meaning for those she researched in her narrative. Quinn also recognized the 'epistemological shortcomings' of interview in terms of its temporality and partiality, and how interviewees seek to create a coherent narrative about themselves, their beliefs and actions, in ways that do not necessarily equate to their lifeworld. Data collection was through student diaries, which were relatively unstructured to gain a wider sense of their lifeworlds, supplemented by observation in and out of class to explore the hidden curriculum. Quinn's use of focus groups and video stimulus found that the female students were little interested in sexism per se, but were very interested in 'the role of their education in their positioning as women' (p. 14). Quinn's recursive approach led to a shift in the research away from the university itself as gendered, and to 'its place in the spectrum of the student's lives as women' (p. 14). Her 'materialist deconstructivist account' paid 'nuanced attention to discourse while locating it within the materialist constraints within which it was produced' (p. 15), while drawing on queer theory and feminist geography. Quinn's study is typical of much feminist research within the academy which focuses on the conditions of production of particular gendered student and academic identities. It is theoretically and methodologically eclectic, using iterative strategies that are grounded in rich data analysis, and that seek practical implications for pedagogy and universities to become more inclusive institutions.

### **ACADEMIC CAPITALISM, GLOBAL/LOCAL SOCIAL RELATIONS OF GENDER AND THE POST-COLONIAL TURN**

Feminist academics have been at the foreground of rethinking how culture, diasporic identities and transcending racisms impact on women's educational experiences, taking into account the role of culture and identity in the struggles against racism and sexism. Out of the politics of recognition and indigenous claims upon the state came a critique by feminist indigenous scholars as to the imperialism of white researchers who 'observe', 'name' and 'categorize' in ways that construct the Other, and in which white feminists were complicit (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). Indigenous feminists in settler nation states such as New Zealand, Canada, United States and Australia focused on the role of the university in the colonizing of research within a Western imperialist frame, and the dehumanizing effects of Western theory and research methodologies in defining, representing and researching indigenous peoples. Indigenous feminist scholars have developed with their male counterparts fundamental principles under which research with/on indigenous peoples is to be

undertaken, based on recognition and respect, partnerships and indigenous ownership of knowledge.

Indigenous scholars have deconstructed key concepts such as 'culture' and 'authenticity', often mobilized by Western scholars as if there is 'some pure essence that can be found' (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, p. 73). Indigenous people's ontological perspective relates strongly to collective responsibility and a spiritual relationship to the land. Post-colonial (Narayan, 2004) and indigenous feminist scholars (Battiste, 2005) have redefined notions of 'community' from different cultural traditions, and developed their own knowledge base through indigenous research units and equity policy in universities. The struggle, as Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) in her account of how she became a Maori feminist scholar argues, is less now over recognition, and more about ownership of knowledge – about the how and what of research (see also Battiste, 2005, Moreton-Robinson, 1999). Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) refers to the international indigenous research project that has arisen out of frustration with nation states' incapacity to understand indigenous concerns. This project connects to wider social movements and is strongly activist, working in and through local communities. Indigenous feminist accounts chart the close relationship between research, politics, community and activism in highly localized ways, but within globalized relationships.

### **FEMINIST CRITICAL POLICY ANALYSIS**

Central to the women's movement has been how women make claims upon the state in terms of rights, interests and needs. The role of the state has been problematic to feminists, as theorists and as equity practitioners, depending on their location. Feminist theorists in Australia, New Zealand and Scandinavia, framed by social democratic welfare states, were prepared to work within/against the state through the femocrats, whereas North American feminist scholars work is framed more by a social contractarian environment which is anti-statist. How equity policy is conceptualized, developed and implemented is critical to feminists in terms of their agenda of reforming higher education. Since the early 1990s there has been an emerging field of feminist critical policy analyses (Allen, Iverson, & Ropers-Hullman, 2011, Mazur, 2002, Shaw, 2004) to inform equity policy and practice within/outside the academy. Bacchi (1999) argues that often the issue of gender is misconceptualized, and equity policy is treated as a solution to the 'problem of women'. A critical feminist policy analysis considers how the policy 'problem' is defined, who defines the problem, the content and modes of implementation, stakeholder participation and ownership, as well as policy effects. Feminist critical policy analysis has been informed by the new policy sociology, which draws from cultural studies, and media theory which treats policy as both discourse and text.

