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“Don't be so feminist”: Exploring student resistance to feminist approaches in a Canadian university

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Synopsis

This paper explores student resistance to feminist course content in social science courses cross-listed with women's studies as an example of social reproduction at work. Drawing on both interviews and anonymous student course evaluations, student resistance to feminism is examined from the layered perspectives of faculty, teaching assistants and students in these courses. The author argues that a regime of rationality still operates in the academy and is made evident when feminist course content is met with continual dismissal or disavowal.

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This paper explores how faculty¹ utilize feminist perspectives in social science courses that are cross-listed² with women's studies in one Canadian university and the phenomenon of student resistance to such content. This research contributes to the understanding of the kind of knowledges that students understand to be legitimate knowledge or real knowledge. The data point to a tension between students' notions of an imagined 'ideal professor' and the actuality of feminist faculty as knowledgeable. This article also aims to add to the understanding of social reproduction. Despite some feminist faculty's best attempts to subvert aspects of a masculinist university, the reproductive process of feminist knowledges not being seen by students as legitimate continues. Gordon (1984) reflects on Paul Willis' (1977) contribution in his classic ethnography, *Learning to Labour*. Gordon argues that Willis demonstrates how cultural choices

made with a particular direction in mind may induce unintended effects in an altogether different direction. The faculty members in this research are oddly complicit in this reproduction process.

First I outline the larger project that this work stems from and lay out the institutional context of the research site. Next I outline the approach the various faculty and teaching assistants take towards "justifying" the array of feminist course content used in their courses to students. Last I move on to explore student resistance to feminist approaches from the layered perspectives of faculty, teaching assistants and students in these courses. Included in the discussion of student resistance is an analysis of anonymous student course evaluations that the faculty participants shared with me for this project.

It is important to state that I do not assert that the resistance that these faculty report is necessarily an

artifact of cross-listed courses. I chose this site as it is one where I as a junior faculty member was experiencing such resistance. This is not to say that cross-listed courses are the only site of feminist teaching nor are they the only location of resistance to feminist content. What is particular about this setting though is the explicit designation of the courses as feminist courses within the home discipline's regular course bank. These courses represent an attempt to incorporate non-traditional approaches to knowledge into the various social science disciplines. These courses challenge the taken-for-granted regime of rationality (Smith, 1992) of the academy. Through the operation of this regime of rationality, 'masculine consciousness in the scholarly world is assured' (Smith, 1992, p221). This orientation to men as embodying rationality is made visible when challenged by women. Smith argues that feminism may be tolerated when it is located far away from the 'real' scholarly world (i.e. in women's studies) but it is met with anger when feminism crashes through the gate.

Far from threatening the foundations of the university, critiques of racism and sexism are better understood as committed to removing deformations that have been historically sedimented in the everyday working life and the intellectual practices of universities in North America. Those who make the critique can be seen as measuring a university against an implicit ideal of fully reciprocal and symmetrical dialogue as foundational to universities' claims to universality and commitment to rational discourse. (Smith, 1999, p223)

Similarly, as Adrienne Rich (1979, p130) points out in her classic piece, 'Toward a Woman Centered University', women are 'made to feel that the 'real' curriculum is the male centered one; that women's studies are (like Third World studies) a 'fad'; that feminist teachers are 'unscholarly,' 'unprofessional,' or 'dykes'...the university is above all a hierarchy'. Rich (1979) suggests that there exist two areas of women's needs that need to be fulfilled in order to change the nature of universities. The first concerns educational content and pedagogy and the second concerns institutional barriers to women's full or partial participation in higher education. This article explores the first category: course content and pedagogy.

Method

This paper draws from a larger study exploring the social organization of feminist approaches to teaching through the perspectives of faculty, teaching assistants and students. The research question of the larger project asks to what extent idealistic teaching, framed as feminist, is possible in a university that is regulated by other principles, namely masculinist principles. This paper draws on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with twenty-two participants (twenty-one women and one man): eight faculty, five teaching assistants and nine students. Interviewing the participants allowed for a dialogue to take place between myself and each interviewee. As Reinharz (1992) notes, qualitative data-gathering, such as through the semi-structured interviews used here, has been widely used by feminist scholars. The semi-structured approach allowed interview participants the opportunity to raise topics that were of interest to them that I did not originally consider pursuing.

The participants are all from one university which is primarily focussed on undergraduate teaching in a medium sized urban setting in Ontario, Canada. The women's studies programmes in this university began around ten years ago. Hence, the practice of offering courses cross-listed with women's studies is also around ten years old.

The final composition of participating faculty in the project is as follows: one sessional instructor (Sue Ann), two lecturers on contractually limited term appointments (Tina and Bettina), one assistant professor on a contractually limited term appointment (Jordan), two tenured associate professors (Ilana and Rosemary) and two tenured full professors³ (Cara and Paula). This group of faculty provides a nice blend of experience across the various academic ranks, noting that half of the women currently teaching these cross-listed courses in the social sciences are non permanent members of the university. Women's participation as faculty in Canadian universities remains concentrated at the lowest ranking levels. Women represent only 15.1% of full professors, 31.6% of associates, 41.2% of assistant professors and 51.9% of 'other' (including lecturers) (CAUT, 2004).

