

1 Becoming a Feminist Scholar: A Second-Generation Story

I AM not a feminist pioneer. My intention in beginning this way is not to indulge in self-deprecatory apology but to provide a statement of historical context. As an early “daughter” of second-wave feminist scholars, my work and career have developed within a fragile, uneven, but steadily strengthening feminist community in the academy. In many ways, I have worked with a kind of comfort that I recognize as part of the privilege of coming later: I have been helped by feminist scholars before me, socialized into the profession by powerful mentors who are also feminists, and supported (for the most part) in my attempts to resist disciplinary tyranny. I have also learned to accommodate to the demands of the profession, and my adjustments to an academic career often sit uneasily beside my feminism. The community that supports my work often seems dangerously fragile. Finding a place in the discipline felt like a risky bet until quite recently; the fact that I have entered the field successfully is a source of pride and also cause for reflection on why I have been sorted in rather than out. I try to tell a story here that examines my historically situated self and that displays some of the conditions of my entry into both feminism and sociology.

GROWING UP: CULTURAL CONTRADICTIONS

I was born in 1950 to white middle-class parents who had constructed a traditional family of the era.⁷ My parents, raised in mostly rural midwestern environments, valued education. My father, who went to college to become a music teacher, was encouraged to continue with graduate work and soon became a college teacher specializing in mathematics education. My mother, whose college work in art had been interrupted by their marriage, took up the work of a faculty wife (enthusiastically at first, I think, and then with increasing ambivalence). I was their first child, obedient, smart, and shy. I was much loved and, for better and worse, shaped by the values of the prevailing culture of my era and class. A kindergarten evaluation (preserved in my mother’s lovingly detailed record of my development) encapsulates the contradictions of middle-class girlhood in that

time: “Marjorie is extremely well-adjusted. I have never seen her cry or get upset, though she sometimes sucks on her skirt.”

I was encouraged to apply myself academically, to think of myself as “special,” and to make my own decisions. But it was never very clear where that decision-making might lead. For a while (during the Kennedy era), I remember that I aspired to what seemed a very influential post: politician’s wife. I was a responsible, intelligent, and conscientious student, drifting toward a promising, if hazy, future. Gender patterns in this sort of middle-class family were just beginning to fracture: I remember, in my early teens, overhearing adult voices in heated discussion of *The Feminine Mystique*. Soon, a wave of painful divorces would begin in such families.

Politically, I grew up alongside the 1960s, just a bit too young (and too timid) to participate fully in the movements of the time. Off to college in 1968, I watched the activism of the period mostly from the sidelines, drawn away from classes and out to the streets only at moments of crisis—spring 1970, for instance, when U.S. troops invaded yet another Southeast Asian country and students like me were killed by soldiers on their campus.

I remember—just barely—that during those years “women’s liberation” came to our campus one day: a group of slightly older activists from somewhere in the East, traveling through the country with a workshop for women. I remember, dimly, that I attended, with my roommates, that we sat on the floor and talked. And I remember that the discussion continued back in the dorm well into the night.’ This early appearance of feminism was anomalous in my life, however. I was about to slide into marriage to my high school sweetheart, too early and far too blithely. It didn’t take long to discover that this marriage would not work. I struggled with various accommodations: I became domestic, tried to suppress my ambition. And I wish I could say that I rebelled and left, but in fact it was his unhappiness that finally moved me along. I hadn’t yet learned to be angry in any effective way.

DISCOVERIES

In my first year of college—1968—I discovered social science in an introductory psychology course taught by a very young woman faculty member. (I remember this young woman very vividly and sympathetically: in the image I retain, she sometimes trembled while lecturing. She was one of the four faculty women who taught me in that college, each of whom I can visualize now in precise detail. Significantly, I remember in this vivid way hardly any of the faculty who were men.) We were to write term pa-

pers, and after choosing the topic “subliminal perception,” I went to look for the material referenced in our textbook, articles in a journal so esoteric sounding that I was sure the school library wouldn’t have it: the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*. Of course, I found it, on the fourth floor, in a little garret at the top of what seemed a very musty branch of the old library.

