

The Political is Academic: Women's Studies at Brown University

By

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“I am talking about a way of regarding our world as amenable to investigation and interrogation without magic keys, special jargons and instruments, curtained-off practices.”

-Edward Said¹

As a student of the humanities, I have found that, contrary to its name, there is very little room for humanness in the humanities. Truthful interrogation of human experiences has been subverted by disciplinary boundaries, careerism, institutional politics, and academic jargon. Discovering human truth in the humanities has become a rebellious act, an act of pushing back against academic standards. This project began as an act of defiance, an attempt to push against the boundaries of History as a discipline and its rules of objectivity. Could I use my subjectivity, as a Gender & Sexuality Studies concentrator at Brown University, to provide an analysis of the history of women’s studies at Brown as a means to make sense of humanities’ work that was explicitly geared towards liberating oppressed peoples?

I took a course titled Introduction to Gender & Sexuality Studies during my second semester at Brown. The course, which was meant to serve as a survey-type introduction to inquiries related to gender and sexuality, required texts by the likes of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Joan Scott. I found the readings insurmountably difficult. And when it came to writing papers, I had no idea where to start. The ideas seemed too big and too slippery. At one point, I was relieved and excited to come to the conclusion that sex was the term used for biological, factual division between male and female, and gender was the social construction of femininity and masculinity. Then I read Anne Fausto-Sterling’s “The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female are Not Enough,” and

¹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 312.

my conclusion was proved wrong. Additionally, people kept talking about “postmodernism,” as in, “this is a very postmodernist idea,” without ever explaining what postmodernist meant. Nevertheless, I stayed with the course, attempting—but rarely finishing—the readings, putting *some* thoughts on the page when it came to papers, and attending every lecture and section. I stayed with the course because I felt the material had something to do with me and my experience of the world.

The course stayed with me because it altered the way I think: the questions I ask, the assumptions I make. The course offered me seemingly legitimate ways to articulate my frustration at pervasive sexism in my everyday life. The course did not “raise my consciousness” (to use the jargon of second-wave feminism) to such sexism, but rather gave me terms and an intellectual framework to understand and articulate my grievances against sexism. But, then I wondered why I needed to come to an Ivy League institution and learn terms with no definition and read texts I couldn’t comprehend and write papers that didn’t come to a conclusion in order to feel like my feelings and experiences were legitimate. I did not know how to translate these articulations of sexism to people outside of the academy or even to people who weren’t involved, in some way, with Gender & Sexuality Studies. I dreaded the question, “So what exactly is Gender Studies?” It was a question I asked myself all the time, and yet never had an adequate response.

This project is my attempt to formulate an answer to the questions I so dreaded. What exactly is Gender Studies? What is its purpose? What are its origins? Who is it for? Who is it by? What does it assume? These questions were as much a personal interrogation of the particular course of study I am engaged in as they are about the role of education, academia, and scholarship in my life, others’ lives, society, culture, and

politics. Of course, these are not *new* questions, nor can they be fully answered within the scope of my project—if they can be answered at all. However, the *act* of asking them is what I aim to interrogate with this project. What role does inquiry play in academia? To sexism? To politics? Can inquiry be radical?

This project is both a celebration and a criticism of the tools I have gained from being a Gender & Sexuality Studies concentrator. While I have been frustrated by the concentration's perpetuation of lofty academic discourse and sterilization of theory from truthful human experiences of oppression, I am able to engage in this critical historical analysis of women's studies at Brown *because* of the analytic tools I have gained from concentrating in Gender & Sexuality Studies. Therefore, it is with the very tools it has taught me that I push back on Gender & Sexuality Studies, pointing to its origins in women's studies. I ask if Gender & Sexuality Studies can reconnect to its radical mission: can it do more than provide names and theories by which to call sexism, and actually challenge it?

I chose to direct my questions at the history of Women's Studies at Brown because, first, the past has proved a helpful space in which I can grapple with these slippery questions and concepts. And second, conducting research at Brown would be the richest place to do it, as I could access a plethora of archives and people. Through my research, I learned Brown University was an even more appropriate subject of my research than I could have imagined. The Pembroke Center, in which the Gender & Sexuality Studies concentration is housed, is world-renowned, bringing highly celebrated *international* scholars, such as Jacques Derrida, Catharine Stimpson, Jacqueline Rose, and Jill Conway in the 1980s. Indeed, Anne Fausto-Sterling, a pioneer in women's

studies in the Biology, was a founding member of the *ad hoc* Women's Studies Board, the group that launched the official concentration at Brown. In addition, Joan Scott was the first permanent Nancy Duke Lewis Professor, the first faculty position reserved for a senior feminist scholar, and the founding director of the Pembroke Center. As an undergraduate concentrator, I was unaware of the Pembroke Center's international reputation, so it was exciting to see names I recognized—names of people whose work I had read and struggled with—as actors in the history of the institution and concentration in which I was reading and struggling.

Further, Brown proved to be the ideal setting for my research. As a Brown student, I had ready access not only to a vast collection of archival resources related to women's studies, but also to the impressive network of women studies practitioners with ties to the university. Perhaps the largest archival resource available to me was the Sarah Doyle Women's Center archives. Yet-to-be formally processed, the archives offered an informal look at notes, drafts, influences, and internal discussion leading to the establishment of the Pembroke Center and the Women's Studies concentration. In the University Archives, I made use of the papers of Provost Frank Durand and Paul Maeder, as well as the papers of President Howard Swearer to construct an institutional history, starting in 1971 with the merger of Pembroke College with the Men's College at Brown University, leading up to the formal approval of the Pembroke Center and the Women's Studies concentration and its founding semester. Also within the Brown University Archives, I used course announcements to trace Women's Studies intellectual history, determining what courses it used to institutionally define itself. Finally, while I did look at course materials of Naomi Schor and Anne Fausto-Sterling from the Feminist Theory

Archives, little of their material made it into the actual thesis. However, the wide range of contributors to those archives made clear to me the Pembroke Center's esteemed reputation in feminist theory.

Using my experiences as a student, I began research with the subjective knowledge that somewhere along the line, women's studies at Brown lost sight of its original purpose. Through my research, I learned that the roots of this can be tied to the transformation of women's studies, lower-case, an informal area of intellectual curiosity, to Women's Studies, upper-case, an institutionally recognized and regulated area of study. While practitioners at Brown were aware of this distinction, I argue that they were unable to maintain a self-awareness or the "self-reflexivity" that took into account the academic structure *they* adopted in order to ensure and maintain Women's Studies at Brown. This failure resulted in the marginalization of its political mission from its research and teaching and allowed itself to be tokenized by the university as a demonstration of diversity and "cutting-edge" intellectual work.

The history of women's studies at Brown University is a story of the tension between examination of human experiences and academic standards. Caught between radical political motivations, tied to their roots in second-wave feminism, and the requirements of institutional regulation, the actors of this story had to negotiate a complex and layered landscape. Their story speaks to questions of the *purpose* of higher education, of the relationship between universities and people's lived experiences. It troubles the notion of objectivity as well as of modernist, postmodernist, and postcolonialist thought as organizations of intellectuality. Therefore, while this project's scope is particular to Brown University in the 1970s and 1980s, focusing on only a few

actors in one part of the university, its specificity speaks to wider notions of academic study, radical politics, and personal experiences.

Institutional Historical Context

Due to social upheaval in the 1960s and 1970s, American universities re-evaluated their purpose in society: to justice, democracy, and identity. With the Civil Rights Movement, Black Power Movement, second-wave feminism, and other radical political movements dedicated to social betterment of minorities, American universities aimed to make themselves “an instrument for social change dedicated to providing access and social justice.”² By changing their curricula, canon, pedagogy, and student demographics, American academics looked to reorient the purpose of higher education.

In 1969, Brown University introduced the New Curriculum. Proposed by two undergraduate students, the New Curriculum eliminated core requirements in undergraduate learning, so that students could have more choice and responsibility in their education. In addition, the New Curriculum aimed to remove constraint from grade achievement. First, it removed “failure” from its grading spectrum, opting instead for “no credit,” meaning any course in which a student did not reach “satisfactory completion,” he/she simply would not get credit. Second, with the New Curriculum, the Brown administration stopped calculating Grade Point Averages (GPAs) for students. Finally, it allowed any student to take any course satisfactory/no credit (similar to pass/fail at other institutions). The New Curriculum demonstrated the university’s commitment to reorient

² Catharine Stimpson, *Women’s Studies in the United States: A Report to the Ford Foundation* (New York: Ford Foundation, 1986), 16.

higher education away from arbitrary grade achievements toward the pursuit of knowledge.

Another way in which many universities across the nation changed their curriculum was through the introduction of courses focusing on groups of people who had previously been excluded. One of the most obvious examples of this is the emergence of Black Studies, Afro-American Studies, and Ethnic Studies programs that developed in U.S. universities during the 1960s. Often created in response to sit-ins and other forms of protest by the student population, members of American university communities looked to create “scholarly programs that would focus on the understudied histories and situations of African Americans, Asian Americans, Chicanos and Native Americans.”³

In 1968 at Brown University, black students staged a walk-out, in which “almost all of Brown’s Negroes walked off the campus, charging that the university was not making a meaningful commitment to its black students.”⁴ In response, the university’s president, Ray L. Heffner, formed a committee on Afro-American Studies. By January 1969, Brown offered its first Afro-American course, titled, “Black Assertion.” By the close of the 1968-69 academic year, the university agreed to offer an Afro-American Studies concentration to begin at the start of the 1969-1970 school year.⁵

Women’s Studies, conversely, arrived on college campuses—and at Brown—through a more gradual process—that is to say without protest and through faculty. The release of Betty Friedan’s 1963 *The Feminine Mystique*, a survey of Smith College

³ “History,” Department of Ethnic Studies, University of California, Berkeley website, <http://ethnicstudies.berkeley.edu/history.php>

⁴ “Brown Will Offer a Course on Blacks,” *The New York Times*, February 2, 1969.

⁵ Martha Mitchell, “Afro-American Studies,” *Encyclopedia Brunonia* (Brown University Library, 1993).

classmates, and Kate Millett's 1970 dissertation *Sexual Politics* were important milestones in the integration of feminism and academia. In 1969, members of the National Organization for Women (NOW) founded Know, Inc., "a publishing house directed toward the dissemination of serious feminist writing."⁶ These feminist works "provided the basic questions that spurred the development of women's studies," thereby forging a link between feminism and the academy.⁷

The first Women's Studies program in the United States was at San Diego State University (then San Diego State College) in 1969-1970; the second was in 1970-1971 at Cornell University.⁸ Within a decade, Women's Studies programs began to spread to "institutions of virtually all kinds in regions that spanned the United States."⁹ In 1976, *Women's Studies Newsletter* estimated there were 151 programs in the United States.¹⁰ By 1980 there were twice that number, and by 1985 there were 450. During the 1990s the count exceeded 600.¹¹ While these were the first formal programs (thus, Women's Studies capitalized), many universities in the 1970s offered, "an ensemble of courses listed on bulletin boards and often taught for free" in women's studies that were not yet institutionally ratified (hence, women's studies lower case).¹² In 1969-1970, Sheila Tobias at Cornell University published *Female Studies I*, an anthology of syllabi of

⁶ Sarah Slavin Schramm. "Women's Studies: Its Focus, Idea Power, and Promise," in *Women's Studies: Contributions in Women's Studies*, Number 2, eds. Kathleen O'Connor Blumhagen and Walter D. Johnson (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978), 3.

⁷ Marilyn Boxer, *When Women Ask the Questions: Creating Women's Studies in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 12.

⁸ *Ibid*, 1, 10.

⁹ *Ibid*, 10.

¹⁰ Schramm, "Women's Studies," 3.

¹¹ Boxer, *When Women Ask the Questions*, 10.

¹² Robyn Wiegman, "The Possibility of Women's Studies," in *Women's Studies for the Future: Foundations, Interrogations, Politics*, eds. Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Agatha Beins (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 40.

women's studies courses taught or proposed during 1969-1970, which triggered a national discussion of practices in Women's Studies and women's studies.¹³

Brown, like many formerly all-male universities, also became co-ed in the late 1960s. In 1969 Brown University made plans to merge Pembroke College with the Men's College. The university formed a Pembroke Study Committee to evaluate the potential pros and cons of merging the two colleges. In 1971, the majority of the committee agreed to the merger, requesting that the university make plans to provide a unique space offering "guidance, support, and resources for women at Brown and to serve as a research center on education for women."¹⁴ This request led to the 1975 founding of the Sarah Doyle Women's Center, created to "meet the needs of women."¹⁵

Also during the 1970s, Brown University was advancing women's studies. Mari Jo Buhle, a women's historian, was hired in the American Civilization program in 1972. Soon, she was joined by biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling and anthropologist Louise Lamphere, all of whom taught women's studies courses in the early 1970s, raising the number of undergraduate students at Brown who pursued independent concentrations in women's studies in the 1970s. In 1977, Elizabeth Weed was appointed director of the Sarah Doyle Women's Center. As director, she constructed an *ad hoc* Women's Studies Board, which was made up of faculty and administrators—and eventually, undergraduate and graduate students—from various disciplines who were interested in developing Women's Studies at Brown. Buhle, Fausto-Sterling, Lamphere, and Weed were among

¹³ Boxer, *When Women Ask the Questions*, 4.

¹⁴ Pembroke Study Committee, "Majority Report," 1971, p. 2, Papers of Provost Paul Maeder, OF-1CA-1, Box 1, Folder I.6: Pembroke/Brown, Brown University Archives, John Hay Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

¹⁵ "Announcements," Papers of Provost Frank Durand, OF-1CA-D1, Folder I. 89, Brown University Archives, John Hay Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

the main players. With this board, she created pamphlets, held discussions, and advised independent concentrations in women's studies.¹⁶

Also in 1977, Brown was confronted with the Consent Decree. Denied tenure in 1974 from the Anthropology Department, Louise Lamphere teamed up with other women faculty and filed a class action lawsuit against Brown University for systematic discrimination against women. The suit was settled out of court with the consent decree that "mandated percentages and timetables for the hiring and tenuring of women faculty."¹⁷ In 1976, just before the consent decree, 2.5 percent of the tenured faculty and 8.5 percent of the untenured faculty were women.¹⁸ In 1992, when the decree was vacated by the court, "Brown had increased its number of tenured women faculty five-fold."¹⁹ Nevertheless, the decree caused tensions to soar on campus and sent women's studies as a topic of inquiry to the forefront at Brown University.