At the end of each of the faculty interviews I requested student course evaluations from each pro-

fessor; these evaluations could either be the actual paper copies of student evaluations from both cross-listed and non-cross-listed courses or copies of selected comments faculty were willing to have included in the research. All eight of the faculty members provided me with copies of student course evaluations, leaving me with 533 forms to analyze. Comments on course evaluations are informative as they are an anonymous form of communication from the students (Richer, 1995). However, evaluations are not necessarily reflective of the 'mood' of a course as a whole as not every student fills out an evaluation. Further, evaluations are also influenced by the size of a class, the status of the course as mandatory or elective, the students' performance in the course and so forth. Nonetheless, student evaluations are useful to explore.

Three of the five teaching assistants (Julia, Arja, Dale) were in their first year of being a teaching assistant. The other two teaching assistants (Donna, Sybil) had previous teaching assistant experience, with one being quite an experienced teaching assistant. Eight women and one man were interviewed who are students at this university: four 'young' students (Heather, Rebecca, Charlene, Liam) and five 'mature' students (Melissa, Alicia, Sarah, Connie, Veronica); four are co-major students with women's studies and five are sole major students (not in women's studies).

I used a snowball method of recruiting student participants, beginning with a student with whom I was acquainted. While this proved a reliable method of recruitment, I failed to secure the participation of non-feminist friendly students. The feminist friendly student with whom I started the snowball process provided the name of another feminist friendly student and the process continued from there. The snowball method did not yield any students who were non-feminist friends. Thus, this article lacks an important standpoint. I am reliant on discussing student resistance from the perspectives of faculty members and teaching assistants who experience resistance in their classes and students who do not resist feminist approaches yet witness resistance in their own classes.

Also notable about this research site is the pre-existing acquaintances of several participants with the researcher. I worked at a few universities as a

sessional instructor and as a limited term faculty member before securing a tenure-track position. I was not teaching any of the students at the time of the interviews nor were any of the teaching assistants working with me in my courses. These prior acquaintances are important to note as participants may have felt more comfortable to reveal particular details in their interviews. Likewise, the participants may not have shared other details because of this prior association.

Feminist content

All of the faculty interviewed for this project utilize feminist materials in their social science courses that are cross-listed with women's studies. The faculty also introduce some degree of feminist content in their non-cross-listed courses. While there is a program requirement at this university (not actively monitored) that cross-listed women's studies courses need to have 50% feminist content (meaning half of the course material should be authored by women-ignoring the problematic assumption that women authors necessarily equals some sort of feminist approach) and have an instructor with a background in a range of feminist theory, these women faculty believe that such inclusion would be their choice regardless. As Jordan laughingly states in her interview, 'there's no material that isn't feminist material'.

One could argue that by virtue of their location as women workers in the university, the women faculty challenge the current, and certainly historical, masculine regime of the university. Also, by these faculty members being feminists, they further challenge or resist the ruling regime. So we might think of these women's practices as ones of resistance rather than focus on the students as the important resisters. As Smith (1990, p21) notes, 'feminist theory in sociology is still *feminist* theory and not just plain sociological theory'. In the context of this project, the sentence can read 'and not just plain social theory' as this is not a problem specific to sociology. Faculty whose teaching and practices are informed by feminisms are positioned as 'hopelessly biased' (Elliot, 1995, p5) by students, as feminism is perceived as being based on personal viewpoints and therefore does not constitute legitimate knowledge (Atwood,

1994). As Morley (1995, p116) argues ‘the relationship between gender, language, knowledge and power’ further complicates the web of power relations in which faculty informed by feminisms are enmeshed. ‘In power-laden daily social interactions, it is not just a question of what is said, but of who is entitled to speak’ (Morley, 1995, p116). Legitimate knowledge is taken up by students as being objective and scientific and not based on personal opinion (Moore, 1997). Acker (1994) also points out the dual nature of resistance. She argues that given one’s theoretical preference, resistance can either be read as ‘the last stand of the brave underdog or the last gasp of the doomed dinosaur’ (Acker, 1994, p93).

While the women faculty involved in this project do not need the 50% feminist content rule, it exists to safeguard the women’s studies program from supporting non-feminist courses and to ensure that the program’s students and majors are indeed taking courses informed by feminisms. Nevertheless there sometimes exists a communication breakdown between the chairs of particular programs and the part time or non permanent faculty who are hired to teach courses that are cross-listed with women’s studies. The result is that some of the part time or non permanent instructors are not trained in feminist theory but may be sympathetic to feminist content while other instructors who are hired have no background and no alliance with feminism.