My discovery in that garret was what captured me for social science and, eventually, sociology. I discovered that scholars argued back and forth about topics such as subliminal perception and that psychologists engaged in the most interesting exercise: they designed experiments to convince each other of their views. I spent many hours working on my paper, poring over dirty old journals, tracing debates back and forth. It was a time of private, intense emotion, an awakening to the excitement and creativity of scholarly work. I sensed then that scholarship could be a kind of conversation, and I wanted to be part of it. The tone of slightly illicit pleasure in this account captures the edge of ambivalence I felt in this discovery. I was still caught in the dilemmas of my socialization, unwilling to fully acknowledge my ambitions but equally unwilling to put them aside.

A few years later, around the time I was divorced, I discovered feminism. I did not join a consciousness-raising group or engage in political action. Instead, I encountered the women’s movement in its academic context. I was then pursuing a master’s degree in curriculum and instruction, with the idea of becoming an elementary school teacher (one of the failed strategies for accommodation to my marriage), and faculty members at my institution, the University of Wisconsin at Madison, were just beginning to bring feminist content to the teacher training program. I read about gender stereotyping in children’s readers, began to think about my own life, and experienced that profound feminist “click” of awakened consciousness. I began to get angry, and—more importantly—I had a theory to explain why. I learned, for example, that women were socialized into a double bind: that being a “normal woman” was incompatible with being a “normal adult.” And that men expected—and would demand—that women serve as audience for men’s actions rather than become actors themselves. I remember long, solitary walks during that time, when I tasted these new insights and emotions and considered what they meant. And I remember discovering feminist writings that spoke directly to these feelings: Judy Chicago, Doris Lessing, Marge Piercy, the alternative journal *Country Women*, and others. I began to work on becoming a conscious, independent woman, and I found this project tremendously energizing.

With other women in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, I began to explore what feminist scholarship might be. In the early 1970s, I

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was a member of that department's first graduate course in women's studies, "Issues in Sex-related Differences in Curriculum and Instruction," a seminar offered by Elizabeth Fennema, who had already begun to challenge the prevailing wisdom about girls' mathematics performance.³ We had a wonderful time, but there were lurking anxieties; it seemed odd and a bit risky, then, to give serious attention to women and girls. Several times, I heard Liz, in the course of telling about the seminar, offer a laughing apology. "Well," she would say, "these students have to take the blame for all this." Smiling, we would correct her: credit, not blame! But I was struck by the sense of vulnerability that produced this kind of nervous joke.

Abandoning my plans for elementary teaching, I wrote a master's thesis that analyzed students' experiences in the university's two-year-old introductory women's studies course.⁴ And then I left school, uncertain what would come next. By that time—the late 1970s—feminism had touched everyone in my family of origin. My parents were divorced, and my mother was establishing herself as a painter. She and I were especially close during this time; we encountered feminism together and shared books, friends, and ideas about our work and our fledgling careers. My sister Ileen was also becoming a feminist scholar: she was one of the first women's studies majors at the University of California, Berkeley, and she is now a feminist labor historian (DeVault 1990). We developed these common interests in different ways and times: she was radical while I was married, then moved toward labor studies when I was discovering feminism. But we finished our graduate work at nearly the same moment, found jobs at roughly the same time, and published books in successive years. Now we live in the same region and share professional networks, as well as the puzzles and frustrations of writing, teaching, and institutional politics. I suspect that my siblings and I were all looking for some integration of the implicit gender split we observed in the family: while Ileen and I followed our father into academic work, our brother became a musician and is active in the feminist men's movement.

LEARNING A DISCIPLINE (AND RESISTING IT)

My feminism, then, was in place before I became a sociologist. In fact, I chose sociology rather casually—it was one among several possible fields—and in 1978, with little knowledge of what it would mean, I entered the Ph.D. program at Northwestern University. I knew only that I would do feminist scholarship, that the "sociological imagination" seemed relevant (I'd read C. Wright Mills [1959]), and that the department seemed hospitable. I met briefly with Arlene Kaplan Daniels, who would

later become my thesis adviser, and she extended an enthusiastic invitation. We talked about her research on women as volunteer workers and an ongoing study of returning women students. "I'm just having a great time," I remember her saying, "and you're welcome to run alongside and join the fun!"