In 1979, the Working Group on the Status of Women revived the Nancy Duke Lewis Chair, which had originally been established to bring "distinguished feminist scholars to occupy the chair on a visiting basis."²⁰ By reviving the chair, the university agreed to fill the chair on a full-time basis, in conjunction with another departmental appointment. A year later, the university appointed Joan Wallach Scott, a women's historian, the Nancy Duke Lewis Chair in conjunction with the History department. She

¹⁶ Elizabeth Weed, "1977-78 Annual Report (Sarah Doyle Center)," p. 4, Papers of Howard Swearer, HRS III. 221 OF-1C-15, Folder: Sarah Doyle Women's Center (78-79, 79-80), Brown University Archives, John Hay Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Weed, *Notes on Pembroke Center's History: 1981-1991* (Providence: Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women, 2011), 4.

¹⁸ Lyde Cullen Sizer, "'A Place for a Good Woman': The Development of Women Faculty at Brown," in *The Search for Equity: Women at Brown University, 1891-1991*, ed. Polly Welts Kaufman (Providence: Brown University Press, 1991), 184.

¹⁹ Anne Diffily, "Five Questions for Louise Lamphere," *Today at Brown*, October 16, 2008, accessed March 20, 2013, <http://today.brown.edu/articles/2008/10/lamphere>.

²⁰ Weed, *Notes on Pembroke Center's History*, 3.

teamed up with Weed to draft a proposal for the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women, which would incorporate the Sarah Doyle Center and would hopefully house a Women's Studies concentration.

On May 19, 1981, The Academic Council formally recommended the establishment of the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women, appointing Scott as Director and Elizabeth Weed as Executive Director. On May 19, 1981, President Howard Swearer formally approved the Pembroke Center and Scott and Weed's appointments, which would be effective as of June 1, 1981, "for a period of five years," and which point it would be re-evaluated by university administration.²¹ Embedded in this recommendation was approval of the women's studies concentration. The review committee wrote, "The new Pembroke Center would have as a primary mission the organization of curricular and research efforts in this important study area."²² Thus, the Women's Studies concentration was launched under the auspice of the Pembroke Center.

Intellectual Context

From the beginning, women's studies' mission was to "transform the university so that knowledge about women was no longer invisible, marginalized or made 'other.'"²³ Not only did women's studies practitioners want to introduce knowledge of

²¹ Howard Swearer, Letter to Joan Scott, dated May 19, 1981, p. 2, Papers of Howard Swearer, HRS IV. 33 OF-1C-15, Folder: Pembroke Center (80-81, 81-92), Brown University Archives, John Hay Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

²² Lewis P. Lipsitt and Maurice Glicksman, "Committee Report: Proposal for PEMBROKE CENTER," p. 3, Papers of Howard Swearer, HRS IV. 33 OF-1C-15, Folder: Pembroke Center (80-81, 81-82), Brown University Archives, John Hay Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

²³ Alice E. Ginsberg, "Triumphs, Controversies, and Change: Women's Studies 1970s to the Twenty-First Century," in *The Evolution of American Women's Studies: Reflections on Triumphs, Controversies, and Change*, ed. Alice E. Ginsberg (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 10.

women to the university, they wanted to challenge the university's presentation and perception of women's studies. However, introducing feminism into the university forced women's studies founders to ask: "if women's studies became a legitimate department within the university, would it still be able to retain its close ties to the feminist movement?"²⁴ This raises the question: *how can an area of study so deeply rooted in activism against patriarchy take part in a historically patriarchal institution without adhering to a patriarchal structure and patriarchal values?*

Surprisingly very little historical scholarship has been published on the formation of Women's Studies in the United States. That being said, it has been a topic of great debate among practitioners from a wide range of academic backgrounds. Political theorist Wendy Brown took up this question in 2001.²⁵ Looking back at the founding of Women's Studies programs in the United States, Brown argued that the introduction of women's studies into the university was a statement, "a profoundly important *political* moment in the academy, the moment at which the women's movement challenged the ubiquitous misogyny, masculinism, and sexism establishing norms and exclusions in academic research, curricula, canons, and pedagogies."²⁶ Wendy Brown thus grounded Women's Studies in the women's movement. As such, its roots were political, not academic. She argued that by entering the academy, women's studies challenged the patriarchal foundation of the academy that had necessitated feminist activism in the first place. If the academy had previously been defined by its tradition and canons, Women's Studies—by

²⁴ Ibid, 27.

²⁵ Robyn Wiegman, "The Possibility of Women's Studies," in *Women's Studies for the Future: Foundations, Interrogations, Politics*, ed. Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Agatha Beins (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 40.

²⁶ Wendy Brown, *Politics out of History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 34.

virtue of gaining existence alongside these traditional curricula—challenged the definition of the academy. Thus, she argued, the only true political work women’s studies could do resided only at the moment in which it became Women’s Studies. In this moment, women’s studies gained a unique position from which practitioners could ask—from a legitimated academic position—why Women’s Studies had been excluded in the first place. In this sense, Women’s Studies’ *existence* would serve as an academic lens for exploration of feminist goals and questions.

Robyn Wiegman, a Professor of Literature and former director of the Women’s studies Program at Duke University wrote a response to Wendy Brown. She argued, “The possibility of women’s studies resides in generating the analytic perspective necessary for apprehending the most paradoxical features of U.S. academic feminist discourse today: its struggle with the forms and consequences of *academic feminism* itself.”²⁷ Wiegman argued that the success of women’s studies lay in its ability to self-evaluate and evolve. By acknowledging the distinction between women’s studies and Women’s Studies, women’s studies practitioners recognized the contradictions between feminism and the academy, activism and tradition. In so doing, women’s studies could provide a comprehensive study of the construction of gender as well as *the value of studying* that construction. Thus, Wiegman advocated Women’s Studies’ flexibility in order to adjust to its changing relationship with the academy and the world beyond.

By claiming a role in academic institutions, women’s studies in some ways validated those institutions. Therefore, in order to maintain its original purpose, women’s studies practitioners needed to resist the values and organization of the academy in some

²⁷ Wiegman, “The Possibility of Women’s Studies,” 42.

ways. As political scientist Sarah Schramm pointed out, women's studies practitioners "need to facilitate consciousness of... oppression among Women's Studiers, activists in the Women's Movement, and other women and to change that oppressed status."²⁸

Schramm argued for consciousness-raising, of sharing experiences of sexism, as a way to connect Women's Studies to its political roots.

This value of experience is evident in the literature about women's studies. In Alice Ginsberg's *The Evolution of Women's Studies*, she includes a preface entitled "My Own Experience," which details her journey to women's studies. In the prompt for the essays included in her book, she asks authors who were important players in the formation of Women's Studies, "*Why were you interested in getting involved in Women's Studies? Did you have any personal experiences or mentors that facilitated this process?*"²⁹ Similarly, the *Politics of Women's Studies* is comprised of personal accounts from "30 Founding Mothers."³⁰ In addition, Marilyn Boxer includes a preface titled "Perspective" in which she provides her own perspective on women's studies, emphasizing the importance of individual experiences.³¹ This emphasis on personal experience in the reflections on women's studies indicates women's studies' interest in using personal experience as a framework for understanding structural injustice.

In *When Women Ask the Questions*, historian Marilyn Boxer argued that women's studies employed what she called feminist pedagogy. By altering the purpose of knowledge, she argued, feminist pedagogy changed the way students learned and

²⁸ Schramm, "Women's Studies," 6.

²⁹ Alice E. Ginsberg, introduction to *The Evolution of American Women's Studies*, ed. Alice E. Ginsberg (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 2.

³⁰ Florence Howe, ed., *The Politics of Women's Studies: Testimony from 30 Founding Mothers* (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2000).

³¹ Boxer, *When Women Ask the Questions*, xv.

professors taught, thereby challenging the academy to reassess its practices. In most women's studies courses, professors employed "feminist pedagogy," which emphasized "the importance of engaging students as active learners and encouraging them to make connections between the materials being studied, their own lives, and those of others (faculty as well as students) with whom they interact."³² Feminist pedagogy, Boxer argued, demonstrated women's studies' connection to activism beyond the university by pushing students to apply knowledge learned in the classroom to their own *experiences* and their professors' *experiences*. In so doing, it loosened the barriers between students and faculty by acknowledging their collective connection to the "materials being studied." This loosening of professor-student roles challenged traditional modes of transmitting knowledge. With feminist pedagogy, women's studies practitioners forged an explicit connection between *learning* and *doing*. Feminist pedagogy pushed students to be "active learners," meaning they were *doing* things with their education—*claiming* an education rather than *receiving* one.

The current scholarship on the introduction of these programs takes up the issue of balancing political activism with academic legitimacy, much as I do. However, unlike them, I offer a specific account of the development of Women's Studies that sits at the intersection of institutional and intellectual history.

Chapter Overview

My first chapter will discuss the process by which women's studies became Women's Studies at Brown University. Its establishment coincided with increasing

³² *Ibid*, 81.

emphasis on postmodernist thought in academia. As I have come to understand postmodernism, it is characterized by its rejection of a meta-narrative of progress toward a white male dominated point of arrival. As such, women's studies used postmodernism to refute perceptions that women's studies' ultimate goal was to gain inclusion into the university, thereby becoming Women's Studies. Instead, practitioners at Brown called upon women's studies' pervasive and diffuse existence in the university prior to its institutional approval. In doing so, they maintained a distinction between Women's Studies and women's studies so as to not allow its definition to hinge on institutional acknowledgement.

In my second chapter, I trace how Women's Studies practitioners at Brown, now under the auspices of the Pembroke Center, became leaders in postmodernist feminist thought, radically questioning categories of gender through its research and teaching. In doing so, the Center ensured its survival, which it looked to perpetuate by constantly promoting its pre-eminence. In doing this, the Center's administration utilized institutional politics to maintain its inclusion in a white male-dominated structure: a decidedly un-postmodernist notion that subverted its original intention to reach oppressed women in favor of appealing to academics and potential funders. Doing this without employing a pointed self-consciousness of its own use of an institutional structure caused the Center to lose sight of the cultural-political aspect of its mission: to liberate women.

Finally, my third chapter will examine how Women's Studies practitioners at Brown used interdisciplinarity in an attempt to balance their transformational aspirations with their need for institutional legitimacy. Following the lead of other Women's Studies programs around the nation, practitioners at Brown promoted the Pembroke Center as an

interdisciplinary research center, which would include the Women's Studies concentration. Maintaining an interdisciplinary approach, they theorized, would allow them to maintain enough academic legitimacy so as to maintain its existence, while also offering them enough critical distance to challenge traditional disciplines. However, since the Women's Studies concentration at Brown was housed within the Pembroke Center, its interdisciplinary interaction was limited to the confines of the Center, which meant two things. First, because "interdisciplinary" became a catchphrase for the university to promote its liberal learning, and because the Center promoted its interdisciplinary work to attain administrative approval, this interdisciplinary conversation became a tool of the university, rather than a tool for women's studies to challenge the barriers of disciplinary research as a means to challenge sexism. Second, it gave institutional structure to oppression, thereby putting sexism and racism in two separate Centers, with no clear lines of collaboration between them.

Women's Studies practitioners at Brown, under the auspices of the Pembroke Center, became satisfied with theory as an end in and of itself. Without acknowledging the limitations its own structure posed to collaboration for the purpose of liberating oppressed peoples, the Pembroke Center separated the theoretical from the practicable. In doing so, it lost sight of its original feminist goals, allowing itself to be tokenized by the university, thereby becoming a tool through which the university could deny its patriarchal existence.

“creative institution building”³³: from women’s studies to Women’s Studies

In 1981 Brown University formally approved a Women’s Studies concentration, granting A.B degrees to its first two graduates in 1983.³⁴ This official endorsement of the concentration came after more than a decade of development of women’s studies at Brown, during which several Brown University undergraduates earned A.B. degrees in women’s studies through independent concentrations. By calling attention to this gradual development, practitioners at Brown called attention to the distinction between women’s studies and Women’s Studies. In doing so, they offered a definition of women’s studies that did not rely on institutional approval.

Beginning with the 1971 Majority Report’s stipulation that Brown University form a center for the personal, educational, and research needs of women, women’s studies established its presence on Brown’s campus. The first women’s studies courses were offered in the early 1970s, taught by women’s historian Mari Jo Buhle, biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling, and anthropologist Louise Lamphere.³⁵ Administrators Karen

³³ Quote from Elizabeth Weed, *Notes on Pembroke Center’s History: 1981-2011* (Providence: Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women, 2011), 26. In reference to people involved in Pembroke Center’s history. Full quote: “What I find truly remarkable is that in my decades of involvement with the Center, I have been surrounded by people with minimal patience for unnecessary bureaucracy and maximum energy for creative institution building.”

³⁴ Rebecca Colesworthy, *Women’s Studies Concentrators at Brown: 1981-2001* (Providence: Pembroke Center, 2001), 1.

³⁵ Weed, *Notes on Pembroke Center’s History*, 4.

Romer and Kay Hall, who were hired in 1972 and 1973, respectively, founded the Working Group on the Status of Women, which was made up of faculty, administrators, and students.³⁶ This group played an integral role in the establishment of the Sarah Doyle Women's Center (SDC) and the revival of the Nancy Duke Lewis Chair. When Elizabeth Weed was appointed director of the SDC in 1977 she formed the *ad hoc* Women's Studies Board, which compiled lists of women's studies courses and advised undergraduate independent concentrations in women's studies. Buhle, Fausto-Sterling, Lamphere, and Romer were among the founding members. Under the directorship of Weed, the SDC worked closely with campus groups, such as the Third World Center, The Resource Center, Women Athletes, Women of Brown United, Residential Counselors, Orientation Committee, and Brown Alumni Monthly to sponsor events and hold discussions about concerns that were important to women on campus.³⁷ Such concerns included sexual harassment, Women's Studies in American universities, the history of Pembroke College, the Consent Decree at Brown, and working women.

In 1980, Joan Scott, a women's historian, was hired as the first permanent Nancy Duke Lewis Professor, with a joint appointment in the History department. Scott and Weed, along with the rest of the *ad hoc* Women's Studies Board began drafting plans for an official Women's Studies concentration to be housed within their proposed Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research. Finally, the Center and the concentration attained

³⁶ *Ibid*, 3.

³⁷ Elizabeth Weed, "1977-78 Annual Report (Sarah Doyle Center)," p. 4, Papers of Howard Swearer, HRS III. 221 OF-1C-15, Folder: Sarah Doyle Women's Center (78-79, 79-80), Brown University Archives, John Hay Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

university approval in May 1981.³⁸ Thus, the establishment of Women's Studies came after years of development of women's studies. While institutional approval of the women's studies concentration was an institutional win in the history of women's studies at Brown, it did not serve to define—or even establish—women's studies at Brown. It was merely an institutional acknowledgement of something that already existed.

The national rise in Women's Studies programs followed a similar trajectory to Brown's. In the 1970s, many universities offered, “an ensemble of courses listed on bulletin boards and often taught for free.”³⁹ In 1969-1970, Sheila Tobias at Cornell University published *Female Studies I*, an anthology of syllabi of women's studies courses taught or proposed during 1969-1970.⁴⁰ Thus, there was a distinction—at Brown and at other American universities—between “women's studies” and “Women's Studies.” The un-capitalized version points to an area of intellectual inquiry, whereas the capitalized version points to an academic institution. In “women's studies,” women are the owners. In “Women's Studies,” the academic institution is the owner.