This situation is in part a consequence of a bureaucratic procedure. Currently the program committee of women’s studies approves courses on a course by course basis in terms of accepting them as cross-listed courses. The initial petitioning faculty member demonstrates to the committee, via a proposal of topics and readings, that the course will fulfill the 50% feminist content rule. Once the course is initially approved by the program committee, it appears in the course calendar every year as a cross-listed offering unless the host department requests its removal from cross-listed status. The course appears in the calendar regardless of any change in instructors from year to year. If the committee screened courses by individual instructors, this would preclude courses being cross-listed with women’s studies that have no feminist content and a professor who is not trained or familiar with feminist theory. However, to put such a practice into effect requires a time commit-

ment given the number of non permanent faculty members teaching cross-listed courses who would yearly require “screening” by the women’s studies program committee.

Explain and justify feminist content?

The various faculty members interviewed have a range of responses to the questions of how they introduce material informed by feminism/s into their cross-listed courses and whether or not, and if so how, they explain or justify their selection of such course material to their students. These cross-listed courses often have very small numbers of students who are taking the course as a women’s studies credit as opposed to a credit from the home social sciences department. In a typical course of 100 students, five of those students might be taking the course as a women’s studies credit.

Surprisingly, in my experience teaching these cross-listed courses, many of the other students are unaware that the course is cross-listed with women’s studies and is thus expected to be a “feminist” course. The university’s course calendar is clear that the course is cross-listed with women’s studies and the course outlines also state the dual nature of these courses. There are also students in these courses who do know the course is cross-listed with women’s studies and are taking it for that reason, even though they choose to have the course listed by its social science department’s name on their university transcripts.

Most of the faculty interviewed do not overtly justify or explain to the students why there is content informed by feminism/s in their courses. As Jordan states, ‘I don’t ever apologize for it’. One faculty member, Ilana, invoking an evangelical metaphor, envisions herself as a missionary of feminism. She teaches a cross-listed course in a social science department which rarely has students she would comfortably label as feminist. Ilana’s view is that by incorporating feminist content into this class she is ‘perhaps doing the world good teaching this stuff to 65 students who would never otherwise engage [with feminist writings]’. Ilana’s approach is to use what she identifies as ‘watered down’ feminism in an attempt to meet her students ‘where they are’. Tina, as a non permanent faculty member, also tries to choose fem-

inist writings that are not 'too strident' as she is concerned about student reaction and resistance.

The one faculty member who does openly name the material she uses in class as feminist also makes a point to welcome any students who are men to her feminist class. Sue Ann states, 'there's a guy in here and you're really welcome to be here'. She continues, 'I'll say, "there's guys in this course [in lecture hall], you're welcome, it's wonderful that you're here, you need to be here, it's about your experience too"'. Making a production out of men's presence in these classes communicates to students that men as a gender are privileged.

One teaching assistant, Donna, reports that one of the faculty members she works for announces at the beginning of the course during the first lecture 'this class comes from the feminist perspective'. Donna has the impression that the faculty member is trying to give the students the option to continue in the course or to 'opt out'. Donna continues saying that she has had students who completed this course say to her 'in retrospect if they knew to what extent the feminist perspective was incorporated into the course they probably would have dropped it'.

The above gets at what Acker (1999, p60) details as a 'fragile order' in the teaching process. While Acker is writing about elementary schooling, it is helpful here as she situates this negotiated order as part of the teaching process in general. Teachers create strategies in their classes, arriving at tacit deals so that their decisions and wishes appear legitimate and are prioritized such that classroom life can continue in a regularized manner (Acker, 1999).

There also seems to be a sense on the part of the teaching assistants that to label or name the course material as feminist would create a disengagement on the part of their students. Here we can see the regime of rationality at work. The teaching assistants are cognizant of what happens when knowledges are labelled as feminist. Dale talks about introducing feminist content without identifying it as such.

There are really negative stereotypes and negative reactions to feminism, so if you sort of go out and hang out this sign saying 'feminist, this is feminist content' you immediately lose the students, or not all of them, but a fairly large portion. . . just saying feminist will shut them down, they stop listening and you

lose credibility if you sort of push blatant feminist content at them.

I asked her to explain how she sees herself losing credibility when she labels a perspective as feminist. Dale responds,

What you get is the 'oh that's just a feminist ranting again'. And that's where you lose the credibility because it gets turned into this, as if it's some sort of annoying as opposed to a valid point that has something important to say, or bring to the discussion. It's just an easy way of shutting somebody down and in that sense I think that you lose credibility, you lose the ability to dialogue.