This sense of joining a collective project captures my experience of feminism in sociology during those years. Some might assume that, coming in a second generation, I had "training" to be a feminist sociologist, but it didn't feel that way. When I think of my development as a feminist scholar, I do not think primarily of coursework and mentoring relationships (these seem much more crucial for my development as a sociologist). Instead, the story I construct from those years is one of lessons learned from the "hidden curriculum" of my graduate program and of a collective intellectual project of resistance to the discipline in its traditional construction. This project was supported by an emerging feminist community, but it often felt like a private struggle.

In many ways, Northwestern provided a most congenial environment. I remember, with gratitude, that faculty gave us lots of freedom, took student work seriously, and insisted that we take it seriously, too. I saw the faculty as engaged and productive scholars who paid attention to each other's work. There were classroom experiences that are still vivid for me, as well as the extended student discussions over coffee that are so central to most graduate study. It was a program that left room for challenge to the disciplinary canon, and I found among the faculty and my graduate student colleagues a willingness to listen sympathetically to my questions about how women might be made more visible in sociological work.

I can also easily recall becoming aware of a pervasive and frightening atmosphere of sexism. I watched as two outstanding junior faculty women, Janet Lever and Naomi Aronson, were denied tenure, and I noticed that the two senior women were curiously distant from the centers of the graduate curriculum and departmental decision-making. Slowly, I began to see the institutional pressures that excluded women and the questions I wanted to ask. I was cheered and inspired by the presence of women faculty: I watched Arlene at work and learned from her example, and I was moved by Janet Abu-Lughod's (1981) elegant and forceful address to the Northwestern faculty, "Engendering Knowledge: Women and the University."⁵ But as I came to know women faculty, I shared not only ideas but also their experiences of discomfort and marginalization as sociologists. The lives of junior faculty women were especially frightening; I wondered, often, if I could survive in the profession and if survival would be worth the pain that seemed inevitable.

During my time at Northwestern, the formative collective experiences

for graduate students were Arnold (Ackie) Feldman's classical theory course and Howard Becker's fieldwork seminar. In the theory course we read Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Antonio Gramsci. I entered the program with virtually no sociology and began to read the first volume of *Capital*. I remember the sense of wonder that Ackie's close readings of this text could produce and my pleasure in discovering that sociology could dissect inequality with such precision. In the fieldwork seminar, we simply began to work. "Go out there and start writing fieldnotes," Howie told us. "Just write down everything you see." So we went out, wrote voluminous notes, and then came back to class to work on making sense of them.

These were very different classroom experiences. I remember Feldman pacing in front of the class, delivering extremely dense lectures that we tried to transcribe as completely as possible. It was difficult for most of us to formulate questions; usually one or two students (often marxists from other countries) were prepared to grasp the point quickly enough to discuss it, and the rest of us struggled just to keep up. We were taught to read Marx and Weber as complementary, completing each other's analyses so as to encompass both class and status inequalities. We did not hear much about gender (though we could ask or write about it, and some of us did). And theory appeared to be men's territory. It was almost always men who participated in the extra reading groups and who went on to work with Feldman. Nevertheless, the two courses I took with him were important for me. I was challenged to produce a rigorous kind of analysis that really explained something, showing how it happened. And I was given a set of theoretical tools. For several years I started every project with a ritual rereading of the several hundred pages of notes I had produced in these classes.