Bacchi (1999) argues that policy should be treated as problem-setting, and that categories such as women or working class or black are themselves problematic, as they essentialise the group and ignore multiple forms of difference. The policy dilemma for gender equity is that in many instances women as a group need to be recognized, and that resources will be diverted if that is not the case. Feminists have therefore undertaken institutional case studies, analysed policy texts and documented protocols, promotion and selection criteria to identify the nuances of how organizational cultures, processes and practices position women (Brooks & MacKinnon, 2001, Currie et al., 2002). They have charted how equity policies are received and enacted to supplement quantitative analyses mapping staff distribution and career profiles. Feminists have deconstructed the conceptual and discursive shifts in equity discourses: from disadvantage positioning women as victims, to stronger terms such as equal opportunity and social justice which recognize legacies of collective injustices. Contemporary discourses of diversity are considered to be weaker and too easily align with neoliberal individualism (Ahmed, 2012, Blackmore, 2006). Feminist post-colonialists reject old polarities in policy between concepts of multiculturalism and antiracism, which reduced their policy capacity (Anthias & Lloyd, 2012, p. 22).

Whereas anti-racist policy focused on the institutional, economic and political to the neglect of culture, multi-culturalism fell into the policy trap of 'fixed racial categories' and notions of culture (Anthias & Lloyd, 2012). For example, Ahmed's analysis of racism and diversity in universities was

undertaken through the voices of diversity practitioners and policymakers in Australia and the United Kingdom, and at the international, national, state and institutional levels. She deconstructed policy discourses of diversity, how they were produced, circulated, reinterpreted and enacted within the performance culture (Ahmed, 2012, p. 8). Drawing on Acker (2000), Ahmed argued that what appeared to be an equality regime through legislation, when enacted, emerged often as an 'inequality regime'. Feminist poststructuralism facilitated understandings of the unpredictability of social and economic change. Thick descriptions of individual actions were contextualized within policy, legal, historical and institutional frames. By 'inhabiting the diversity worlds' of the practitioners' she noted the physical environments and how embodied diversity differed spatially in each institution (p. 11). At the same time, equity practitioners realized that, in the performative corporate university, equity policy and practice has been mainstreamed and down streamed to managers within a 'human resource' frame, and without the expertise or inclination to change the system (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007).

Of increasing importance in a globalizing context of higher education are cross-national feminist critical policy analysis, which undertake analyses of how economic globalization and neoliberal policies impact significantly on women's access and participation in higher education (Stetson & Mazur, 1995, Stromquist & Monkman, 2000). This follows on from the strategy of gender equity policy activists, who have also refocused claims from nationstates, which now mediate rather than regulate local/global market relations to new regional and transnational bodies that are changing the very nature of the university (Blackmore, 1999). Evidence suggests that the globalization of universal ranking systems and standardization of graduate attributes may signal new gender and racial hierarchies within and between universities, disciplines and nation states. The rise of the Asian century will require further development of feminist comparative studies as internationalization, together with increased mobility and flexibility in online environments, radically change the nature and context of higher education.

Feminism is not utopian, with feminist activists and theorists alike recognizing the need for tactical and practical responses to even partially remediate existing inequalities, while keeping a social imaginary of a more equal world alive. Arnot comments:

Theoretical understandings are best framed not just by social scientific academic discourses but also by pragmatic and practical considerations. One of the clear guiding principles of feminist studies and the women's movements has been the use of theory to ground social reform. (2002, p. 2)

This is particularly evident in cross-national research by feminists who create frameworks of gender analysis (e.g. March, Smyth, & Mukhopadhyay, 1999), inform equity policies locally and internationally, and work outside the academy with women through workshops (creating small businesses, adult literacy programs). Such activities exploit the trend that nation states are increasingly held to account by global policy communities and international financial bodies. National social and economic stability are increasingly seen to be signaled by gender equity progress as measured by performance indicators, and therefore more likely to attract both investment and aid to developing nation states.