Although establishment of an institutionally recognized Women's Studies concentration at Brown came twelve years after the first program in the United States, Brown's development of women's studies followed a similar timeline to national Women's Studies programs, the first of which began during the 1969-1970 academic year. By 1980, when the ad hoc women's studies board was drafting the proposal for the

³⁸ Howard Swearer, Letter to Joan Scott, dated May 19, 1981, p. 2, Papers of Howard Swearer, HRS IV. 33 OF-1C-15, Folder: Pembroke Center (80-81, 81-92), Brown University Archives, John Hay Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

³⁹ Robyn Wiegman, “The Possibility of Women's Studies,” in *Women's Studies for the Future: Foundations, Interrogations, Politics*, ed. Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Agatha Beins (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 40.

⁴⁰ Marilyn Boxer, *When Women Ask the Questions: Creating Women's Studies in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 4.

Pembroke Center, there were over 300. By 1985 there were 450 programs, and by the 1990s the count exceeded 600.⁴¹ Therefore, by the time Brown was establishing its Women's Studies program, founders around the nation were beginning to ask *now what?* How could women's studies maintain its radical, political, feminist roots while maintaining its academic legitimacy? Now that it was part of the university, did that mean it perpetuated the academic structure that had excluded it for so long? Did Women's Studies have the same potential to transform the university as women's studies had?

For many, the transformation from women's studies to Women's Studies marked the ultimate win for women's studies. With an officially approved concentration, women's studies at Brown became accessible to far more students. In addition, a formally approved undergraduate concentration could open the door for professional opportunities in women's studies, hopefully encouraging graduate school programs, faculty positions, and research opportunities. What's more, women's studies could now claim academic legitimacy at Brown; it was an institutionally acknowledged, supported, and organized entity.

Still, for others, establishment of Women's Studies meant an indoctrination of feminism into patriarchal academia. By becoming Women's Studies, women's studies was among the traditional disciplines, no more equipped to offer a critique of the academy. Institutionalizing Women's Studies meant submitting to institutional regulation and a mitigation of their radical nature.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 10.

The *ad hoc* Women's Studies Board was aware of these conversations about Women's Studies' potentiality and therefore gestured to them in their proposal for the Pembroke Center and the concentration within it. Two of the documents they included in their appendix—a 1980 *New York Times* article about the national trend of Women's Studies in American Universities and Stanford's 1980 Report on the founding of its Women's Studies program—demonstrate the national tension surrounding women's studies transformation into Women's Studies. By including these documents, the *ad hoc* Women's Studies Board interrogated its own development as they looked to develop women's studies at Brown into Women's Studies. By articulating this distinction, they used their development of Women's Studies as an opportunity to refute reliance on institutional approval for definition.

Intellectual historical context

In 1980, when Scott and Weed, along with the ad hoc women's studies board, were drafting proposals for the Pembroke Center and a Women's Studies concentration, women's studies programs were on the rise in U.S. universities. In response to this rising trend, women's studies practitioners and founders, students, and popular media debated the purpose of Women's Studies and its relationship to politics and academia. One powerful example that included all three perspectives is a 1980 article in the *New York Times* entitled, "Women's Viewpoints Gain Respect in Academe." In it, the author, Leslie Bennetts, recounted the growing popularity of Women's Studies in American universities and interviewed directors of Women's Studies programs at various institutions as well as some undergraduate students. The *ad hoc* Women's Studies Board

included a copy of this article in the appendix to its official proposal to the Academic Council for the Pembroke Center. In doing so, they indicated their awareness of this conversation as they ventured to institutionalize their own program. Moreover, because the article cited the growing trend of Women's Studies programs at American institutions, the Board encouraged Brown University to keep up with its peers. The divergent answers captured in this article demonstrate the tension that existed in thinking about women's studies' relationship to the academy and women's studies' relationship to feminism.

In the article's introduction, Bennetts wrote, "women's studies attempts to remedy what its proponents view as the omission of the experiences and achievements of women from traditional teaching in subjects ranging from history and literature to economics and biology."⁴² According to Bennetts, women's studies was a correctional force in U.S. universities: it filled a void where something had been missing. Phrased in this way, Bennetts suggested women's studies could do little more than that. She did not suggest women's studies could interrogate *why* there had been an omission in the experiences of women, which would interrogate sexism in the university. In this sense, then, women's studies' *action* would simply be inclusion. Its critique of the university would stop when it became part of it. As an outsider to women's studies—a non-practitioner—writing a non-editorial piece, Bennetts represented an aspect of perceptions of women's studies from outside the academy.

⁴² Leslie Bennetts, "Women's Viewpoint Gain Respect In Academe," *New York Times*, December 2, 1980, appendix to "Proposal: Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women," (1981), p. 5, Papers of Howard Swearer HRS IV. 33 OF-1C-15, Folder: Pembroke Center (80-81, 81-82), Brown University Archives, John Hay Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

Nevertheless, some of the founders she interviewed gestured toward women's studies' larger goals, namely challenging sexism. When asked about the purpose of women's studies in the academy, Elaine Marks, chairman of the women's studies program at the University of Wisconsin, said, "It's a matter of realizing how pervasive sexism was in all aspects of the culture... Women's studies by definition has a feminist perspective, and as such it has to be implicitly political in the sense that it implies the desire and the need for change. We want to change the university."⁴³ Marks, like Brown, grounded women's studies in the feminist movement. As such, its embedded goal was feminist: to challenge sexism. As an academic entity, women's studies' specific goal was to challenge sexism in the university: to look at how women as actors had been marginalized in the professional structure of academia as well as how women as topics of academic inquiry had been excluded from the curriculum. Thus, Marks argued, women's studies' goal was not to include women where they had been excluded, but further, to interrogate *the reasons why* they had been excluded from the university in the first place, thereby changing the university. In this framework, the subject of women's studies was not women, as it was often perceived; rather, the subject of women's studies was the social categorization of women. By maintaining this, Marks argued, women's studies could maintain its political fervor to transform the academy.

Some women's studies practitioners prioritized women's studies' broader political goals to the point that they viewed women's studies as a stepping-stone to those goals. In the same *New York Times* article, Marianne Ferber, director of the women's studies program at the University of Illinois, said, "My idea of utopia is the day when we no

⁴³ *Ibid*, 5-6.

longer need women's studies."⁴⁴ Women's studies worked to fulfill a need in that specific moment. Once it fulfilled that need entirely, its existence would no longer be necessary in the academy. In this sense, women's studies served a temporary, transformative role in the university. Women's studies pointed to the former absence of women's experiences as viable academic evidence. Ferber argued that women's studies' goal was more than gaining inclusion into the university; its ultimate goal was to gain internalization of the experiences of women into the foundation of the academic structure. Thus, according to Ferber, women's studies raised consciousness of women as academic subjects. Once it raised consciousness of women as viable academic subjects to the point that it became subverted in the academic structure—if it could—women's studies would no longer need to exist. Its work would be complete.

Still, women's studies practitioners needed to keep in mind women's studies' role *in the lives of women*. Bennetts interviewed one undergraduate student, Judy Lebold who transferred from University of North Carolina to University of Massachusetts so she could major in women's studies. Lebold made the decision after taking a women's studies class at UNC and realizing she could not pursue a degree in it. She described the course, saying, "It was talking about my life, women's lives, the history, politics and socialization of women."⁴⁵ Lebold felt empowered by the subject of her women's studies course because the subject connected her experiences as a woman to experiences of other women. It raised her awareness of women's *socialized* experience and validated that experience as a practicable academic area of inquiry. In this sense, women's studies mirrored the consciousness-raising rap groups of second wave feminism, "a discursive

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 6.

instrument: women got together, ‘rapped,’ shared their ‘experiences,’ found commonalities, and began to analyze them in a discussion.”⁴⁶ Doing this in the classroom granted women’s experiences academic legitimacy. Thus, according to Lebold, women’s studies’ purpose was to substantiate women’s experiences as academic evidence of sexism.

These varying perspectives on the purpose of women’s studies indicate tension among practitioners regarding Women’s Studies’ academic and political vitality. *Was Women’s Studies an academic realization of feminism? Or a feminist realization of academia? Where did the personal experiences of women fit into Women’s Studies?* By asking these questions during their development of Women’s Studies, Brown practitioners demonstrated a self-awareness of the stakes involved. By understanding the stakes, they could hopefully avoid co-optation of women’s studies by the university.

The study of women

Also included in the appendix to their formal proposal for the Pembroke Center, was the Report of the Task Force on The Study of Women at Stanford from March 1980. The report conceptualized the development of women’s studies into the institutionally recognized field of Women’s Studies. The women’s studies board used this report, citing, “We found the one developed by proponents of women’s studies at Stanford to be as persuasive as any we might write.”⁴⁷ In fact, Stanford’s explanation of its development of

⁴⁶ Michelle Murphy, “Toxicity in the Details: The History of the Women’s Office Worker Movement and Occupational Health in the Late Capitalist Office,” *Labor History* 41.2 (2000), 196.

⁴⁷ “Why a Center for Women’s Studies at Brown?,” p. 1, appendix to “Proposal: Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women,” Papers of Howard Swearer, HRS IV. 33 OF-1C-15, Folder: Pembroke Center (80-81/ 81-82), Brown University Archives, John Hay Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

women's studies mirrored in large part Brown's focus on women's studies as an intellectual curiosity preceding institutional recognition, as a means to establish Women's Studies as an institutionally and academically legitimated area of study.

First, the Stanford report refuted popular perceptions that women's studies was new to academia. They wrote, "The study of women is not a new field of intellectual inquiry."⁴⁸ Stating "the study of women is not... new" places this curiosity about women's experiences and its institutional consciousness on different points in a timeline. Curiosity about women *preceded* its institutional consciousness. By making this distinction, the authors emphasized that what was known institutionally as "Women's Studies" had longstanding roots that subverted institutional acknowledgement. Thus, women's studies was not defined or created by its institutional legitimation.

The use of the phrase "study of women," rather than "women's studies" reveals a bottom-up approach. The author(s) wanted to make it clear that Women's Studies, as the institutionally recognized entity, came out of an informal curiosity about women's experiences. As such, it existed apart from the university; it did not rely on the university structure for its existence or creation. Therefore, academia was one branch of many through which this curiosity could be explored.

Proponents of women's studies at Brown similarly worked to establish women's studies' precession to its institutional approval. In April 1979 the Lida Shaw King Fund, Sarah Doyle Women's Center, Associate Alumni of Brown, University Committee on the Arts, Third World Center, Brown University departments, and Women of Brown United sponsored an event titled "Women's Issues in the Brown Curriculum: The Forgotten

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 1.

51%.”⁴⁹ The title itself called attention to what already existed in the university but had been overlooked: “The Forgotten 51%” pointed out the contradiction that women made up the majority of undergraduate students and yet the curriculum treated them as minorities.

The event aimed to do two things. First, make known the ignored prevalence of women’s studies already established within traditional disciplines at Brown University. Second, offer a forum to strengthen women’s studies within each of them. Lasting 11 days, the event consisted of “colloquia, panel discussions, and workshops designed to examine research on women and explore ways of integrating such research in the Brown curriculum.” The event covered a variety of disciplines, ranging from History to Slavic Studies to Sculpture to Biology & Medicine.⁵⁰

Within each discipline, interested faculty and students—from Brown and other institutions—discussed contemporary research on women’s issues as well as ways in which women’s studies perspectives could be incorporated into the discipline. For example, in Biology & Medicine, interested members met for a colloquium on *The Significance of Lactation in the Evolution of Mammals*. In the Music discipline, members of the Brown University Wind Ensemble played works by women composers. Faculty and students within semiotics hosted a panel called *The Fetishization of Women in the Cinema*. In addition to discussions within disciplines, the event held panels dedicated to “Explorations,” in which interested students, faculty, and community members discussed *Women’s Studies at Other Institutions* and *The Future of Women’s Studies in the Brown*

⁴⁹ “Women’s Issues in the Brown Curriculum: The Forgotten 51%,” Folder: Women’s Studies Concentration and Curriculum, Sarah Doyle Women’s Center Archives, Sarah Doyle Women’s Center, Providence, Rhode Island.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Curriculum. They also had a section dedicated to “Beyond the Ivory Tower,” consisting of panels called *Dual Career Marriages* and *Women’s Studies and the Community*.⁵¹

By discussing women’s studies within disciplines at Brown, at institutions besides Brown, and in the community beyond Brown, this event demonstrated the ubiquity of women’s studies, not only as an area of academic study, but also as a topic of intellectual, political, and practicable inquiry. In doing so, organizers and participants demonstrated women’s studies’ presence in the lives of women, thereby proving its existence at Brown while also interrogating the ways in which its existence could be emphasized more. In this sense, the event organizers blurred the line between inclusion and exclusion of women’s studies; women’s studies was part of the Brown curriculum by virtue of it being a part of women’s lives, it just wasn’t institutionally recognized or supported yet.

In the Stanford report, the authors defined the “study of women” as a “field of intellectual inquiry.”⁵² Using the word “intellectual,” rather than “academic” pointed to its transcendence beyond the university. Women’s studies (growing out of the “study of women”) began with a set of questions: *what are the differences between men and women? What are women’s experiences? What are the bases of misogyny? Where does it come from?* Women’s studies grew out of a desire to identify misogyny and to understand it. In order to do so, it interrogated the basis for the exclusion of women’s studies from the academy.

Growing out of a field of “intellectual inquiry,” women’s studies then sought “integration of fundamentally critical analyses of gender into established academic

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² “Why a Center for Women’s Studies at Brown?,” 1.

curricula,” which the authors described as “relatively new.”⁵³ “The established academic curricula” referred to traditional disciplines that were already part of the academic structure. Thus, incorporating aspects of the “intellectual inquiry” of “the study of women” into established aspects of traditional academic structure, women’s studies founders were able to gain institutional footholds. What’s more, by entering traditional disciplines without becoming an entrenched discipline itself, women’s studies gained a unique position in which it could critique the traditional academic structure, which I will discuss in my final chapter.

Thus, the question arose: *how* would women’s studies integrate itself into the traditional curricula? Dorcas Dobie, an alumna of Brown University, consulted Ann Seidman about this during the 1978-1979 academic year. Seidman, a visiting Nancy Duke Lewis Professor in Sociology that year, emphasized the importance of *integrating* women’s studies into university curriculum. “Ann Seidman does not see the goal of women’s studies to be the establishment of a strong but separate women’s studies department. Although she recognizes the need for courses dealing specifically with women’s studies at a time when the role of women is generally neglected, the ultimate goal is general awareness and integration.”⁵⁴ Seidman pointed out that while the act of creating a separate women’s studies department was seductive in its ability to shed light on the topic of women within academia (something that had historically been ignored), the true goal of women’s studies was to pervade intellectual thought and scholarship. Thus, women’s studies’ goals were not ultimately institutional, but rather intellectual.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 1.