Becker's fieldwork seminar met in a special classroom furnished with dilapidated easy chairs. He began each class as if he had no plan at all: "So what's been happening?" he might ask. And from whatever we had to say, he would make a lesson in fieldwork. Some people were frustrated by this style of pedagogy, feeling that nothing much was happening, but I found these sessions utterly enchanting. As the weeks went by, we could see projects developing, analyses arising from our confusions in the field. Howie pushed us; there were simply no excuses for not getting started. He conveyed a tremendous respect for the work we were doing, finding the seeds of significance in our beginners' attempts at observation. He insisted that it was all very simple: we could just figure it out and write it down. And he pointed out that no project was really complete until it had been written up for publication. Here, too, gender did not appear unless we asked. Howie was impatient with the idea that one might come to a project with a feminist agenda; he didn't believe in agendas and didn't want to talk about them.

Some students veered toward one or the other of these approaches; many of us yearned to “have it all.” Given this foundation (and this desire), I was more than ready for Dorothy Smith’s visit to Northwestern in winter 1983 as guest lecturer for a quarter. Several of us had been reading her work with great interest, and women faculty in the department had arranged a visiting lectureship. We organized a seminar and Dorothy taught her own work, week by week, laying out for us the development of her thought about sociology, its problems, and the promise for women of a revised and stronger form of sociological analysis (Smith 1987, 1990a). With several friends, I studied this material in a nearly fanatical way. We met early to prepare for each class and again later to discuss what had happened in each session. Laboring over Dorothy’s dense prose, I copied long excerpts into my notebook and composed lists of questions to ask in class. Whenever Dorothy spoke, I was there.

During Smith’s visit, I began to envision a sociology that was more satisfying than any I’d known: it would build on materialist principles, retain a commitment to the world as people lived it, and insist that women’s varied situations be kept in view. Dorothy’s approach, more than any other, seemed to offer possibilities for moving beyond feminist critiques of established sociology and beginning to build something new. There were lessons in the hidden curriculum as well. For example, one of the startling revelations of the seminar lay in discovering its meaning for Dorothy: that this was her first opportunity to present her work so thoroughly as a unified body of thought and that she needed our response as much as we wanted to hear her words. The experience also supported my sense of feminist scholarship as collective project. One day in class, when I’d asked another earnest and anxious question about how to do this kind of sociology, Dorothy just smiled for a moment. “Well, Marj,” she finally said, “I don’t have all the answers. You’ll have to figure some of this out for yourself.”

My research topic, the invisible work of “feeding a family,” arose from the feminist theoretical agenda I’d brought with me to sociology, as well as from questions about my own gendered experience. I’d been fascinated by the feminist idea that women’s absence from most scholarly writing had shaped the assumptions and concepts of every discipline. I wanted to study aspects of life that “belonged” to women and to consider what it would mean to take those activities and concerns as seriously as we take the perspectives that arise from men’s experiences; for this reason, I began to think about housework. There were, at that time, several sociological studies that took housework seriously, applying the perspectives that sociologists of work applied to paid jobs.⁶ I was enormously grateful for these early studies, but I also tested them against my own experience—a fundamental feminist move—and felt that something was missing.

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I was living at that time in a stormy, exciting, and ultimately disastrous relationship with a man who had become quite incapacitated by chronic depression. During the years we spent together, he became increasingly helpless; I was terribly ambivalent about the partnership but strongly committed to caring for this person I had loved so intensely. Life felt very difficult during those years; I brooded a lot about how to respond to his troubles, and I remember in one moment of reflection thinking that the womanly experience I wanted to capture in my work was this incredibly delicate craft of caring for others.

I did not go directly to my typewriter. Instead, I muddled along wondering if I would ever develop an acceptable thesis topic, experiencing a prolonged period of depression myself, and slowly beginning to write about women and food. I couldn't say what I was **up** to: I wrote about supermarkets, the health food movement, dietitians, food stamps, and food journalists. And I kept coming back to the household work of providing food. Stubbornly, I held onto my own experience and my intuitive sense of topic, which didn't seem to fit with the topics available in the discipline. My first clear statement of my topic came from my reading outside sociology, when I was able to point to Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse* and say: "It's what Mrs. Ramsay does at her dinner party! Of course there isn't a name for it—that's the whole point." I wrote an essay about Mrs. Ramsay, and finally I was able to begin an ethnography of the unpaid work of "feeding a family" with some confidence that I might capture what made it so compelling for women.'