#### **FUTURE POSSIBILITIES FOR FEMINIST RESEARCH IN HIGHER EDUCATION: RECLAIMING THE SOCIAL**

Feminist scholarship is, therefore, about researching from within and on radically and rapidly changing higher education systems. A feminist analysis challenges false boundaries between public and private spheres, between context and institution, between policy and practice, and between theory and method. It may start with the experiential, but a feminist analysis tracks how the social relations of gender arrangements interpolate interpersonal, institutional, national and global levels. Post-colonial feminists consider that feminist work is only beginning in many developing nations, with rising participation rates of girls in schooling moving into higher education, and feminist

activism within higher education under authoritarian regimes. Fraser (2008) discusses how shared agreements developed within Western social democratic traditions around human rights and about what counts as social justice in terms of 'fairness' are now in dispute, due to contested ontologies across cultures. She considers a transnational imaginary of social justice rather than one framed by 'methodological nationalism' (Amelina, Nergiz, Faist, & Shiller, 2012). In higher education, Walker (2006) is applying Nussbaum's (2011) capability theories of social justice to academic pedagogies and reflecting on their potential implications. Such studies address cultural specificity but also utilize cross-national patterns, analysing how gender works through higher education and its relation to culture, family, education and work.

At the same time universities are being radically restructured in the first decades of the 21st century, tying them in instrumental ways to national research priorities and economies that often neglect the social and women's rights, interests and needs. Such restructuring is gendered and racialized in terms of who counts, what counts and who benefits (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007). In Australia, reduced government funding means many universities are focusing on science and technology to gain industry money. The rise of performativity with the global ranking of universities, increased differentiation between and specialization of universities due to financial constraints is in some contexts challenging the notion of the liberal comprehensive university (Barnett, 1997, Ernst & Young, 2012, Nussbaum, 2010).

The trends towards specialization, interdisciplinarity and applied research together have potentially damaging effects on some disciplinary fields where women are concentrated. For example, in Australian policy encourages differentiation between universities and concentrations of expertise. University responses have been to focus on niche markets and applied research because they cannot afford to do it all. Being responsive to student, government and industry demand often means that 'unpopular' or what are considered 'irrelevant' fields, such as the classics, languages, the humanities and social sciences, primary sites of feminist theoretical work, have been affected in terms of staffing redundancies. Individual philosophers, historians and sociologists are in some universities being embedded within large interdisciplinary research units or faculties which focus on applied research. These interdisciplinary units then rely on the older universities to offer research training within the foundational disciplinary fields. The trend to applied research and education as a service to industry exacerbates popular perceptions that science is equated to innovation. It also means that disciplines which rely on pure research, and that do not have immediate relevance in terms of resolving a policy issue or problem-solving, are underfunded (Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education, 2012).

Research assessment in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand has led to a reassertion of the scientific norm as to how research is done – in big projects, large interdisciplinary teams – and how research is valued through statistical methods and citations in 'top international' journals, indicative of the rise of the audit society (Besley, 2010). Interdisciplinarity is to be encouraged. Indeed, feminist research is interdisciplinary in its approach as evident in women's studies, education and feminist contributions to the field of cultural studies. Feminists, despite their critique of the theoretical and methodological assumptions embedded in sociology, history, psychology, philosophy and other foundation disciplines, still argue for an ongoing investment in and valuing of the disciplines within the humanities and social sciences as critical to the 21st century university – if it is to contribute to the public good and if the university is not merely to become an instrument of industry or government (Nussbaum, 2010).

Academic work as a profession is being casualized, feminized and technologized, while the academic voice that is critical of the consequences on quality of teaching and research is being diminished both within and outside the university. Academics are now one of many sources of 'expertise'. Increased fees together with free massive open online courses offer unprecedented challenges to the campus-based university, with academics expected to teach 'smarter' while experiencing the intensification of workload. This is the emerging context for feminist theory, practice and activism.

Arguably, at the very time that feminist theory and methods have greater validity and relevance in terms of exploring complexity, interdisciplinarity, hybrid identities and boundary crossings in ways that address the social, aesthetic and emotional dimensions of teaching, learning and research within the academy, the very theoretical and methodological base that feminist academics have developed through interdisciplinarity and specialist feminist studies may disappear from the academy and research. What is even more disconcerting under the contemporary conditions are the challenges to critical or advocacy research that seeks to change the university or society. Indeed, method rather than theory, science and technology more than the social sciences and humanities, may dominate research in the entrepreneurial performative university, as the idea of the modern university comes under threat.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The chapter draws on research projects funded by the Australian Research Council, the most recent being *Leadership in Entrepreneurial Universities: Diversity and disengagement (2011–2013)*.

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