⁵⁴ “Toward a New Goal for Women’s Studies,” p. 3, Folder: Women’s Studies Concentration and Curriculum, Sarah Doyle Women’s Center Archive, Sarah Doyle Women’s Center, Providence, Rhode Island.

Still, Seidman noted the institutional means by which this intellectual goal could be realized. She “urges the establishment of small groups... of students within each department to work with interested faculty on compiling critical bibliographies designed to situate women’s studies within particular disciplines. It would be especially valuable if each group could consider how the integration of women’s perspectives might alter a discipline’s fundamental theoretical assumptions.”⁵⁵ By working to establish women’s studies’ impact in all already-established academic disciplines, these students and faculty could prove women’s studies’ academic worth. Women’s studies already existed within the academy; it did not need to be created, but rather, brought to light. Seidman recommended incorporating “women’s perspectives” into disciplines, which suggests that women’s perspectives had been historically absent from these disciplines. This means that the theoretical assumptions on which these disciplines had been based were men-centered, and therefore patriarchal. Therefore, by asking students and faculty to question how incorporating “women’s perspectives” could “alter a discipline’s fundamental theoretical assumptions,” Seidman was asking students and faculty to evaluate how bringing women’s studies to light in traditional disciplines could challenge patriarchy within each established discipline at Brown. By doing this in each discipline, proponents of women’s studies could use the established institutional model to achieve a larger feminist goal: challenge patriarchy in the university.

By asking questions about the origins of misogyny and how it operates in women’s lives, women’s studies necessarily denaturalized gender differences, thereby offering a critical analysis of gender. By asking these questions within traditional

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 2.

disciplines, women's studies founders not only raised academic consciousness of gender as a social construct to a wide audience, but also transformed traditional curriculum and the sets of questions driving each discipline. Therefore, the incorporation of questions about gender set in motion a transformation of academia, which necessitated that scholars no longer take gender for granted as an absolute truth.

The *ad hoc* Women's Studies Board at Brown used their Stanford counterpart's perception of the development of women's studies into Women's Studies while they were trying to do the same at Brown. In doing so, the board resisted allowing their Women's Studies to hinge on the specific institution of Brown. In addition, they pointed to an inevitability of Women's Studies. Using Stanford's account as backup, the board argued that women's studies already existed at Brown; Women's Studies inevitably would too.

Women's Studies and the academic structure

The 1980s marked a transition from modernist to postmodernist intellectual thought. Both postmodernism and modernism are, by nature, difficult to define. Postmodernism is often characterized by its interest in "Fragmentation, indeterminacy, and intense distrust of all universal or 'totalising' discourses."⁵⁶ As such, it espouses a 'rejection of 'meta-narratives' (large scale theoretical interpretations purportedly of universal application)."⁵⁷ Modernism, then, suggested a meta-narrative of progress, working toward a point of arrival, the achievement of which would be measured by a white male heterosexual standard. Second-wave feminism, out of which women's studies

⁵⁶ David Harvey, "The Condition of Postmodernity," in *The Post-Modern Reader*, ed. Charles Jencks (London: Academy Editions, 1992), 300.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 300.

in the United States grew, exemplified modernist thought. Thus, many feminists of the 1960s and 1970s wanted to achieve inclusion of women's studies in the white male-dominated academy. As postmodernism crept in, making a definitive mark in academe by the 1980s, founders of these programs began pondering the risk of inclusion. If women's studies was working toward inclusion, thereby becoming Women's Studies, did that mean they were subscribing to—and therefore, perpetuating—a patriarchal narrative of progress?

In 1984, three years after the founding of the Pembroke Center, philosopher Jacques Derrida led a seminar with members of the Pembroke Center, the editorial board of its undergraduate feminist journal *subjects/objects*, and a few other visitors. Derrida, heralded as the founding father of deconstructionism (also called poststructuralism), was one of the leaders of postmodernist thought in the 1980s. He gave the members of the editorial board permission to record and transcribe the seminar, describing it as “authorized, but authorless.”⁵⁸ The editors titled the transcription “Women in the Beehive” and published it in the 1984 issue of *subjects/objects*.

The topic of the seminar was the transformative potential of women's studies in 1984 United States. Derrida noted, “Departments of Women's Studies in America are now becoming a relatively solid institution,” the wording of which suggests a required specificity of time (“now,” meaning 1984) and place (“America,” meaning the United States).⁵⁹ Still, in 1984, Derrida was asking questions similar to those posed by women's studies founders in 1980: *how could an area of study so deeply rooted in activism against*

⁵⁸ Jacques Derrida et al., “Women in the Beehive: A Seminar with Jacques Derrida,” *d i f f e r e n c e s: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 16:3 (2005), 139.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 141.

patriarchy take part in a historically patriarchal institution without adhering to a patriarchal structure and patriarchal values? In 1984, Women's Studies departments were becoming a singular institution. As such, they risked becoming—and therefore perpetuating—the institution that had excluded them.

As a framework to discuss this, Derrida used Franz Kafka's parable "Before the Law," an allegorical tale about human desire to access what we cannot. In the story a man from the country arrives at a door—the door to the Law—guarded by a gatekeeper. Because the gatekeeper will not permit him to enter, the man decides to wait. He waits his entire life, up until his death, at which point, the gatekeeper tells him no one has tried to get through the door because the door was made only for him, at which point, I argue the gatekeeper is revealed to be part of the man from the country. Thus, the man from the country was his own gatekeeper standing between his self and the Law. The Law, therefore, is the thing we simultaneously desire, conceal, and protect. Although we have the potential to allow ourselves access to the Law, doing so would eliminate the need for a door to the Law; we would just be in it. Derrida argued by gaining academic legitimacy, Women's Studies programs were becoming guardians of the Law, by which he meant guardians of the structure of the institutional force that had kept them out. Therefore, as women's studies became Women's Studies, it ran the risk of co-optation into the university structure that had historically produced the sexism that had maintained exclusion of women and women's studies.

Derrida wondered if women's studies had the potential to redefine the Law, and in turn, transform the university. He asked, "Is there in the abstract or even topical idea of women's studies something which potentially has the force, if it is possible, to

deconstruct the fundamental institutional structure of the university, of the Law of the university?”⁶⁰ In order to interrogate the potential of women’s studies, Derrida turned to “the abstract” or “topical idea of women’s studies.” He removed it from its practical application in the academy. In doing so, he attempted to disengage it from the Law. *What is women’s studies if it is not defined in terms of its relationship to the Law?* The “fundamental institutional structure of the university” refers to the foundational organization of the university. To deconstruct it is to challenge the foundation, the very ideas around which the entire academy is organized for the purpose of knowledge-production. If there is an aspect of women’s studies that can transform the university, it will do so, Derrida argued, by challenging the university’s foundation. However, this can only be done if women’s studies is considered separately from the academy. It cannot transform the academy if its relationship to the Law cannot be re-imagined.

Nevertheless, Derrida acknowledged that the institutionalization of women’s studies was a necessary part of its existence. “Of course it has been a necessary phase, strategically speaking, to build women’s studies. But what should be the next step? Only this first move, this first effort? Or something totally new?”⁶¹ In 1984, three years after the founding of the Pembroke Center and the official approval of the Women’s studies Concentration, Derrida asked women’s studies practitioners at Brown, *now what?* He recognized that Women’s Studies had to be built—to find some sort of legitimate academic foothold. But, he argued, it must then do something else.

The fact that Derrida’s seminar occurred at the Pembroke Center demonstrated that the Center looked toward poststructuralism as a means to effect change. Derrida’s

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 144.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 144.

emphasis on differences (plural) and deconstruction of the Law as a way for Women's Studies alter the misogynistic structure of the academy pointed to postmodernist engagement with fragmentation and pluralization. As I will discuss in my next to chapters, The Pembroke Center made efforts to do this: to re-orient itself to the university Law through its research and relationship to disciplines. However, in order to do this, the Pembroke Center needed to exist and survive: it needed funding, offices, faculty positions, and an administration. What's more, the vast majority of the people who were making this happen *were women*. Thus, the actors themselves were grappling with sexism *as working professionals*. How could they connect their postmodernist deconstruction to their lived experiences? While Derrida admitted that institutionalization had to be done, he did not propose *how*.

Postcolonialist theorists have criticized such disconnection between theory and practice. Gaining momentum in the late 1980s and 1990s, postcolonialism marked yet another intellectual turn. Postcolonialists like Edward Said and Samir Amin criticized postmodernist theorists for being “satisfied with showing complexity and pluralism rather than offering a critique of a system that continues to ravage peoples, cultures, resources, and places.”⁶² Postcolonialists have criticized postmodernists' favoring theory at the expense of rectifying fundamental injustice. Because postmodernism does not offer practicable applications of theory, adoption of it runs the risk of losing sight of an original purpose. As Women's Studies at Brown utilized philosophies of postmodernism, its ability to simultaneously radicalize its theory and its institutional presence was strained.

⁶² Naoko Shibusawa, “Ideology, Culture, and the Cold War” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, eds. Richard H. Immerman and Petra Goedde (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 33.

Theoretically Radical: Limitations of Women's Studies' Self-reflexivity in the Pembroke Center

By 1980 academic feminism was a topic of fervent discussion among American universities. As Women's Studies programs were established around the nation, its practitioners and founders created spaces in which they could discuss how Women's Studies could maintain its original radical critique while still being a legitimate part of academe. Practitioners had formed the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA); research institutes, such as Radcliffe's Bunting Institute, Wellesley's Center for Research on Women, and Stanford's Center for Research on Women; and academic journals, such as *Signs* and *Feminist Studies*.⁶³ While some of these organizations were tied to specific universities, they all worked to study and theorize about Women's Studies' progress and its potential.

The Pembroke Center was established in 1981 to serve a similar purpose. Organized into three branches—research, teaching, and cultural-political—it was designed as an organizational force for women's needs on campus. That is to say, the Center had broad aspirations for feminist thought through radical research, expanding its scope through undergraduate teaching, and disseminating it to a community of women through its political-cultural arm. In order to keep all these three aspects of academic feminism simultaneously in tension required a high level of self-consciousness that not

⁶³"Why a Center for Women's Studies at Brown?," p. 2, appendix to "Proposal: Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women," Papers of Howard Swearer, HRS IV. 33 Pembroke Center (80-81, 81-82), Brown University Archives, John Hay Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

only continuously critiqued the work it produced, but also continuously examined its institutional structure and position within a larger academic structure.

The Pembroke Center has been immensely successful in the research and teaching branches of its original mission. Particularly with its founding project, “Cultural Constructions of Female,” the Center asked radical questions that launched feminist theory into a new postmodernist realm. Its pre-eminent reputation among scholars as a leader in postmodernist theory brought intellectual superstars, like Jacques Derrida, to lead seminars, lectures, and discussions. Naturally, however, these superstars provided good publicity for the Center, which its administrators—who were often also its scholars—could then use to ensure the Center’s continued survival. With this, however, the audience for the Pembroke Center became the academic structure, promoting itself to potential funders instead of a wider feminist audience. Thus lauding such intellectuals as superstars can ironically be seen as fundamentally “un-postmodernist,” because it demonstrated a concern with a meta-narrative of institutional progress. While this was arguably necessary for its survival, the Center’s mission called for a critique that should have required a self-conscious awareness of this use of institutional politics. Therein lay an internal contradiction: to be true to its stated goals, the Center should have been *analyzing* this use of institutional politics as part of its effort to understand the pervading structure of sexism. And this, I argue, is where the Pembroke Center fell short. Survival meant, or perhaps required, a lack of pointed self-consciousness of its own institutional structure, and thus the Pembroke Center marginalized the cultural-political aspect of its mission, satisfying itself with radical questioning that was contained in its theory. It thereby lost sight of its original purpose to liberate oppressed peoples: women.

Gaining Inclusion

In order for women's studies to begin to critique the academy, it needed first to be a part of it. Whether that meant establishing a Women's Studies program, re-orienting traditional curricula, or re-writing History to include women, women's studies *in some way* needed to become part of the white male-dominated academy. As such, women's studies' original mission, as it emerged out of second-wave feminism, was fundamentally modernist. Women's studies practitioners—in their various forms—wanted to make progress for women, which they measured by the extent of women's studies' institutional presence. By gaining this inclusion, women's studies could then point to its historical exclusion as a means to identify the exclusionary structure and politics of the academy. Women's studies practitioners at Brown showed deep concern for this modernist notion of progress throughout their development—when they were not yet Women's Studies practitioners—and in their treatment of the history of women at Brown.

Prior to the founding of the Pembroke Center and the official inauguration of the women's studies concentration at Brown, the Sarah Doyle Women's Center (SDC) hosted a conference in May 1978 called, "The Role of Women's Studies in the University." The conference consisted of a panel moderated by Helen Astin, the Nancy Duke Lewis Visiting Professor of Psychology and Sociology. The participants were Elaine Reuben, the coordinator the National Women's Studies Association; Catharine Stimpson, Associate Professor of English at Barnard College and Editor of *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*; and Adele Simmons, president of Hampshire College. Catharine Stimpson and Adele Simmons also presented their papers, discussing

“the role of women’s studies in the academic curriculum and the... state of women’s studies scholarship.”⁶⁴ This conference, similar to ones within the NWSA, academic feminist journals, and research institutes that were cropping up around the nation, was interested in critiquing Women’s Studies itself. They asked, what is the purpose of Women’s Studies? How does it interact with already established aspects of the academy? By asking these questions before an official concentration—therefore, Women’s Studies capitalized—had been approved at Brown, the coordinators demonstrated their awareness that women’s studies existed at Brown regardless of institutional acknowledgement. In doing so, the coordinators pointed to, as a site for interrogation, the *institution’s* reluctance to establish Women’s Studies.

At the conference, Catharine Stimpson presented her paper on the politics of consciousness. Stimpson argued that women’s studies enacted politics of consciousness, by “attempting [to] alter both individual mind and institutions.”⁶⁵ Women’s studies, she argued, worked to challenge misogyny on both the institutional level—by way of forcing its existence into the academy and traditional disciplines—while simultaneously challenging misogyny within individuals by interrogating the basis of gender differences and inequality. This idea challenged the perception that women’s studies’ landmark merely lay in inclusion. Women’s studies’ goal was not merely to be included into the university, but rather to use inclusion into the university to point to and examine the misogynistic politics of academic legitimacy.