I wanted a feminist as my thesis adviser, and I chose to work with Arlene Kaplan Daniels. We shared a central concern for excavating those womanly activities rendered invisible or trivialized by social theory derived from the concerns of privileged men. Arlene's own work at that time was concerned with the "invisible careers" of women volunteers who became civic leaders (Daniels 1988). This study was leading her toward a more general analysis of varieties of "invisible work," which she presented as her presidential address to the Society for the Study of Social Problems in 1987 (Daniels 1987). In that piece, she synthesized writings by feminists (and others) about a wide range of nonmarket activities, arguing for an expansion of the concept of work as a crucial step in the project of including women's contributions more fully in sociological analyses of work and the social order.

Arlene's writing on invisible work displays the kind of strategically doubled vision that I absorbed from working with her and that I now see as crucial to my development. As a feminist, Arlene saw the promise of rethinking the grounding concepts of the discipline; as a sociologist, she conceptualized the innovative work that feminists were developing in

terms that located it in relation to core questions of the discipline. Perhaps because she had long been a student of the professions, Arlene insisted on the importance of placing oneself firmly and clearly inside the discipline; she insisted that I write a dissertation that was not only innovative but also acceptable in the terms of the discipline.⁸ These lessons were sometimes uncomfortable: I confess that I was often impatient when she counseled me cheerfully to become an “occupations and professions man”; I understood, but could not quite accept, the conditions that produced this advice (see her account, Daniels 1994). But I do believe that to steer the tricky course between innovation and acceptance is the most essential task for a feminist scholar: even though our aims may be transformative, innovative writing is recognized and appreciated only if it can be located successfully, somewhere, in relation to existing work.

My account of Arlene’s mentorship would not be complete without some mention of the personal texture of our relationship—the complex and lively breadth of our interaction. One of my vivid memories: each time I put a chapter in Arlene’s mailbox, I would soon afterward hear her extravagant voice booming down the hall as she skipped toward my office. “Marj, my dear Marj!” she would shout. “You finished another chapter! You deserve a reward; what would you like? A box of chocolates? Or shall I take you for sushi lunch tomorrow?” Sushi lunch was my favorite, so we would stroll down the street together, and I would have my reward. It felt wonderful. To emphasize this kind of help is not to trivialize Arlene’s intellectual contribution to my work; rather, I mean to emphasize her recognition that intellectual work is best sustained through attention to emotional, as well as intellectual, needs. While I was her student, I ate and shopped with Arlene, as well as joining her at feminist lectures and meetings. She introduced me to her colleagues and “talked up” my work. I watched and learned as she helped to build a feminist world within the discipline and pulled me into that world.

COLLECTIVE WORK

My scholarship has always depended on the support of women colleagues and could not have developed as it has, I believe, without my relationships with other women. Twice, I’ve enjoyed long periods of intensive “partnered” reading and thinking. In graduate school, I worked with Sandra Schroeder and for several years after graduation with the late Marianne (Tracy) Paget. In neither case did we work collaboratively on joint projects or even on the same topics. But in both cases we shared feminist commitments, interests in experimentation and resistance, and some affinity in our styles of thought. In both cases, we paid loving attention to each

other's work, read and talked about everything we wrote, and tried to hear and coax out for each other what we meant to do in our work.

Sandy and I scheduled weekly meetings throughout our dissertation work (a practice that amused us since we were housemates most of that time and shared an office as well); we considered each other essential, though unofficial, members of our dissertation committees. Tracy and I began our work together by reading all the work of Dorothy Smith that we could find, and we agreed that it made a difference to study her writing as a coherent, extended body of thought (the way students are routinely taught to understand canonical male theorists). We talked about reading other women sociologists in this way (inspired in part by the work that Shulamit Reinharz was doing to reclaim women sociologists of the past), but that project was precluded by Tracy's untimely death in 1989.'