As research notes, when students do not see feminism as an academic discipline, they are able to regard discussions of gender issues as non intellectual or non academic enterprises (Bauer, 1990). Another teaching assistant, Donna, echoes Dale's sentiments and approach. She too does not overtly label the course material as feminist as she finds that students will participate in class discussions more actively when 'feminism' is not attached to their readings or statements. There are several possible explanations for this silence. Anderson and Williams (2001) argue that in order to claim an identity it has to be declared valid by others. While Anderson and Williams are writing about identity, their argument is useful in this context. The students could be turned off when feminism is mentioned because of the current dismissive culture towards feminist ideas (Letherby & Shiels, 2001). Alternatively, the students might be afraid of saying something 'wrong'. Like most of the faculty, Donna's goal as a teaching assistant is not to necessarily 'convert' her students to the 'feminist side' but to get them to 'engage in the conversation' and to perhaps think differently about the world around them than they had prior to taking a cross-listed course. Again we see the use of evangelical terminology. The use of such language raises questions about whether feminism-friendly classrooms are educating students or are spaces of proselytizing. Certainly the latter of these two has been a criticism launched against feminism. There must be some awareness of this concern as Donna is distancing herself from this position while Ilana to some extent embraces it with her missionary standpoint. Does this mean that in Ilana's courses,

only those who engage and perhaps convert can do well? While this is not Ilana's intent, it may be the message being communicated to students. As Marchbank et al. (2003, p87) argue, 'feminist interventions in education (as elsewhere) can be disciplining as well as empowering, merely replacing one type of 'authorised' approach with another'.

One student reports a situation that I too was always keenly aware of as an undergraduate student. Melissa comments on being frustrated by these "feminist classes" as there always seems to be an apologetic tone from the faculty members about the course content. Melissa states,

I always liked the feminist perspective that the professor would bring but at the same time it was also a bit frustrating in that it was never AS feminist as I would like it. They always had to take into consideration that non-feminist[s], [were] usually a larger group, and I was always frustrated by people in the course who were taking the course and weren't sympathetic to [feminism]; that would always cause some sort of problem.

Melissa continues to explain how she felt as one of the few feminist students in her cross-listed courses.

There was always a feeling that the course had to be justified, that the professor had to justify why she was including this or that. The TAs had to constantly reiterate that this was a worthy study. So while I liked the content it was often frustrating because there was always this apologetic tone and that they couldn't go full out, they never felt like they had free reign because they always had to justify themselves.

In my own teaching of these cross-listed courses I have often felt like I needed to justify and defend my choice of course material to the non-feminist student majority. I have found that as a nonpermanent faculty member and now as a junior tenure track faculty member that I am acutely aware of the role of student evaluations and student complaints in the process of performance indicators (merit, tenure and promotion). While I do not see myself as how one faculty member, Tina, describes her teaching practices as attempts to cultivate the Miss Congeniality prize, I certainly recognize that I am actively managing my teaching performance to secure non problematic reviews from the point of view of my administrators while still attempt-

ing to be committed to my feminist teaching. I identify quite closely with Melissa who says in her interview,

As a self professed feminist I needed to constantly convince people that this was worthwhile, that this was legitimate to talk about these things, that it was necessary to talk about these things. It wasn't male bashing.

The students who participated in this project are all supportive of feminism/s. When asked how they feel when feminist perspectives are introduced in their courses, the overwhelming sentiment is best illustrated by Alicia's response of 'praise be'. The fact that all of the students whom I interviewed desire feminist content in their courses is a limitation of this study. I would have preferred to have also interviewed students who are openly resistant or anti-feminist for this project. In terms of discussing student resistance to course material informed by feminism/s, as I noted previously I am reliant on the perspectives of those faculty, teaching assistants and students sympathetic to feminism whom I interviewed.

Student resistance

How do we understand resistance? Resistance is sometimes something that is seen theoretically as productive (see Foucault (1980) for example), pushing society forward. Resistance is also thought of as something that happens at the margins of society. In Smith's (1987, 1990) framework resistance is often seen as happening outside the relations of ruling or from the perspective of those whose work provides the conditions for ruling. If one takes up the framework of the relations of ruling as Smith outlines it, then the students in this project who are uncomfortable or unsympathetic with feminist content are not really 'resistant'. Rather, the "resistant" students take up the stance of the ruling regime. Sexism, and we can add racism, ableism, heterosexism, classism, and so forth, are all features of the contemporary (and historical) relations of ruling in North America. These social relations have become hegemonic in the way our society is ruled and are therefore in our social institutions. The academy is not immune to these oppressive relations.

Following this framework, we are then able to see the feminist faculty members and the teaching assistants and students who are supportive and/or sympathetic to feminist content as the resisters to the current ruling regime. The intentions of the feminist faculty are continually overruled by their position as agents of this ruling regime. This seems to happen more frequently with feminist content and practices than for other “critical” teachers. While writing about the UK, [Letherby and Shiels \(2001, p126\)](#) point out:

[While] issues of domination, dependency and subordination are still often taken seriously by students in terms of for example social class, the politicisation of these issues in relation to feminist agendas are more often resisted or rejected.

The practices of the university undermine their ability to effect social change within their classes if they want to be re-hired, earn positive merit scores, earn tenure, be promoted and so forth. This is not to ignore that some women in the academy built their careers on feminism. As [Smith \(1992, p223-224\)](#) notes, some women took risky paths with their careers in order to unpick the ‘gendered regime of rationality institutionalized in universities and colleges’. Real gains have been made even though they have been gradual and difficult ([Smith, 1992](#)).