⁶⁴ “The Role of Women’s Studies in the University,” Papers of Provost Frank Durand, OF-1CA-D1, Folder I.18, Brown University Archives, John Hay Library, Providence, Rhode Island. Elizabeth Weed, Memorandum to Frank Durand April 10, 1978, Papers of Provost Frank Durand OF-1CA-D1, Folder I.18, Brown University Archives, John Hay Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

⁶⁵ Catharine Stimpson, “Politics of Consciousness,” p. 1, Papers of Provost Frank Durand, OF-1CA-DF, Folder I. 18, Brown University Archives, John Hay Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

Stimpson proposed that reactions to Women's Studies' institutional existence reflected general feelings towards women in society. In fact, she argued that Women's Studies *could* transform individual minds and institutions *because* it was "an intellectual movement of zeal and promise [that] inspires hostility and/or malign neglect." They thus served as "analogies to general responses to women."⁶⁶ By this, Stimpson meant that perceptions of and reactions to Women's Studies in the academy reflected general responses to women in society. Women's Studies held transformative power by analyzing reactions to it.

Stimpson argued this connection between reactions to Women's Studies and reactions to women is evident in four ways: first, trivializing women as the subject of thought is to trivialize women in public life; second, the assumption that Women's Studies will be done badly is analogous to the "pervasive suspicion that women [are] irrational, or intellectually inferior"; third, agreeing that some paradigms of Women's Studies are plausible but not incorporating them into the curricula is like acknowledging some positive features of the women's movement but not wanting to go "too far with it"; finally, attacking some of Women's Studies' paradigms is similar to attacking any change in the status of women as wives and mothers.⁶⁷ By drawing the connections between Women's Studies to the greater picture of women in the world, Stimpson called attention to the important underlying political action of women's studies: challenging the sexism that was obviously pervasive in general society, academia included. Thus, she argued, women's studies' struggle to become Women's Studies held a mirror up to society,

⁶⁶Stimpson, "Politics of Consciousness," p. 2.

⁶⁷ Stimpson, "Politics of Consciousness."

thereby pointing to the common foundation between academic institutional politics and widespread sexism.

Yet the relationship between the perceptions of women's studies and women was not analogous, but rather symptomatic. Women's studies was trivialized, condescended to, restricted, and oppressed *because* women had been relegated to a similar role in society. The two are not separate entities; most Women's Studies practitioners were the same as the women who were being marginalized in society. Their treatment as academics trying to gain institutional acknowledgement of an area of intellectual inquiry was at times discriminatory *because* they were women and they were proposing an institutional study of women. Denial of them as professionals, academics, and subjects was a result of sexism that existed in American culture, which included the American academy. By hosting this conference, when women's studies was not yet Women's Studies at Brown, the Sarah Doyle Women's Center illuminated the value of its struggle to become Women's Studies as a means to expose sexism embedded in the structures in which women's studies was trying to be a part. In doing so, the Sarah Doyle Center politicized the moment of Women's Studies' inclusion into the university, maintaining a connection between Women's Studies and the women's movement; Women's Studies was meant to address marginalization of women.

The Pembroke Center administration, namely Elizabeth Weed, tried to maintain this awareness of its purpose to women by using "women" in the title: Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women. Similar to reactions to Women's Studies, reactions to the word "women" in the title revealed wider feelings toward women. Elizabeth Weed retrospectively called attention to this in her 2011 account of the

Pembroke Center's history. She wrote, "'Women' seemed out of date, just the opposite of the cutting-edge center that Pembroke was. And for those who wanted to marginalize or even trivialize the Center—there were always a few—the 'Women' in the name provided the perfect justification."⁶⁸ Using the Pembroke Center's focus on women as terms for its marginalization and trivialization exhibited—in an institutional setting—deep-seeded biases against women. Therefore, by gaining an institutional position, the Pembroke Center moved discussions of sexism to the forefront of academia. Weed, the founding Executive Director of the Pembroke Center, made connections, like Catharine Stimpson, between treatment of the Center—the organized institutional force for women's studies at Brown—and treatment of women at large. Making this connection, Weed suggests that on an institutional level, she and the other founders were aware that institutional acceptance of the Pembroke Center did not indicate a final point of arrival for the women's movement. On the contrary, institutional acceptance of the Pembroke Center *exposed* the prevailing sexism within the institution to which it had just gained acceptance. Weed's awareness of the tension surrounding the word "women" in the Center's title indicates that the Center set out to maintain a connection, as Women's Studies, to women and their marginalization.

In fact, the naming of the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women proved a political act in more ways than one. The use of "Pembroke" in its title called upon the history of women's education at Brown. Ten years earlier in 1971, the Pembroke College had merged with the Men's College at Brown University. As discussed in my first chapter, the Majority Report that agreed to the merger had requested

⁶⁸ Elizabeth Weed, *Notes on the Pembroke Center's History: 1981-2011* (Providence: Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women, 2011), 12.

that the women's center thus established "could be called Pembroke."⁶⁹ This did two things. First, it provided alumnae of Pembroke College an institutional nod to their alma mater, which would garner alumnae support for the Center. Because of limited financial support from the university administration, this was necessary to the Center's survival. Second, the name gave the Pembroke Center an opportunity to include the legacy of Pembroke College in the legacy of Brown University. Brown University's history would not be considered the same as the history of the Men's College.

The Center's founders appealed to the administration of Brown—and President Howard Swearer in particular—to rectify the loss Pembroke College had suffered following the merger by pointing to the history of marginalization of women and their experiences within the institution of Brown. Their appeal proved successful. On October 22, 1981, President Swearer ordered the transfer of funds from the "President's Peer Fund" into the Pembroke Center "to cover costs for Pembroke Archive Project" in the amount of \$2,000.⁷⁰ After gaining Swearer's approval, the coordinators requested additional funding from the Monticello College Foundation. They wrote, "To a great extent, the merger subordinated the identity and ideals of Pembroke College to the larger concerns of the university during the 1970s. Because the college no longer had institutional status, its many contributions became blurred."⁷¹ The history of Pembroke College had gotten lost in the merger. Often described as a merger of Pembroke College

⁶⁹ Pembroke Study Committee, "Majority Report," p. 2, Papers of Provost Paul Maeder, OF-1CA-M1, Folder I.17 "Brown/Pembroke Study," Brown University Archives, Providence, Rhode Island.

⁷⁰ "Interdepartmental Invoice: 10/22/81," Papers of Howard Swearer, HRS IV. 33 OF-1C-15, Folder: Pembroke Center (80-81/81-82), Brown University Archives, John Hay Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

⁷¹ "A Proposal to the Monticello College Foundation from Brown University for The Pembroke College Archive Project," p. 1, Sarah Doyle Women's Center Archives, Sarah Doyle Women's Center, Providence, Rhode Island.

into Brown University, the Men's College became synonymous with Brown University, thereby subordinating Pembroke College and its history. Thus, this project would endeavor to include Pembroke College—and therefore, women—into the history of Brown, thereby pointing to the process by which they had become excluded. By re-including Pembroke College's history, the Pembroke Center offered alumnae a reason to re-invest in Brown University because it was as much their university as it was the Men's College's.

The project consisted of “three interrelated parts. 1) Collection by students of oral histories of Pembroke alumnae... 2) Cataloguing, sorting, and publishing a guide to the existing archival materials so that the letters, diaries and other written records of the institution can be available to students and other researchers. 3) Writing a new history, for publication of Pembroke College. The existing histories are outdated and largely anecdotal.”⁷² First, the project would work to include undergraduates in the Center's research, thereby offering common ground on which alumnae could re-connect with Brown. In fact, the coordinators even made plans to offer an oral history seminar focused on the History of Pembroke College.⁷³ Second, the project would organize Pembroke College's historical materials, making them available to more people. Finally, the project would provide the opportunity to *rewrite* the history of Pembroke from a newfound feminist perspective. Not only would their history, written under the auspices of the Brown-approved Pembroke Center, now include Pembroke College in the history of Brown University, it would also challenge the dominant history of Brown University. Not

⁷² “A Proposal to the Monticello College Foundation from Brown University for The Pembroke College Archive Project,” 2.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 1.

only would it point out the sexist conflation of the Men's College with Brown University, it would also challenge definitions of historical evidence. By using "largely anecdotal" accounts of student experiences and diaries and letters, participants in the archive project would validate women's experiences at Pembroke College as viable historical evidence.

Women's studies practitioners at Brown were concerned with using the tension between their institutional presence and institutional acknowledgement of that presence as a means to highlight the sexist politics that were at play in constructing their exclusion. By hosting a conference that shed light on reactions to Women's Studies as symptomatic of sexism and by mandating an archival project through its institutionalization that would reject an institutional History of Brown that subverted women's presence and experiences, practitioners made a modernist endeavor to make themselves part of the center of power that had excluded them.

Asking Radical Questions

While the archive project and "The Role of Women's Studies" conference fulfilled a modernist desire to achieve inclusion, postmodernism became the dominant intellectual discourse in the 1980s. Postmodernism, as I discussed in my last chapter, promoted fragmentation and chastised meta-narratives. As the Pembroke Center developed in the early 1980s, its research, teaching, and seminars adopted these postmodernist ideals. By hosting postmodernist thinkers, researching "social constructions of female," and self-promoting as a theoretically cutting-edge institution, the Pembroke Center became a leader in postmodernist feminist thought, constantly critiquing the work they produced in order to probe deeper into the roots of misogyny.

The Pembroke Center was cutting-edge in its ability to critique the work it produced, thereby refuting universalizing claims about women and their social category; however, its work was limited to the theoretical. Because of a failure to maintain awareness of its own institutional structure that it created as a means to gain inclusion, the Pembroke Center segmented its feminist efforts, separating its theory from its practice.

Perhaps the most prominent example of the Pembroke Center's theoretical self-awareness in a postmodernist moment is Jacques Derrida's "Women in the Beehive" seminar. Held in 1984, Derrida questioned the value of institutionalizing Women's Studies, as many women's studies practitioners in the United States had been doing. In discussing the women who manage women's studies programs, he asked, "Do they not risk constructing an institution similar to the institution against which they are fighting?"⁷⁴ With a focus on the plurality of difference in order to deconstruct binaries, Derrida pointed out that differences are vital to the purpose of women's studies; women's studies must reject the meta-narratives created by academia that had maintained women's studies' exclusion for so long.

Further, the French theorist insisted, women's studies must do more than offer an alternative to other departments and scholarship; it must challenge them. He stated,

As much as women's studies has not put back into question the very principles of the structure of the former model of the university, it risks being just another cell in the university beehive.⁷⁵

This quotation is worth examining at some length. First, the difference between Derrida's "women's studies" and "Women's Studies" is an important one. The former describes

⁷⁴ Jacques Derrida et al., "Women in the Beehive: A Seminar with Jacques Derrida," *difference: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 16:3 (2005): 142. This article recalls the seminar two decades later.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 142.

women's ownership of this focus of study; the latter describes the university's ownership of the women's focus of study. The former means what it says; the latter says more than it means. In Derrida's discussion, women's studies—(without the capital, so therefore, women)—are the subjects.

Second, these subjects were attempting to act on an object—in this case, “the very principles of the structure of the former model of the university.” The “former model of the university” refers to university education, which, Derrida explained, was largely “constructed at the beginning of the nineteenth century in Germany, in Berlin.”⁷⁶ He pointed out that this institutional model had been reproduced exactly in the U.S., the only exception being Women's Studies. Therefore, the “former model of the university” is the American academy before Women's Studies; that is, before women's studies *became* Women's Studies. The “structure” of this former model was that of knowledge production, of which the “principles” were objectivity.

Third, Derrida does not say “the principles of the former model University”; rather, he says, “the very principles *of the structure* of the former model of the university” (italics added). Thus, Derrida suggested a complete deconstruction of traditional academia. In other words, Derrida argued that women's studies must not only commence a critique of traditional academia; it must work to place the values that informed the structure of traditional university academia into a space outside of which women's studies can challenge them continuously.

Fourth, Derrida's phrasing, “put back into question,” signifies an ambiguous

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 142.

temporality.⁷⁷ It ascribes to women's studies practitioners the power to exist outside the original principles of American academia, suggesting an outward-in point of view of the subject that ignores their continued roles in American academia. The phrase, moreover, "put back" implies that these principles have already been in question, but Derrida does not specify by whom. He may have been gesturing toward the very moment at which women's studies first appeared in the university as Women's Studies, at which point—by virtue of existing where it hadn't existed before—critiqued the scope of American academia. And finally, "into question" points to action: women's studies must be active. But not only that, "into question" suggests a beginning—that "questioning" the original principles will be a continuous act; one that never stops, but rather evolves over time.

Thus Derrida was saying that if women's studies did not continue to question the values of the structure of the academy, "it risks becoming another cell in the university beehive." The university beehive is the knowledge-producing structure of the academy, which has been informed by misogynistic values. If women's studies became "another cell in the beehive" it would not only lose its ability to deconstruct that beehive, it would also become a productive member of the beehive. Yet, the question remains, *how* could women's studies maintain its critique of the beehive? Using Kafka's parable, "Before the Law," which I discussed in my previous chapter, Derrida proposed two ways in which one can re-imagine one's relationship to the Law (which in this case, can serve as ways Women's Studies could re-imagine its relationship to the beehive): optimistic and pessimistic deconstruction.

⁷⁷ Since some of the seminar was conducted in French, it is possible that Derrida used the French *remettre en question*.

Optimistic deconstruction suggests Women's Studies has the same potential as women's studies to challenge the academic structure. With optimistic deconstruction, "one cannot be content with only positive research... one must push to the end of the radical question concerning the university Law and do more than simply institute a department of Women's Studies."⁷⁸ This type of deconstruction is optimistic because it assumes women's studies *can* push to the end of the radical question and that it *can* do more than gain institutional inclusion. It suggests not only that establishing Women's Studies is not the end, but also that establishing Women's Studies does not change the orientation of the radical question women's studies was asking. This type of deconstruction poses two problems, however. First, what is *the* radical question? Second, what is the end of this radical question? With this, what is the value of reaching the end of a radical question? With deconstruction, doesn't one run the risk of deconstructing to the point of destruction?

The Center aimed for optimistic deconstruction through its research projects. Its first project, called, "Social Constructions of Woman," proposed a study of gender as a social construction. In the proposal, they wrote, "The Research proposed is not narrowly restricted to women as a subject. Rather it addresses substantive and theoretical questions about how societies and groups in a single society define gender: the role of and the relationships between men and women."⁷⁹ Thus, the radical question with this project was what does "women" mean? Pushing to the end of that radical question meant interrogating the structure that had created the category "women," and in turn, the

⁷⁸ Derrida et al., "Women in the Beehive," 144.

⁷⁹ "Project Description," p. 1, Sarah Doyle Women's Center Archives, Sarah Doyle Women's Center, Providence, Rhode Island.

category “men.” Therefore, the project’s goal was not simply to include women as subjects of academic study, but moreover, to examine how women’s experience had been constructed within a gender dichotomy. In this sense, the project refused to use “women,” a socially constructed category characterized as inferior, as the starting point; rather, it aimed to use postmodernist methods of fragmentation to refute the misogynist meta-narrative of women’s inferiority.