These intense working relationships seem a bit like falling in love, at least in the sense that they don't come along very often and cannot be produced at will. But I have shared feminist ideas, reading, projects, and debates with many other groups and individual colleagues over the years. These relationships have been important because they have felt quite different from more conventional academic spaces. Within them, some understandings can be taken for granted, and one doesn't need to defend and legitimate feminist principles and assumptions. We can and do question our core ideas, as critics might, but this activity feels quite different when undertaken with sympathetic colleagues. Within such groups, we give lots of encouragement, we deal with emotional issues alongside intellectual ones, and we find nothing strange or suspect in that agenda. Finally, we have energy, fun, and, usually, a lot of laughter. Sometimes I feel that male colleagues are a bit jealous of these relationships (those male colleagues who know about them, at least), and I can see why they might feel that way: feminism has enlivened academic life for many of us. I am also conscious of a kind of separatism in these practices that feels not only pleasurable, but vital and nurturant. It is the kind of separatism that lesbian writer Marilyn Frye (1983) identifies as a useful sometime strategy for all women—a strategy that insists on women's own value, apart from men, and our value for each other (see also Krieger 1996).

GETTING IN

I chose to study sociology during a period of contracting opportunities for academic work; we were warned, on that hopeful first day of graduate school, that many of us would have difficulty finding jobs. Thus, for nine years—from 1978, when I entered graduate school, until 1987, when I was hired as an assistant professor at Syracuse University—I had a keen

sense of the possibility that I would never find stable employment as a sociologist. After completing my degree in 1984, I searched for a permanent job for three years, scrambling to find work and moving every year. During one difficult year in Boston, I supported myself with part-time teaching: a more than full-time schedule for less than half-time pay. I was quietly enraged for much of that year; the most difficult job was managing those emotions and considering how long I could persist in such a life. It was then that I met Tracy Paget, who never held a permanent teaching post. During much of our time together, she supported her scholarly work as many artists support their creative projects: by enduring periods of temporary clerical work so that she could also have periods of uninterrupted writing. She didn't often tell about this strategy while she was alive; it didn't sound very "professional." But I think she wouldn't mind that I divulge the secret here. I think she would agree that it is important to speak about such women and their work. Challenging disciplinary tradition leaves many innovative scholars outside the institutions of scholarship and personally vulnerable. I believe that the discipline is impoverished by their absence.

One of the things that feminism has provided for me is an analysis of the evaluative and gatekeeping processes that structure these experiences. It has given me a way to think about some of the difficult moments in my professional life. I have learned to think long and hard about audiences for my writing, and I have learned to evaluate the gatekeepers: when my work is judged, I ask who is judging it and on what terms. When I hear, "But that's not sociology," I have learned to say (or at least think), "Maybe not yet."

During 1982–83, I began to work, with Patty Passuth, Lisa Jones, and other graduate students at Northwestern, on something we called "the gender project": a survey of graduate student experiences in our department, which we hoped would help us to understand the frustrations so many of us were feeling. We gathered data on attrition from the graduate program, interviewed all of the students in residence, and wrote an article-sized report for distribution to the department. Although the attrition data were incomplete, it seemed that during the decade we had studied, women had been more likely than men to drop out of the program, especially at the dissertation stage. Introducing the document, we wrote:

In a survey of all students, we found subtle differences in the ways that male and female students described their interactions with faculty members. Relative to men, women tended to feel more marginal to the department, and believed they were taken less seriously. They reported receiving less help and encouragement than men, were more pessimistic about their chances for employment, and their expectations were more likely than men's to

have dropped since entering the program. A substantial number of women blamed themselves for the situations they described, reporting that their own work was marginal to the field, or that their experience in the program was “unusual” in some respect. (DeVault, Jones, and Passuth 1983: 1)

In fine multimethod fashion, we presented tables and quotations from respondents to illustrate a pattern of “benign neglect” of women students. Although unwilling to “point with certainty” to causes, we suggested several factors that might explain these problems: the structural reality of a predominantly male faculty, documented differences in the interactional styles of men and women and the differential responses these styles elicit from others, and the incomplete acceptance of women’s concerns within the discipline. Echoing “The Missing Feminist Revolution” (Stacey and Thorne 1985)—which must have been circulating at the time, though I don’t think we had read it—we concluded:

Another possible cause for the differential experience of men and women students is that by following their own concerns—an approach to research encouraged by this department—female students are more likely than men to be working on non-traditional topics or approaching traditional topics in original ways. Thus, they may have more difficulty formulating their ideas, and faculty may have a harder time understanding them or seeing the significance of their work.