Nonetheless, for lack of a better phrase, students do often resist feminist content. As [Elliot \(1995\)](#) argues, teaching for liberation is a challenge and therefore it is a kind of teaching that is likely to be challenged by students. [Culley \(1985\)](#) suggests that student challenges to critical content are likely to be aggravated when the faculty member is a woman. Consequently, student resistance is often a feature of feminist classrooms and is important to explore. Overall, the feminist teaching literature takes a positive position on the role of student resistance. While resistance, according to [Moore \(1997, p128\)](#), is an ‘unwillingness to consider research or theories that contradict one’s sense of social order’, it is also seen as a necessary part of the struggle toward social change as learning is a social process ([Cooks, 2001; Ropers-Huilman, 1998](#)).

Further, some resistance is looked upon as healthy and necessary ([Bauer, 1990; Davis, 1992; Elliot, 1995; Ropers-Huilman, 1998; Titus, 2000](#)). [Davis \(1992\)](#) argues that resistance indicates that students are engaging with the material sufficiently to become

upset by the issues. [Davis \(1992\)](#) further suggests that we also understand student resistance as offering emotional protection to our students who are hearing about oppressive structures often for the first time. When learning about oppressive social relations, [Lewis \(1993\)](#) argues many students who occupy privileged social positions of gender or race/ethnicity or social class:

...find it difficult to engage in the self-reflection required for the questioning of unequal...social relations in which [they] are social actors. ([Lewis, 1993, p149](#))

While student resistance sometimes creates uncomfortable academic spaces, feminist pedagogues hope that the lessons from their classrooms might be learned after their students have completed classes and/or even their university degrees ([Davis, 1992](#)).

The discussion that follows draws from all of the interviews with the faculty members, teaching assistants and students for this project. Additionally I include excerpts from anonymous student evaluations of the participating faculty. All of the faculty shared various course evaluations of their cross-listed classes with me. In total there are 533 student course evaluations representing eight faculty members and covering 12 different courses. There are four second year courses, seven third year courses and one fourth year course included in the reviews. The smallest number of evaluations from a single course is nine and the largest is 126. An overall examination⁴ of the evaluations indicates that although the students do not label it as such, for the most part, they respond positively to feminist pedagogical approaches to teaching. The students praise several aspects of the professors’ teaching practices that the faculty consciously include as part of the commitment to feminist pedagogy. These include such things as being approachable, creating comfortable spaces for student participation, including personal experiences in the classroom, and so forth.

Anonymous resistance-course evaluations

One of the first aspects I noted when starting to read all of the student evaluations is that when a professor was receiving a positive evaluation it was generally consistent with feminist pedagogical princi-

ples that the faculty members themselves tried to incorporate into their teaching. Some examples are,

Encouraged discussion and made everyone at ease. (Course 4. Evaluation 1)

Liked that she was fair, gives everyone a chance to talk. She is not intimidating like some other profs. (Course 4. Evaluation 12)

She talked about personal examples which helped out and helped me to see how she and others in the class fit into the sociology of family. (Course 7. Evaluation 48)

Prof [name] is so flexible with assignments. (Course 10. Evaluation 12)

While the students do not overtly label these practices as stemming from feminist pedagogical principles, the individual faculty members would hopefully be pleased with the effectiveness of some of their practices.

What is also worth noting about the student course evaluations is that words and phrases like ‘feminism’ or ‘feminist perspective’ never appear on the positive evaluations. Feminism only ever appears on the course evaluations in a negative context. There are some evaluations that praise the content of the course, but it is interesting that the ‘f’ word is never used. For example,

I loved the content of the course, the prof was really easy going and made the class very enjoyable. (Course 4. Evaluation 10)

Very interesting course, very well presented. (Course 8. Evaluation 25)

She rocked! You made it interesting and kept the material relevant. (Course 9. Evaluation 46)

Another element of the evaluations that is intriguing analytically is the use of descriptors of the professors who received positive student evaluations. As the faculty members point out in their interviews, they perceive that they are judged on a personal level by virtue of being women more so than their men colleagues. While this project cannot substantiate such a claim, it is worth noting that the student evaluations that were positive overall for a course

included evaluative statements of the professor on a personal level.

She was a lovely lady... (Course 3. Evaluation 17)

Prof was cheerful and kind. (Course 3. Evaluation 19)

She was friendly and easy to talk to. (Course 4. Evaluation 4)

Easy-going prof- very nice and likeable. (Course 4. Evaluation 5)

Good disposition. (Course 7. Evaluation 84)

Sweet and knowledgeable. (Course 7. Evaluation 111)

Very approachable, friendly... (Course 10. Evaluation 13)

Note how the personal evaluations are positive and the attributes are clearly gendered.