The project aimed to perform this postmodernist critique by restructuring its approach—in essence, to break out of the beehive cells. Instead of designating its methodology to one particular discipline, the researchers argued, “answers will not emerge entirely from quantitative analysis of empirical description, but rather from a broad humanistic cross-disciplinary analysis.”⁸⁰ Qualifying their analysis as “humanistic” suggested that “quantitative analysis of empirical description” created a meta-narrative that overlooked human nuances. Thus, the project’s aim was not to be “objective,” but rather to place academic value in subjectivity. Suggesting “humanistic” analysis suggested they would place human values and truths above other projected value metrics, such as institutional, academic, etc. Their audiences would be individual people, not academics or institutions. By proposing a cross-disciplinary analysis, these researchers proposed a re-orientation of the already established academic structure. By combining disciplines and putting them in conversation with one another, the researchers suggested their project could utilize what was already in the university to create something new. Limiting analysis to disciplinary methodologies meant limiting the research’s ability to

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 7.

remain humanistic. By following strict disciplinary methodologies, researchers' audiences became academics and institutions, not individuals.

Moreover, the researchers aimed to avoid speaking only to academics by institutionalizing as part of the Pembroke Center, a channel by which they could disseminate their work outside the university. They explained their plans for community engagement:

The social dimension of the project—our concern with the national need for new ways to think about the cultural definition of women—will be addressed through the Pembroke Center. Under those auspices, we will invite Brown alumnae/i and community people to seminars staffed by members of the Center and research project. The purpose will be to introduce such people to our research and to other new work in the areas of women's studies. They will then carry their learning back to their jobs, homes, families, communities, social, and political activities. We will achieve a popular dissemination of our work, and of course, cement relations with a group which is often not reached by contemporary scholarship on women.⁸¹

Weed and Scott emphasized that this project, and the mission of the Pembroke Center, would have wide implications, reaching beyond academia and beyond “Women’s Studies” as an intellectual entity. The purpose of academic research, they argued, was to relate it to peoples’ lives. They wanted to research social constructions of female as a means to explore what it means to be a woman in society. The Pembroke Center thus provided an institutionally approved and fortified space, name, funding, and mission that would allow for its members to forge a bridge between academia and homes, communities, politics, cultures, and societies so that they could be intertwined. Thus, Weed and Scott acknowledged their manipulation of institutional politics to forge these relationships and to work towards accomplishing a fundamentally feminist goal beyond

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 11.

academia. In addition, disseminating the work to communities beyond academia promoted funding from these other realms so that the Pembroke Center could solidify and legitimate its existence.

In fact, Weed and Scott looked to incorporate this awareness of the power implicated in their institutional position as an area of inquiry in and of itself. They acknowledged, “It is precisely because scholars must have both time and an appropriate context in which to do such work well that the proposed project is needed.”⁸² The coordinators argued that the *need* for the Pembroke Center to exist had to be interrogated by this research. Why did women’s studies need to carve out this institutional space within which to perform such research? Why did these questions need to be sanctioned by the university in order to be asked?

Thus, the Pembroke Center’s research worked to push to the end of the radical question about misogyny from its institutional position as Women’s Studies. However, it is important to note that its conception of its research that is captured here, in its proposal, was written with the intent of receiving funding, not only from Brown’s administration, but also from national foundations such as the Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Humanities, from which it did, in fact, receive partial funding. While it promoted its interest in sharing its work with the Providence community, and doing so while maintaining a consciousness of the necessity of its institutional existence within the Pembroke Center, the audience in this case was still academic institutions.

⁸² *Ibid*, 7.

Speaking theoretically, Derrida argued the risk of destruction was the very risk women's studies should be taking. If Women's Studies is part of the academy, part of its structure—if not all of it—is informed by the academic structure in place, whose values include misogyny. Thus, in order to challenge the values of the structure of the academy, women's studies must continue to challenge those values by challenging the structure. In so doing, women's studies practitioners run the risk of deconstructing Women's Studies, the thing they worked so hard to build. Derrida understood this paradox.

We have to negotiate. To maintain, for instance, women's studies as a classical program, a now classical program, and at the same time to ask radical questions which may endanger the program itself. And what is the measure? You must check everyday what is the measure. One thing may be a good measure at Brown, but perhaps it would be the worst thing at Yale, for instance.⁸³

Derrida's phrase, "women's studies as a classical program," refers to Women's Studies. Derrida argues that while women's studies practitioners must work to maintain Women's Studies, they must also keep in mind the radical impulse upon which they built Women's Studies, knowing all the while, that this radical impulse conflicts—and at times, even contradicts—the institutional existence of Women's Studies. These radical questions, then, according to Derrida, would demonstrate women's studies practitioners' awareness of the distinction between women's studies and Women's Studies. This distinction—this negotiation, as Derrida puts it – between the two would be *crucial* to maintaining women's studies radical nature as Women's Studies. Thus, the purpose was not to *reconcile* women's studies radical impulse with Women's Studies institutional existence, but rather to hold the two in tension: to utilize their differences as a means to mutually critique.

⁸³ Derrida et al., "Women in the Beehive," 155.

However, while utilizing these differences met the criteria of postmodernist thinking in one respect—in the fragmentation of women’s studies into multiple parts—it ran the risk of creating a meta-narrative for women’s studies everywhere in the nation. Thus, Derrida argued that these programs must “check everyday what is the measure.” Derrida maintained that all practitioners must determine a way to test their program’s viability that is specific to time and place. If it did not seek this specificity, it allowed universality to stand in for truth. By being specific and self-aware, women’s studies would not rely on being “classical” for definition. But if women’s studies practitioners did not check the measure specifically and everyday, Women’s Studies would become a singular institution, dominated by meta-narrative.

This goal of specificity can be captured in what Derrida calls pessimistic deconstruction.

If one were to radically deconstruct the old model of the university in the name of women’s studies, it would not be to open a territory without Law—the theme of liberation if you like. But it would be for a new relation to the Law. It is necessary to establish departments of Women’s Studies which would resemble their brothers and sisters of literature, philosophy, anthropology, etc., but after one had done that, one would already have found the Law again. But at least one would have radically changed the situation. One would have rediscovered the Law, but at least one would not be bored any longer.⁸⁴

This second type of deconstruction assumes women’s studies *cannot* push to the end of the radical question. It can ask the radical questions, but it is limited to its position as Women’s Studies. Pessimistic deconstruction recognizes that challenging the academy through Women’s Studies will not yield an academic structure that is completely void of

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 144.

the Law that built it, and therefore excluded Women's Studies. Women's Studies will, to some extent, incorporate the academic structure into its own existence. Therefore, the most women's studies practitioners could do was ask radical questions, all the while knowing that this radical questioning would be confined by its institutional structure. Thus, "one would have rediscovered the Law," meaning Women's Studies perpetuated and reinforced university Law through its own institutional organization. Yet, "one would not be bored any longer," meaning at least women's studies would have arrived at the Law through a different process from its "brothers and sisters." Thus, pessimistic deconstruction suggested a self-awareness of its own institutional constraints and how these constraints limited the radical nature of the radical questions it was trying to pose. In maintaining this self-awareness, at least, women's studies practitioners could discover the Law again *through* radical questioning. They may not have answered the radical questions—or pushed to the end of the radical questions—but at least they began posing them.

In its 1980 proposal, the Pembroke Center did concede to an institutional structure within itself. In the beginning stages of proposing the Center, the founders identified "a terrible need for a centralized effort—one which would coordinate faculty-student needs."⁸⁵ The Pembroke Center would serve as an institutionally recognized organizational force for women's concerns on campus. In order to do so, the Pembroke Center needed to propose a means by which they would organize these concerns. An early draft of the Pembroke Center proposal included a flow-chart, delineating the branches of the Pembroke Center. Under the "Pembroke Institute for Teaching and

⁸⁵ Proposal Draft, p. 1, Sarah Doyle Women's Center Archive, Sarah Doyle Women's Center, Providence, Rhode Island.

Research on Women,”⁸⁶ there were three branches: “research,” “teaching,” and “cultural & political.” The Research branch listed a number of projects underway, including “Cultural Constructions of the Female” and “Biology of Gender,” both of which would be researched by Brown faculty, graduate students, visiting scholars and postdocs.

The “teaching” unit was the academic unit responsible for teaching and undergraduate curriculum, the development of a library in women’s studies, and cooperation with the Pembroke Center of research projects. Thus, the “teaching” unit would incorporate the undergraduate population of Brown into its intellectual aspirations. It would develop and moderate a curriculum for women’s studies, thus endeavoring to make it a viable academic major at Brown. This branch of the Pembroke Center would also work in tandem with the research arm in order to mutually benefit.

Finally, the “cultural & political” arm was to be housed in the Sarah Doyle Center, an institutional unit already in existence on campus. The SDC would remain “as is;” there were no plans of collaboration delineated into the organization of the Pembroke Institute. The authors of the proposal, the *ad hoc* Women’s Studies Board, who were operating through the Sarah Doyle Center at the time, clarified that despite this incorporation, “the broad educational function of Sarah Doyle Center will remain. In light of the report of the Brown Project on coeducation, it seems particularly appropriate a close relationship between the two centers be guaranteed by this formal connection.”⁸⁷

“The Brown Project on Coeducation” refers to a 1979 report by the Committee on the

⁸⁶ Before consulting institutional definitions, they thought an “Institute” would be the best institutional channel to utilize.

⁸⁷ “Proposal: Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women,” p. 4, Papers of Howard Swearer, HRS IV. 33 OF-1C-15, Folder: Pembroke Center (80-81/81-82), Brown University Archives, John Hay Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

Status of Women at Brown that analyzed the effects of the merger on Brown undergraduates, both men and women. The Report identified several areas for improvement in the personal, social, professional, and academic needs of women. Thus, the Pembroke Center argued to the Brown administration that by incorporating the SDC, the Pembroke Center would help ameliorate those issues. However, they did not specify *how* the SDC would interact with the teaching and research arms.

The way the proposed organization of the Pembroke Center seemed to specialize its different aspects. By organizing according to meet certain academic standards, the Pembroke Center made the personal and political concerns of the Sarah Doyle Center “other” to the academic concerns of the Teaching and Research arms of the Pembroke Center. As the Teaching and Research arms strived to reach the top echelons of academia, the Sarah Doyle Center’s connection to academia became unclear. Whereas the SDC housed the *ad hoc* Women’s Studies Board prior to the Pembroke Center’s founding, the SDC was relieved of such formal academic ties and was thus relegated to fulfill vague “broad educational function.” And also given the Center’s aspirations to disseminate their research project, “Cultural Constructions of Female” to the Providence community, the Sarah Doyle Center would ostensibly be immensely helpful. Yet, the researchers did not outline a way in which these ties could be solidified so that the information could go from Pembroke to Sarah Doyle and then outward from campus and be able to affect women’s lives in the community. As such, the center’s aspirations to connect its research to its specific community seemed merely a theoretical notion, something that was not actually put into practice.

Bringing Jacques Derrida to speak was, in fact, a formidable example of the Pembroke Center's intellectual investments by 1984. Still, it is important to keep in mind that in 1984, Derrida was a superstar within academia, often regarded as one of the forefathers of postmodernism. Thus, while his seminar offered important theoretical criticisms and hopefulness for Women's Studies, in practice it indicated a point of arrival at institutional success for the Pembroke Center; it had earned the ultimate sanction of its work from one of the most formidable postmodernist theorists. Relying on this success was, of course, fundamentally *not* postmodernist, as it supported a modernist narrative of institutional, academic, and intellectual progress.

Postcolonialist Critique

Viewing theory as an end in and of itself is often the basis upon which postcolonialists criticize postmodernist thought.⁸⁸ Postcolonialists, like Edward Said, have argued that postmodernist theory (for example, Derrida's deconstructionism) misses the point. Yes, it deconstructs structures of oppression, but it does so only *in theory*. While people are suffering economic, political, and social injustices, postmodernism only serves intellectualize them. Thus, these postmodernist deconstructions were self-reflexive in unproductive ways. Instead of self-analyzing their ability to connect their work to the subject they were trying to liberate, they have satisfied themselves with self-reflexivity that is only contained to their theorizing.

⁸⁸ See one explanation of this critique in Naoko Shibusawa, "Ideology, Culture, and the Cold War" in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, eds. Richard H. Immerman and Petra Goedde (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 32-49.

Edward Said has addressed these issues specifically within academia. He picked up where postmodernists left off, warning about the dangers of indoctrination of radical ideas into the academic structure. He explained,

[W]e have the curious spectacle of teachers teaching theories that have been completely displaced—wrenched is the better word—from their contexts... ‘traveling theories.’⁸⁹ In various academic departments—among them literature, philosophy, and history—theory is taught so as to make the student believe that he or she can become a Marxist, a feminist, an Afrocentrist, or a deconstructionist with about the same effort and commitment required in choosing items from a menu. Over and above that trivialization is a steadily more powerful cult of professional expertise, whose main ideological burden stipulates that social, political, and class-based commitments should be subsumed under the professional disciplines, so that if you are a professional scholar or literature or critic of culture, all your affiliations with the real world subordinate to your professing in those fields.⁹⁰

The theories’ origins lay in their radical impulse to liberate individuals. By “wrenching” them out of that radical space and placing them in academe, these theories need to be re-assessed. Do they work in academe the same way they work in their original contexts? Said argues that no such attention has been paid, resulting in a trivialization of these theories. Thus anyone could adopt them—study them, read them, analyze them, and critique them—and think they are being radical. These theories are not radical by their own merit; rather, they are *radicalized* by their contexts, by the people who inform them and their *utilization* to realize a better reality for oppressed peoples.

On top of that, Said points to a growing professional domestication of these theories. As these theories traveled to the academy, they have been subsumed by the

⁸⁹ Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 226-47, quoted from Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 321.

⁹⁰ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 321.

professional structure of the academy. Thus, the theories have been utilized, not to liberate oppressed peoples, but rather, to fuel the careers of the subjects. In this sense, Said opposes the “real world” with academic “fields.” That said, however, in some cases fueling careers meant a certain liberation of some oppressed peoples. For example, as some of the founders of the Pembroke Center were women who had been limited in their careers because of their sex, the founding of the Pembroke Center through its research has been a liberating process of sorts. Granted, the oppressed peoples in this case are limited to a small and privileged group of women who had access to academia. What’s more, even this type of liberation was not the large-scale liberation women’s studies practitioners had been claiming to perform.