The research literature which incorporates women’s perspectives into sociology—developed over the past 20 years—has been integrated into “mainstream” courses only to a limited extent. Researchers have found that after taking women’s studies courses, female students report feeling more included in academic disciplines, more serious about themselves as scholars and more assertive about their studies. Thus, more active efforts to incorporate new knowledge especially relevant to women may help to combat female students’ feelings of marginality. (DeVault, Jones, and Passuth 1983:33)

I have quoted at some length from this document because it illustrates my use of feminist analysis at that time to construct and sustain a sense of opposition to business as usual in graduate training. It also displays the construction of our activism within the boundaries of the institution and shows how the goal of “getting in” to the profession shaped the substance and form of our resistance. As I look back at this document, I am struck by its heartfelt but measured concern and by our earnestly “professional” tone. Our confidence in the effectiveness of “the facts,” presented well, suggests a considerable measure of political naïveté, as well as the kind of comfort we felt within the program in spite of our complaints. And the carefully suppressed anger in the document points to the extent to which we had already accepted a powerful professional discipline.

I learned from my involvement in this project that researching injustice

carries the seeds of cooptation: though it provoked much discussion, our report resulted mostly in calls for further research. I also learned, however, that speaking out about these problems could bring women together. We were surprised when women faculty in the department expressed gratitude that we had raised these issues. And the intense work of writing the report together was a powerful and energizing experience of collective analysis. For a while at least, our report constructed a lively solidarity among women in the department. Finally, I learned that my personal skills could be used to stir up some trouble within an institution and that stirring up trouble felt like a very good thing to do.

I have suggested that feminism was for me a theory that made immediate and personal sense. I do not mean to suggest that the kind of analysis just described exhausts the meanings of feminism or provides a full account; any adequate feminism must also fit for other women, most of whom are in situations quite different from those of sociology graduate students. In addition, my location as a woman intersects with other privileges and oppressions shaping my experience. It is for this reason that I have tried to display my middle-class, academic background in my telling of this story. I have wanted to give a sense for the particular kind of gendered life I have led and how it has shaped both my feminism and my career. (I learned several kinds of lessons, for example, from observation of my father's work life, including the following: that academic work could be profoundly satisfying; that an academic can chart her own course in many ways; that institutional politics requires particular kinds of entrepreneurship; and, perhaps most importantly, that the academy is no paradise [cf. Ryan and Shackrey 1984]. I also learned a style of demeanor and discourse, so that the kinds of talk required in institutional settings feel relatively familiar. I wanted to resist adopting wholesale my father's consuming absorption in work, which sometimes felt distancing to me as a child—I remember the often closed and inviolable door to his study—but that has been more difficult than I expected.)

My feminism has provided a perspective that sustains a useful, restrained resistance to some aspects of business as usual, while continuing other aspects of this "business" with a vengeance. It seems important to acknowledge these limits, but I want to resist the view that this version of feminism can serve only to support the advancement of privileged middle-class academics. As I analyzed my own marginality, I could readily see that there were similar obstacles for other underrepresented groups and that I would need to use my theory reflexively to analyze my own blindnesses and exclusions. My personal sense of oppression has, I think, helped me not only to hear but also to feel, with some urgency, the complaints of those excluded on bases other than gender. When students complain about my courses, I do not want to reply that I hadn't thought about les-

bians (for example), that I couldn't find any material on women of color (for example), or that surely one class on women with disabilities (for example) is enough. These lame excuses sound far too familiar. And I am convinced — because I have worked so hard to convince those who resisted my feminist complaints — that really working to change the way I think will enliven my work and move us all forward.