The negative comments on the student course evaluations focus on feminism as a bad thing, suggesting that it is merely an opinion and therefore does not deserve to be treated as actual knowledge. Some researchers note that when faculty members critically teach about dominant discourses in their classes, the written evaluations they receive from their students often report that the faculty members leave no room for disagreement or alternative perspectives (Baker & Copp, 1997; Rakow, 1991). This phenomenon is certainly evidenced by the current sample of student course evaluations. For example,

I felt like I had to match the opinions/beliefs of the professor to get a good mark in the course. (Course 1. Evaluation 41)

[Responding to a question on the evaluation- what did you learn most from the course?] My opinion should ALWAYS be the same as the prof or TA. DON'T BE SO FEMINIST! (Course 7. Evaluation 83)

I found the professor only open to her ideas and no new ones. (Course 9. Evaluation 54)

Researchers also note that students (often women students) get concerned about men's exclusion when class discussions focus upon women. Bright (1982, p97) reports that these student concerns get taken up by questions such as ‘but what about the men?’. Lee

(1993) observes that this care for the men also happens with statements outlining that men are victims as much as women are victims. Again, the course evaluations obtained from the faculty members for this project contain similar student statements. For example,

There was little to no real concern over problems white heterosexual males encounter. (Course 1. Evaluation 1)

It was very one-sided. Didn't focus much on the male gender, more directed towards females. (Course 1. Evaluation 10)

She puts down men all the time- too much male bashing. (Course 1. Evaluation 5)

Prof was very biased, did not discuss certain issues, i.e. male perspective. Men are evil. (Course 10. Evaluation 2)

In addition to the current sample of student course evaluations, the faculty also mentioned other responses they have received on their evaluations over the years. Ilana notes that her students indicate that the feminist monographs she chooses for her courses 'are biased'. Cara receives comments that she is nice but too feminist and Rosemary says that her students say she hates men and is a male basher. I know I have certainly received this comment more than once and it puts myself and the other feminist faculty in this project in good company with other feminist professors elsewhere accused of male bashing (Baker & Copp, 1997; Culley, 1985; Deay & Stitzel, 1991; Hughes, 2002; Lundeberg, 1997; Moore, 1997, Titus, 2000).

Subtle resistance

Many of the participants in this project speak about student resistance to feminist content happening in subtle ways in their classes. The participants' descriptions resemble the atmosphere depicted in the chilly climate for women literature (Chilly Collective, 1995; Fox, 1995; Hall & Sandler, 1982; Hannah, Paul, & Vethamany-Globus, 2002; Sandler, 1987; Sandler, Silverbert, & Hall, 1996). The resistance often gets expressed by 'a feeling in the room' (Sue Ann, fac-

ulty). Melissa remembers her fellow students giving the impression that they did not respect their professors. Veronica recalls there being rumblings in her classrooms.

Subtle students' resistance also takes bodily forms as opposed to just general climate aspects. All the faculty note the body language of their students who resist their feminist content. Rolling eyes, huffing, crossing arms, and snickering are all indicators of resistance and as Melissa notes, the body movements are carried out 'just enough to make you feel ridiculous'.

Blatant resistance

While students might say that the above examples of subtle resistance through body language were being misread by faculty, teaching assistants and other students, there are also overt actions described by participants that leave little room for misinterpretation. These instances resemble Smith's (1999) description of the anger feminists are met with when they crash through the gate of the 'real' scholarly world. The regime of rationality then shows how it is a 'historically sedimented local organization of race and gender in the everyday worklife of faculty and student' (Smith, 1999, p202).

Faculty and teaching assistants describe many such instances. One teaching assistant recalls her male students often commenting as they enter the room for a tutorial stating 'I'm ready to get trashed today'. This theme of male bashing arises over and over again in all of the interviews with all three levels of participants (faculty, teaching assistants and students). As Melissa, a student, remembers it was not just the men who would make comments about male bashing.

People would be quite antagonistic. It didn't have to be men obviously, there were women who just didn't agree with the analysis going on and they would say "this is dumb" "I don't believe this" or "this is male bashing". I can't believe how many times I've heard that stupid thing.

In her piece on resistance Moore (1997) discusses the strategy being used by the students Melissa is quoting. Moore argues that students dismiss results of research that they deem derogatory towards men. This is similar to Kenway's (1995) and Lewis' (1993)

findings that women attempt to take care of the men in the room. Lewis (1993, p159) argues that women's caretaking practice 'arises from women's social/political location within patriarchy'. By doing such caretaking, women are upholding the current gender regime of men's authority and supremacy.

The question of what constitutes legitimate knowledge emerges many times in this project. Drawing on the work of Edward Said (1978), Smith (1999) shows how the academy has an intellectual tradition constructed from the viewpoint of the men who first created it.

It is also an intellectual world that has been assembled from within an exclusively European tradition, which therefore organizes the work of classroom, the resources of library, and the language, objects, and conventions of discourse as a centre defining others who are not represented as subjects or authorized speakers. (Smith, 1999, p202)

According to Smith (1999) there has never been a disavowal of this androcentric and Eurocentric past. 'The experiences, interests, and associations of men of a certain class and race bled into the paradigms of the humanities and social sciences, and even into the natural sciences' (Smith, 1999, p202). Smith writes of how this history has become sedimented in the academy.