The Pembroke Center utilized theory as a means to sustain its institutional existence. Elizabeth Weed, former director of the Sarah Doyle Women’s Center and the founding Executive Director of the Pembroke Center, has played a major role in promoting this radical theory. In her 2011, *Notes on the Pembroke Center*, she wrote, “The difference between the Pembroke Center’s intellectual mission and those of other centers of the period can be encapsulated in the difference between thinking of women as the answer and *women as the question*.”⁹¹ The Pembroke Center made “women” the question through their research branch. Their “Social Constructions of Female” project, again, was one such powerful example. By making women the question, instead of the answer, Weed suggested that the Pembroke Center wanted to “push to the end of the radical question,” as Derrida put it in 1984. By re-iterating this in 2011, Weed demonstrates that the Pembroke Center has memorialized itself as a radical institution.

⁹¹ Weed, *Notes on the Pembroke Center’s History*, 7.

However, we must note that such claims were geared toward persuading others of its right to institutionalization. Weed's use of the term "differentiated" harkens to institutional politics, in which the Pembroke Center needed to clearly establish its uniqueness and ability to be "cutting-edge" in order to gain funding and *continue to exist*. The Pembroke Center's existence was precarious, as Brown University only offered part of its funding; the rest they had to get from philanthropic groups, such as the Ford Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Rockefeller Foundation. Thus, their radical theories were the things that not only kept the Center afloat, but also kept the practitioners—at least in part—employed. In this sense, the purpose of their radical theories became the perpetuation of the theorists' professional roles. While I do not doubt that the theorists themselves were optimistic about the theories' transformative capabilities in changing the gendered landscape at the time, the primary audience of their theories became other academics and people who would fund them or promote their funding.

In fact, Weed has acknowledged that these questions have become incorporated into academia: "If these questions no longer seem audacious, it is because the Center has had a major influence on the way questions of gender and difference are addressed today."⁹² Weed acknowledges the importance that those questions were asked at the time. That they no longer seem as bold signifies their success. However, she measures their success in terms of how "questions of gender and difference are addressed today." She does not measure its success in terms of liberation of oppressed peoples. Rather, she places its success in its intellectual inquiry, thereby suggesting its containment within

⁹² Elizabeth Weed, "From the Director," in a 2006 Pembroke Center brochure, Sarah Doyle Women's Center Archive, Sarah Doyle Women's Center, Providence, Rhode Island.

theory. Similarly, Weed has argued for the Pembroke Center's continued radicalism, but has qualified its mission: "It has remained uncompromising about its intellectual mission."⁹³ If the Pembroke Center looked to incorporate a "cultural & political" branch and to use its work in the Providence community, wouldn't its mission be more than intellectual?

Although the Pembroke Center produced self-studies, annual reports, and brochures, its self-reflexivity was limited to its theoretical role. While it placed itself within the intellectual context of the academy and other research institutes, it did not place its radical mission of women's studies within its institutional existence as Women's Studies. It analyzed its role within the institutional structure of Brown University and within the growing trend of Women's Studies programs, but it did not analyze its own structure, which it employed in order to *become* Women's Studies. The Pembroke Center founders and early administrators knowingly manipulated institutional politics to establish and perpetuate the Center's existence; yet, they did not incorporate this use of institutional politics into their analysis. As such, the extent of their self-reflexivity was limited. As a result, the Pembroke Center perhaps unavoidably subverted the radical mission of women's studies to the academic and professional goals of Women's Studies.

⁹³ Weed, *Notes on the Pembroke Center's History*, 10.

Whose Interdisciplinary Work?

With the establishment of Women's Studies programs, women's studies—at least in part—belonged to the university. As a result, practitioners needed to define curricula that met certain academic standards, prompting practitioners to ask, *Should Women's Studies become its own discipline or department, offering its own classes, and requiring specific courses for its students? What would differentiate it from traditional disciplines? If it could not differentiate itself from traditional disciplines, could it offer any sort of critique of them?* One answer for practitioners, including those at Brown University, was to employ interdisciplinary study. Characterized by its use of multiple methodologies from traditional disciplinary study, interdisciplinary study aimed to overcome the segmentation of knowledge as a result of disciplinary barriers. As such, interdisciplinary

study could offer Women's Studies a unique position within the academy: to be academic legitimate in its use of traditional scholarship while maintaining some distance from those disciplines. By negotiating this tension, Women's Studies programs could negotiate their institutional security with their radical critique.

At Brown, the Women's Studies concentration fell under the auspices of the Pembroke Center, which was defined, from its conception, as an interdisciplinary research center. While the Women's Studies concentration benefited from the Pembroke Center's institutional approval and security, its interdisciplinary work was limited to the Pembroke Center's role at Brown. Plus, as Brown became a leader in innovative intellectual work, "interdisciplinary" became its catchphrase: a way to establish "cutting-edge" research in order to garner student interest. Thus, interdisciplinary study became a tool *of the university*. The university could define it, organize it, and use it *for its institutional goals*, thereby subverting its radical aspirations to academic and professional standards of achievement.

Intellectual Historical Context

The question of whether or not women's studies should be its own discipline or department was—and continues to be—the subject of contentious debate. In fact, attendees discussed this very question at the first meeting of the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) in 1979, two years before Brown had an official concentration in women's studies.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Alice E. Ginsberg, "Triumphs, Controversies, and Change," in *The Evolution of Women's Studies: Reflections on Triumph, Controversies, and Change*, ed. Alice E. Ginsberg, 9-40 (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 13.

The institutional advantages of becoming a separate department were largely linked to the resources it could provide. As philosopher and women's studies professor, Sarah Hoagland pointed out, "it is argued that a department will yield a power base. Power is needed both to initiate change from misogynist material and to ensure the permanence of Women's Studies."⁹⁵ As a department, women's studies would be a legitimate part of the university; it would be guaranteed a space on campus, faculty tenure lines, and administrative support.

Furthermore, departmentalization would offer women's studies a comparable status to other, traditional areas of study. Indeed, Marilyn Boxer argued, "without scholars devoted to full-time research and teaching in the field, women's studies would never develop sufficiently to attain that new normality."⁹⁶ Lacking considerable scholarly research and teaching, the academy would not take women's studies seriously. According to Boxer, without faculty committing full-time to research in women's studies (which could only be achieved by becoming a separate department), women's studies would never achieve a secure position (what she calls "normality") in the university. Thus, Boxer argued that women's studies' power would come from its ability to assimilate itself into the university *alongside* traditional disciplines and departments.

However, several theorists of women's studies warned against achieving "normality." By becoming a department, women's studies would run the risk of essentializing its marginalization, allowing itself to be tokenized as a provider of diversity for the university. Instead of challenging the patriarchal foundation of the

⁹⁵ Sarah Hoagland, "On the Reeducation of Sophie," in *Women's Studies*, ed. Kathleen O'Connor Blumhagen and Walter D. Johnson (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978), 17.

⁹⁶ Marilyn Boxer, *When Women Ask the Questions: Creating Women's Studies in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 41.

academy, a Women's Studies department could validate it. Wendy Brown argued, institutionalization of women's studies diminished its meaning: "contemporary identity-based institutions, born of social critique, invariably become conservative as they are forced to essentialize the identity and naturalize the boundaries of what they once grasped as a contingent effect of historically specific powers."⁹⁷ Brown argued that by claiming a role within the university, an institution, which has systematically marginalized women, women's studies practitioners would claim that marginalized identity, thereby naturalizing their position as inferior minorities and validating the patriarchal structure that had constructed their inferiority in the first place.

In addition, becoming a department could limit women's studies' reach within the university. Sarah Hoagland argued, "creating a special department would channel Women's Studies material away from the curriculum of other departments, making it available to fewer students."⁹⁸ Historically, the study of women had been excluded from the curriculum, an exclusion against which women's studies programs rebelled. By making it a department, practitioners would thereby specialize the material, making it a minority curriculum for minority students, rather than an aspect of universal curriculum for everyone. Instead, women's studies could be effective by "confronting what exists rather than being put forward as an alternative to what exists."⁹⁹ By making it a department, women's studies could become an alternative to the traditional curriculum, thereby validating that original curriculum.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 35.

⁹⁸ Hoagland, "On the Reeducation of Sophie," 16.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 17.

By maintaining interdisciplinary status, on the other hand, women's studies could confront what already existed by pushing itself into the traditional disciplines, forcing the academy to redefine the curricular canon. As the Women's Studies Board at San Francisco State noted, "our major purpose is the recognition of women's important 'place' at every level in all disciplines rather than its 'special' character."¹⁰⁰ By being interdisciplinary, women's studies could permeate throughout the university, instead of remaining one isolated section of it. In doing so, women's studies could force members of the traditional disciplines to re-evaluate their methods and subject matter. Because the academy was in many ways defined by its traditional disciplines, this push for reassessment could cause a change in values and perspectives within universities.

Furthermore, an interdisciplinary approach could allow women's studies a unique station within the university. As Wiegman pointed out, "Positioned outside disciplines and institutional economies, feminism was a renegade knowledge, one whose academic illegitimacy demonstrated the movement's central claim concerning women's systematic exclusion."¹⁰¹ An interdisciplinary status offered feminism an opportunity to gain access to the academy while remaining outside the entrenched disciplines. Becoming part of the university could help feminism gain *intellectual* legitimacy, while defying departmental and disciplinary organization could allow women's studies to maintain its *academic illegitimacy*, thereby allowing it to provide a feminist criticism of entrenched—and often patriarchal—disciplinary traditions. Wiegman argued that maintaining this precarious

¹⁰⁰ Boxer, *When Women Ask the Questions*, 37.

¹⁰¹ Robyn Wiegman, "The Possibility of Women's Studies," in *Women's Studies for the Future: Foundations, Interrogations, Politics*, eds. Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Agatha Beins (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 40.

locus would be crucial to the political success of women's studies to transform the university.

Interdisciplinary formation

Creating conversations among and across various disciplines was the process by which women's studies emerged at Brown. As I argued in my first chapter, Women's Studies at Brown was developed out of what already existed among faculty and student interests within established disciplines. Therefore, Women's Studies at Brown was a *product* of conversations across disciplinary lines. When establishing an official concentration by way of piquing student interest, dedicated faculty and administrators promoted women's studies classes in departments spanning Brown's offerings. In doing so, they promoted women's studies courses' applicability to all academic disciplines.

In 1980 the *ad hoc* Women's Studies Board, directed by Elizabeth Weed, in association with the Sarah Doyle Women's Center, released a women's studies brochure for the 1980-1981 academic year. The brochure introduced readers to the "*ad hoc* Women's Studies Board," library resources for women's studies, and "courses of special interest." The compilation of classes on the list of "courses of special interest" included courses from a wide range of departments, including American Civilization, Semiotics, History, English, Sociology, and foreign languages, showing titles such as "History of American Women," "19th Century British Fiction," and "The Family."¹⁰² By promoting classes from a wide spectrum of disciplines, the Women's Studies Board pointed out

¹⁰² *ad hoc* Women's Studies Board, "Women's Studies 80-81," Papers of Provost Frank Durand, OF-1CA-D1, Folder I. 18: "Women's Studies 80-81," Brown University Archives, John Hay Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

women's studies' pervasiveness within the university. The members of the board, too, demonstrated this interdisciplinary cooperation, with members from Anthropology to Biology, many of whom taught courses listed in the brochure. By pointing to courses and professors in various departments, the Women's Studies Board *defined* women's studies as interdisciplinary. Women's studies was not its own academic entity, but rather a set of questions with which to approach traditional disciplines. In doing so, women's studies could be part of the academy (by way of pervading established disciplines) without being indoctrinated into the structure (by becoming its own department).

In fact, the authors, the *ad hoc* Women's Studies Board, were a collection of faculty volunteers from various disciplines who agreed on the intellectual vitality of women's studies. In an invitation to join the *ad hoc* Women's Studies Board, Weed wrote that the group "will advise undergraduates who wish to develop independent concentrations in some area of women's studies and will help those students to find the appropriate faculty resources; it will help faculty members locate sources for stipends, fellowships, released time, etc., for research in women's studies and the development of courses; it will serve as a liaison with other areas of the University involved in curricular development; and it will generally assist with the development of women's studies at Brown."¹⁰³ Calling on faculty at Brown, Weed demonstrated that women's studies was to be developed, not created. The Board would use what was already there—courses, faculty, research, curricula, etc.—to enhance women's studies, an area of study at Brown that was already established enough to make up an independent concentration. By

¹⁰³ Elizabeth Weed, Memorandum to the *ad hoc* Women's Studies Committee, dated November 27, 1979, Folder: "Women's Studies Concentration and Curriculum," Sarah Doyle Women's Center Archives, Sarah Doyle Women's Center, Providence, Rhode Island.

promoting independent concentrations, the *ad hoc* Women's Studies Board sidestepped institutional regulation, allowing informal collaboration among faculty and students to develop a field of women's studies.

This sidestepping of institutional regulations is also clear in Elizabeth Weed's May 1980 meeting notes about drafting this brochure. She wrote, "We discussed at some length the possible steps we might take toward developing a concentration in women's studies. The suggestion that seemed the most feasible was that we work with departments to define women's studies tracks within standard concentrations."¹⁰⁴ In this sense, women's studies' interdisciplinary research emerged out of necessity. Pervading a wide range of disciplines was a more institutionally feasible way to get launch a Women's Studies concentration at Brown. The Board proposed using what had already been established and legitimized to establish and legitimize women's studies. By becoming part of what was already standard, rather than fighting to be considered standard on its own, the study of women could infiltrate the university, thereby pushing the boundaries of "standard" disciplines.

The next year the Pembroke Center was founded and a Women's Studies concentration was approved, which re-oriented women's studies' position in the university. The women's studies brochure for the 1981-1982 academic year is almost identical to the one released by the *ad hoc* Women's Studies Board a year before. One difference, however, is that instead of describing the *ad hoc* Women's Studies Board, the brochure describes the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women and does

¹⁰⁴ Elizabeth Weed, Memorandum to Women's Studies Board, dated May 15, 1980, p.1, Papers of Provost Frank Durand, OF-1CA-D1, Folder I. 18, Brown University Archives, John Hay Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

not list individual members. Women's Studies would be housed in the Pembroke Center. However, Women's Studies was not the same as the Pembroke Center; the Pembroke Center was not a Women's Studies Department. In fact, at its creation, the Pembroke Center consisted of a Director (Joan Scott), Executive Director (Elizabeth Weed), and one administrative assistant. Women's studies was not awarded—and still does not have—faculty lines with the creation of the Pembroke Center.¹⁰⁵ Although associating women's studies with the Pembroke Center meant dissociating it from a board that was much larger in number, association with the Pembroke Center ostensibly offered women's studies apparent *institutional* support, thereby suggesting its reliability as a concentration. Still, this condensing of myriad faculty and administrators into one Center pointed to an isolation of women's studies as it became part of the Pembroke Center, segregating it from its original proponents.