AND NOW . . .

Through the early years of my career, I've been motivated and sustained by a sense of resistance to disciplinary traditions that has bordered on hostility. Feminism has provided pathways (or lifelines) out of the discipline. I have read feminist works outside of sociology, and I often find that they are more productive of the insights I need than the writings of other sociologists. I do not mean that I ignore or dismiss feminist work in sociology but that I have been interested in the challenge of getting out of the discipline, and then back in, exiting and reentering with transformative ideas.

Now that I feel reasonably well established in the discipline, I find, tellingly, that I am more interested in sociology. I want to know more about the history of the discipline, and I feel more interested (in both senses) in its future. One can certainly read this shift as a simple economic response to a change in my situation; I would not discount this reading entirely. But I think this reaction to acceptance also signals the implicit messages about "ownership" of the discipline that are sent when some groups are virtually excluded from participation and hints at the costs to the profession of these kinds of exclusions.

Feminism has led me to questions about the disciplinary context within which I struggle to construct meaningful work. In the process of "becoming a sociologist," I have come to feel that I need to understand how sociology works, as a discipline, to include and exclude topics and perspectives, to advance and coopt projects of inquiry, to resist and tame transformative agendas. I want to understand what it means to adopt a "discipline": how a discipline produces a discourse that enables some projects and rules others out of bounds. One aspect of a recent project (on the work of dietitians and nutritionists) involves an exploration of the force of "disciplinarity" (see DeVault 1995 and chaps. 5 and 7 of this book). In pursuing this research, I have been interviewing professional women who are in positions similar to mine and whose career stories and concerns with work often mirror mine. We work inside the structures of institutional power but not at their centers, and this kind of position, as "marginal insider," gives rise to characteristic troubles and ambivalences. My

aim is to make visible the sticky web of disciplinarity and professionalism within which they (and I) work. These interests arise, in part, from my own puzzles. They are also a product of new intellectual currents, including postmodern meditations on knowledge production and questions about the place of feminism within, among, and across disciplines. Thus, I still struggle with questions about locating myself as a feminist scholar.

In 1992, poised on the brink of tenure, I met the fifteen women and one man who had enrolled in my graduate seminar in feminist research. For the first class, I had chosen as our texts two poems: Kate Rushin's "The Bridge Poem" (1981) and Marge Piercy's "Unlearning to Not Speak" (1973). I had planned to read the poems aloud, and I had resolved to read with feeling. I was nervous, a bit hesitant, but the words carried me along, and my voice broke with feeling as I read. We all noticed, and that moment of emotion became a topic for discussion: why do we feel this way, and what does it mean? By the end of class, one student was ready to admit that she'd been dismayed at first to find poetry in a sociology classroom — so "soft" and womanish! Starting outside of the discipline, I think, had the effect I'd intended: we began to construct space for experimentation. About halfway through the semester, I noticed with surprise and some embarrassment that I was listening to students' presentations and worrying, "But is it sociology?" My feminism kept me quiet for the moment and gave them license to proceed. Near the end of the course, however, I began to feel an urgent need to lecture and warn them, to point out the necessity of living within, as well as between, disciplines. "I want you to be bold, take risks, and make trouble," I told them. "But I also want you to be here, to *survive* in this institutional space. For that, you have to accept a discipline."

In spite of the comforts of the second generation, survival hasn't felt easy. Some days, it seems that the feminist revolution is still missing: my feminist courses attract mostly women students, and I often feel that I live my professional life in a parallel female world apart from the "main business" of my institution and profession. Some days, I notice how many of us are now at work, and I think the revolution may be sneaking up on us, arriving while we're busy with office hours, so that we hardly have time to notice. As I write this last sentence, I am conscious of my easy use of the word "us," and I worry — about my sense that I might be turning into one of "them" and my desire to construct a "we" that continues to press at the boundaries of disciplinary traditions. Almost all the time, I'm interested to see what will come next.