Still today the majority of faculty are white men. In the local regime of a particular university, they are the authorized speakers and teachers of the discourses of their discipline. . . . In the classroom... women and men are taught by men who can enter the discourses they teach without an experience of denial of presence, voice and subject position. A self-insulating, self-reproducing system created in the past is decanted into the everyday ordinariness of the present. (Smith, 1999, pp202-203)

As many researchers have found, students construct feminist knowledge as not legitimate knowledge and are therefore able to dismiss the professor as having a personal vendetta, being biased or merely expressing a personal opinion (Atwood, 1994; Bauer, 1990; Heald, 1989; Titus, 2000). This is where I see the notion of male bashing coming from. Often students are uncomfortable facing material that contradicts their understanding of the social order (Moore,

1997). When faced with such a disjuncture students may accept or reject (along a continuum) the explanation that the professor provides.

Moore (1997) discusses three typical patterns of resistant responses by her students: dismiss research interpreted by students as derogatory to men, ignore explanations that involve structural forces and blame the victim.

In this study an example of what Moore (1997) calls dismissive behaviour happened in a class where one participant (Sarah) was a teaching assistant. Smith (1992) refers to the same type of situation as men policing boundaries in order to secure male privilege. This illustrates that a 'regime of rationality' operates in the contemporary academy. This regime of rationality is a particular arrangement of patriarchal power (Smith, 1992). Prior to the beginning of a lecture, two men (who were not registered in the course) walked up to the professor of the course and said (according to Sarah),

We hope you don't mind, we want to stop and listen, we heard this class was about male bashing from our female friends and we wanted to come for ourselves and see what it's about, we think that you really bash men.

The professor engaged the two in dialogue asking them why they would think that about the material. The professor told the two men that they could come and listen to the lecture for themselves (even though she could have told them to leave). The men then asked if they could ask questions during the lecture. The accommodating professor replied that they could ask questions but to understand that she was trying to teach a course and would need to get back to her material so she could not be answering their questions all the time. This situation that happened is an example of dismissal of material because the material is interpreted as being derogatory toward men. In this instance we do not know what the men thought at the end of the class, but we do know that the men came to the class because of what women students in the class reported about the course content.

What is also striking about this example is the assumption of privilege on that part of the two men who were not students in this course. While they asked the professor for permission to attend the course, they nevertheless challenged her as a competent professor by stating that they were there to judge

her course on the basis of anti-men content. By stating why they were there, they had in essence already made up their minds to dismiss the feminist content. This is described as a 'burden of proof' type of resistance (Carse & DeBruin, 2002). 'There is a presumption on the part of those leading the charge in the classroom that they bear the mantle of authority, that their perspectives are neutral and 'normal'...' (Carse & DeBruin, 2002, p186).

The above classroom instance also illustrates Foucault's (1980) theory of power as multiple and fluid. We see in this example shifting subject positions of those involved. One would assume that as a professor, one is occupying a position of power. The men students (not even students in her class) demonstrate how they were able to shift the relations of power because of their social position as men. The students' social power as men subverted the institutional power of a faculty member, demonstrating the fluidity of power.

Students resisting feminism and feminist content also leave faculty, teaching assistants and fellow students who are feminists or sympathetic to feminist approaches open to personal attacks. One student describes one of her classes where there was 'a lot of personal criticism of the professor in the class' (Charlene). Another student shares the personal attacks she received from fellow women students outside of the classroom based on her contributions during class.

Questioning my ability or the possibility of my being a friend or a mother because of the things that I said in tutorial. Really personalized kinds of 'how could someone like you ever have a partner?' these kinds of things would be said. (Melissa)

Sue Ann, a faculty member, experienced another incident of a personal attack after a lecture on abuse in intimate relationships. She was alone in her lecture hall when three men entered and began uttering comments such as 'lesbian hating feminists' after seeing the material on Sue Ann's overheads, which were still on display. These were not students in Sue Ann's class but students in the next class to occupy her lecture hall. Sue Ann shares that on two different weeks these men gave her a 'really hard time'. Sue Ann responded to the men. 'But I didn't allow it to silence me. So I spoke back to them and got out of there quickly'. This incident unnerved Sue Ann and the situation was

compounded by her institutional position as a sessional faculty member. Sue Ann did not speak to other faculty or her department chair about the incident because she wanted to be seen as a competent course director.

Resistance response strategies

Since resistance is a part of feminist classrooms, how do faculty and teaching assistants deal with resistance? The participants in this project take two main approaches to student resistance. The first strategy is to avoid, avoid, avoid resistance. The second approach is to allow for resistance and counter-resistance in the classroom.

This first strategy of avoidance is accomplished in a couple of ways. One way is adapting the course content to the point of no longer getting resistance. Ilana, a faculty member, describes herself as engaging in such a practice. She sees her course as embodying a quite liberal feminist approach. Although the result is that Ilana's students resist minimally or even not at all, Ilana is not deliberately trying to stave off resistance. Rather this result came about from Ilana's efforts to envision who her students are and where they might be politically and attempts to meet her audience at that point.

Avoiding discussing people's resistance to material during class is the approach Tina, another faculty member, takes. Tina talks about attempts at managing her courses for harmony. Tina reports that the topic of male bashing does arise in her courses but she never stops to talk about it because she would be worried about negotiating such a discussion. When asked why she would not open the topic up for discussion, she replies,

Because it opens up a can of worms and I would spend all my time keeping things copasetic...So for them to contract a word like male bashing, I don't know if there's a remedy for that in this lifetime...It tells me that people have an agenda, that there is a need to correct and re-teach the teacher.

Again we see this notion of feminist knowledge as not legitimate knowledge. In the case of Tina the construction of feminist knowledge as not "real" knowledge mediates how she then approaches her classes.

The majority of the faculty members permit resistance in their classes and like Moore (1998, p60) suggest that it is necessary to allow a certain amount of resistance but also encourage 'student-generated counter-resistance'. A senior faculty member, Cara, finds that her male students respond better to critical content when other students in the class take up feminist positions. Cara likes to step back from these discussions and let her students handle the resistance.

I also advocate making time for discussing resistance in class with students but as a couple of the students from this project point out, there are consequences to this strategy. There is the sense that as feminist students you are always starting from the same point, in each class it is back to square one. As Melissa states in her interview it seems as though you never 'get on and learn'. Another student Sybil also indicates that while she sees it as important to discuss people's resistance to feminist materials, it gets tiring as you are always having the same discussion over and over again. Also, it is hard on the students to have to 'take up arms' repeatedly in their classes.

Conclusions

This paper explored how feminist faculty integrate feminist materials in their cross-listed classes and the resistance they experience to such approaches. When viewing the situation of resistance through a framework of examining the relations of ruling we see the feminist faculty members as the resisters to the masculine regime of the university. However student resistance to feminism is a feature of feminist classrooms and was therefore explored. We can take solace in our pedagogical efforts. Perhaps the students who were our greatest resisters reflect on our classes long (or shortly) after they have left our classes and come to understand the vision of the social order we were attempting to explain.

What is striking about the resistance to feminist material is the continual dismissal or disavowal of feminist knowledge. Feminist knowledge is continually not taken seriously, it is relegated to the realm of the personal, of opinion, bias, grudge, and bitterness. Letherby and Shiels (2001, p126) refer to this

as a 'culture of dismissal of feminist ideas'. This construction translates into students not treating feminist material as worthy of examination or consideration. This speaks to the larger issue of what is knowledge and who is accorded the privilege to speak from a position of knowledge/authority. Smith's (1992, 1999) notion of a historically sedimented regime of rationality was used to provide a possible explanation of how feminist knowledge is dismissed as legitimate knowledge. Within this regime of rationality, authorized speakers were and continue to be men. The regime of rationality includes a focus on rational, objective thought incorporating scientific methods which do not recognize subjective constructions of knowledge (Jackson, 2002). Feminists have taken the position that there is no ultimate authority and that professors need to not represent themselves as all-knowing and need to acknowledge and negotiate the relations of power that exist between themselves and their students. At the same time one could argue that this practice might contribute to the construction of feminist knowledge as somehow less 'real' or accurate. Feminists then are undermined to a certain extent by their own philosophy and practices.

In faculty members' efforts to try and teach differently and celebrate alternative methods and course content that challenge disciplinary canons, the social order is ultimately being reconfirmed as oppressive. Some of the faculty members in this project try for a hidden pedagogy, others try to appease their student critics by not mentioning feminism/s, and many of the faculty fear the consequences of negative or poor student evaluations. In the end these survival practices undermine efforts to position feminist knowledges as legitimate. There seems to be a reproductive process at work that allows students to view feminist perspectives with disdain. As Paul Willis (1977) illustrated in his *Learning to Labour*, 'most counter-culture activities tend to be, finally, reproductive rather than transformative' (Gordon, 1984, p113).

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Endnotes

¹ As this is a Canadian study, I use the term 'faculty' in the North American way to refer to academics. Occasionally, I also use the term 'professor' in a generic way like the British term 'lecturer' noting that it is not simply reserved for those in high ranks.

² Cross-listed courses are offered by one department and are also designated as courses in alternate programs of study. For example, a sociology department might have a course 'gender and society'. This course can then be cross-listed with women's studies formally such that students can enroll and receive credit for it as either a sociology credit or a women's studies credit.

³ In Canada a sessional instructor is someone hired to teach on a course-by-course basis. A contractually limited term appointment is typically a one or two year contract position, teaching the same load (or greater) as permanent faculty. Assistant professor is an entry level position which can be on the "tenure track" (with the possibility of a permanent job). Those receiving tenure (after a thorough review of their work involving external assessors after five-six years) are generally promoted to associate professor around the same time. There is a possibility of further promotion to full professor for many academics.

⁴ I reviewed the students' written responses to the following qualitative questions: what do you think you have learned from the course? What problems if any did you encounter with this course? What did you especially like about the course and/or instructor? Comment on the text(s) and/or reading. How do you think the course in general could be improved?

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