One of the ways the Center looked to make up for this sequestration was by promoting Women's Studies' pliable curriculum. On the verge of official university concentration approval, the Pembroke Center submitted a proposal for the Women's Studies concentration, as it would appear in the "Concentration" section of the Course Announcement Bulletin. The proposal defined the goals of the women's studies concentration to examine "cultural definitions of women in their social, political, economic, and cultural contexts."¹⁰⁶ The requirements for the concentration consisted of courses in History and American Civilization, as well as a women's studies senior seminar. In addition, concentrators had to take classes in Anthropology or literature and

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Elizabeth Weed, December 13, 2012.

¹⁰⁶ "Proposed Concentration in Women's Studies," Folder: "Women's Studies Concentration and Curriculum," Sarah Doyle Women's Center Archives, Sarah Doyle Women's Center, Providence, Rhode Island.

semiotics (now known as Modern Culture and Media) and in humanities or social and biological sciences.¹⁰⁷ Although the concentration requirements limited the scope of women's studies as an academic endeavor, the authors still left room for individualized interests in women's studies beyond the concentration requirements. In the final draft of the concentration description, the authors noted, "students who wish to pursue areas of women's studies different from those emphasized in the concentration should consider an Independent Concentration or a special track within another concentration."¹⁰⁸ Thus, the founders of the concentration acknowledged another established institutional route through which students could pursue women's studies (by creating a track within another concentration) *as well as* a less institutionally organized route by way of an independent concentration. Offering both options emphasized women's studies' existence *within* the university *without* its institutional organization.

With a university-approved title and organization, the *ad hoc* Women's Studies Board was no longer an integral component to define women's studies'. Since Women's Studies was housed within the Center, it acquired the Pembroke Center's interdisciplinary status. Therefore, even though the Pembroke Center was not a Women's Studies Department, it was still Women's Studies' home at Brown. As such, Women's Studies' interdisciplinary status was contained within the institution of the Pembroke Center. While the research branch of the Pembroke Center could inform the teaching branch, and vice versa, Women's Studies as a concentration could only be as expansive in its interdisciplinary methods as the Pembroke Center—and its members—could be.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ "Concentration in Women's Studies," p. 2, Folder: "Women's Studies Concentration and Curriculum," Sarah Doyle Women's Center Archives, Sarah Doyle Women's Center, Providence, Rhode Island.

Tokenization of “Interdisciplinary”

In many ways, Brown University tokenized the term “interdisciplinary.” With the adoption of the New Curriculum in 1969, as a way to address wide concern for the “relationship of academic learning to questions of social justice,” Brown reinvigorated its appeal to undergraduate students, and embraced a reputation as “a place for exciting intellectual work.”¹⁰⁹ The New Curriculum gave way to “Modes of Thought” courses that argued, “*how* we know, *how* we think, is no less important than *what* we know.”¹¹⁰ Similarly, Brown began offering courses designated “Special Themes and Topics” that tackled topics not necessarily discussed within traditional academia. In fact, many women’s studies courses (before the establishment of a Women’s Studies concentration) were designated as such. In addition, under Howard Swearer’s presidency, such interdisciplinary centers, as the Center for Environmental Studies, the Center for Public Policy and the Center for Policy Development (now the Watson Institute) were created.¹¹¹ In order to maintain its reinvigorated popularity, Brown promoted these curricular changes by characterizing these Centers as places of interdisciplinary work.

In fact, the document Elizabeth Weed used to decide between proposing a Pembroke Center and a Pembroke Institute was created in an effort to institutionally organize interdisciplinary study “if interdisciplinary work advances to the point where it would gain from being more formally organized.”¹¹² By “formal organization,” the

¹⁰⁹ Elizabeth Weed, *Notes on Pembroke Center’s History: 1981-2011* (Providence: Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women, 2011), 2.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 2.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 5.

¹¹² “Programs, Centers, and Other Interdisciplinary Activities at Brown,” p. 52, Sarah Doyle Women’s Center, Sarah Doyle Women’s Center, Providence, Rhode Island.

authors mean administrative and institutional organization. This is only necessary, they argue, if the interdisciplinary work “advances” to a certain “point.” Such delineation suggests a linear progression, which is a modernist notion. By only suggesting administrative and institutional organization at a certain advanced point, the authors acknowledge that interdisciplinary work can exist casually; however, administrative and institutional organization signifies interdisciplinary work that is “advanced,” which I take to mean, complex. In this sense, the administration made institutional organization a desirable point of arrival for interdisciplinary work for what it would signify of its rigor. From the other side, administrative organization of interdisciplinary work would be useful for Brown, as it would offer concrete empirical evidence to prospective students, alumni, and potential donors of its dedication to new and “cutting-edge” ways of thinking and researching. In fact, it proved that interdisciplinary opportunities were ingrained in its curriculum and definition.

The *ad hoc* Women’s Studies Board utilized the university’s interest in interdisciplinary work as a means to self-promote. In its proposal outline, they wrote, “The University’s ten-year-old New Curriculum provides numerous mechanisms for faculty and students to pursue questions and areas of interest that lie outside normal curricular and departmental structures.”¹¹³ By arguing that the New Curriculum allowed for cutting-edge educational and research pursuits in their proposal for the Pembroke Center, the *ad hoc* Women’s Studies Board, associated the Pembroke Center with those cutting-edge educational and research pursuits. The Board made the Pembroke Center

¹¹³ “Description of the Institute,” Sarah Doyle Women’s Center Archives, Sarah Doyle Women’s Center, Providence, Rhode Island.

appealing to Brown's administration by linking it to the interdisciplinary work that had already been so successful in reinvigorating Brown's reputation.

The Center

Because the Women's Studies concentration was housed in the Pembroke Center, its interdisciplinary methods were informed by the role of the center at Brown. The Pembroke Center was *by definition* interdisciplinary. According to official university definition, a Center is "an academic unit designed to conduct a major scholarship interdisciplinary effort which includes educational and research components."¹¹⁴ Thus, incorporated into its very definition, the Pembroke Center would provide interdisciplinary education and conduct interdisciplinary research.

In early drafts of proposals for a Center for education and research on women, Elizabeth Weed discussed the possibility of a Pembroke Institute.¹¹⁵ However, after consulting "Operating Policies for Centers, Programs, Facilities, and Institutes," she and the rest of the founders changed the title from "Institute" to "Center," explaining, "Center seems the most efficient way to organize and centralize scholarly activity related to women."¹¹⁶ The change in title was a practical move; calling themselves a Center was a more institutionally beneficial route. An Institute is defined as "an organization sponsored by the University to carry out research in a defined area, in collaboration with non-University agencies, corporations or individuals."¹¹⁷ An Institute does not include the

¹¹⁴ "Programs, Centers, and Other Interdisciplinary Activities at Brown," p. 52.

¹¹⁵ "Pembroke Institute for Research and Teaching on Women," Sarah Doyle Women's Center Archives, Sarah Doyle Women's Center, Providence, Rhode Island.

¹¹⁶ "PEMBROKE CENTER at Brown," Sarah Doyle Women's Center Archives, Sarah Doyle Women's Center, Providence, Rhode Island.

¹¹⁷ "Programs, Centers, and Other Interdisciplinary Activities at Brown," p. 52.

educational component of a Center. Therefore, by changing the title from Institute to Center, Weed included the Women's Studies concentration in the Pembroke Center. In addition, an Institute, unlike a Center, has ties to non-University entities or individuals. It seems that for the radical purposes of women's studies, incorporating non-University connections would be beneficial to realizing its radical goals. Thus, the decision to switch from an institute to a Center was an institutionally politically motivated strategy by the *ad hoc* Women's Studies Board. They believed they were more likely to attain approval and adequate funding as a Center than as an Institute; therefore, they sacrificed the non-University connections that may have aided their ultimate goals for the sake of getting their foot in the door.

Also stipulated in its definition, a Center would be interdisciplinary through its cultivation. Clearly stated under its definition of "initiation" for a Center, "a proposal for Center should be developed by a multidisciplinary faculty group."¹¹⁸ This was already underway by the formation of the *ad hoc* Women's Studies Board, which makes the decision to consolidate them under the Pembroke Center even more unclear. In addition, a Center would need to be "endorsed by the Deans of the College and the Graduate School and the chairmen of the departments (and/or divisions) whose faculty were involved. It will be submitted to the Dean of the Faculty and Academic Affairs for review by an *ad hoc* faculty committee."¹¹⁹ Review and approval of the Center relied on interdisciplinary discussion and cooperation. Thus, a Center, by its very definition— and therefore the Pembroke Center, by *its* very definition— required interdisciplinary teaching, research, cultivation, review, *and* approval. Interdisciplinary status would be

¹¹⁸ "Programs, Centers, and Other Interdisciplinary Activities at Brown," 53.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 53.

thoroughly ingrained into its existence.

Furthermore, as part of this interdisciplinary development, a Center would not warrant its own faculty. As delineated by the university, “all full-time faculty affiliated with the Center shall have primary appointments in departments or divisions of the University, and shall share in the responsibilities of those departments or divisions.”¹²⁰ Thus, each faculty member would hold an interdisciplinary position. Their primary research and teaching role would be in an established discipline while their secondary commitment would be to interdisciplinary conversation and learning.

On the downside, such demarcation made the Pembroke Center a secondary affiliation for involved faculty. Any involved faculty member’s primary allegiance would lie with his/her department, thereby supporting arguments that without a department, women’s studies would suffer in terms of resources and faculty. As a result, the founders of the Pembroke Center sought means by which they could strengthen professional ties to the Pembroke Center. One of the ways they did this was in clearly demarcating the administrative roles within the Pembroke Center in its official proposal. The Director, who would also be the Nancy Duke Lewis Chair, would commit 25% of his/her time to the Center; the Associate Director would commit 50% of his/her time, and a Secretary would commit 100% of his/her time.¹²¹ By establishing these roles and their time committed to the Pembroke Center, the authors of the proposal carved out a space for the Pembroke Center and its research and collaboration within Brown University. In doing so, the authors established— in official university documents and terms— a legitimate

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 53.

¹²¹ “Proposal: Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women,” p. 1, Papers of Howard Swearer, HRS IV. 33 OF-1C-15, Folder: Pembroke Center (80-81/81-82), Brown University Archives, John Hay Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

academic and professional commitment to the pursuits of the Pembroke Center, albeit small with only three people.

Another way in which they attempted to strengthen allegiance to the Pembroke Center was through the Nancy Duke Lewis Chair. The chair, originally established with a small bequest left by Lewis, dean of Pembroke College from 1950-61, had originally been held on a visiting basis. In 1978, the Working Group on the Status of Women (which had helped establish the Sarah Doyle Women's Center in 1975) worked to establish the chair as a permanent position for a senior feminist scholar to occupy on a full-time basis in conjunction with a departmental appointment.¹²² In May 1978, the Committee on Women Faculty wrote a letter to President Howard Swearer regarding the search for this senior feminist scholar. The committee promoted a search that would not be limited by disciplinary boundaries. "We recommend that... the search for the permanent person not be limited to a specific discipline but, rather, that an attempt be made to find the most distinguished women's studies scholar available. If it is impossible to accommodate the appointment of that person within the existing staffing plan of a department, we urge the creation of a new position."¹²³ In 1979, the university agreed to search for a senior feminist scholar who could occupy the chair on a full-time basis. The Nancy Duke Lewis Chair thus became an opportunity to professionalize interdisciplinary feminist scholarship. The ultimate goal of the chair was to bring the best possible feminist scholar to Brown, regardless of his/her departmental or disciplinary identity.¹²⁴

¹²² Weed, *Notes on the Pembroke Center's History*, 3.

¹²³ Pauline L. Jacobson, Letter to Frank Durand, dated May 8, 1978, Papers of Provost Durand, OF-1CA-D1, Folder: I.89, Brown University Archives, John Hay Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

¹²⁴ In 1980, Joan Wallach Scott was appointed the first Nancy Duke Lewis professor and professor of History. The next year, she became the founding director of the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women.

Thus, the Nancy Duke Lewis Chair became a professionally and institutionally secure faculty position characterized by its disciplinary flexibility. It became tied to the Pembroke Center when, in 1981 Joan Scott who, in the previous year, had been named the Nancy Duke Lewis Professor, became the Director of the Pembroke Center.

Thus, professional goals became one of the elements of the Center's mission. In the Center's official proposal, which was approved by the Corporation of Brown University in 1981, the *ad hoc* Women's Studies Board listed the functions of the Pembroke Center: 1) "Coordinate existing offerings in women's studies and will survey those offerings and encourage new ones in order to create a coherent curriculum;" 2) "Encourage and facilitate communication among members of the Brown faculty whose scholarship and teaching relate to women's studies;" 3) "Work to develop support for faculty engaged in the teaching and research efforts of the Center;" 4) "Encourage the recruitment and appointment of faculty trained in women's studies whose interests are appropriate to Brown's orientation;" 5) "It will support, through appropriate channels, graduate students working on topics related to women's studies within existing departments."¹²⁵ The Pembroke Center proposed an institutional shelter for women's studies, protecting it from lack of funding, misogyny, closed lines of communication, and disparity. It would promote conversation across disciplinary lines *and* offer institutional and professional support for such conversations, thereby allowing *teaching* of these conversations for students. One of the center's long-term goals was to recruit and appoint "faculty trained in women's studies." What does that mean? If women's studies is not a discipline, how can one be trained in it? "Trained" connotes a set of rules and standards,

¹²⁵ "Proposal: Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women," 2.

which goes against women's studies purported purpose, which was to challenge traditional rules and standards of the academy. In addition, the Center was meant to "create a coherent curriculum." "Coherent" suggests a need for intelligibility. The question is *to whom?* To the university administration? To students? To national foundations? To women in general? Therefore, it seems that although the Pembroke Center looked to challenge disciplinary barriers to open a space for discussion, the Center also looked to establish its own barriers in its curriculum and singular definition of a women's studies professional.

As these professional goal became part of the Center's mission, the university administration took control of professional interdisciplinary interaction. With his approval of the Pembroke Center, President Swearer instituted an Advisory Board made up of academics across various disciplines from Brown and other institutions. Among them were Jean Howard, Professor of English at Syracuse University; Ruth Ekstrom, Pembroke College alumna, class of 1953; Donald Rohr, Professor of History at Brown University; George Bass, Founding Director of Rites and Reason Theater, Professor of Theater Arts and Performances at Brown University; and Constance Buchanan, Professor at Harvard Divinity School, Director of Women's Studies in Religion Program. In his letter to each of them, he wrote of the expectations for the Advisory Board: "As a member of the Advisory Board, you would be expected to consult with its Director, Joan Scott, and its Executive Director, Elizabeth Weed, on all activities of the Center. We anticipate one annual meeting. In addition, you will be called upon (by phone or letter) for advice on policy matters. At the end of five years, you will be asked to review and evaluate the activities of the Center and staff." By soliciting a group of advisors from

various disciplines, institutions, programs, and demographics, President Swearer institutionalized the interdisciplinary professional interaction of the Pembroke Center.

In addition, he facilitated discussion among interdisciplinary institutional entities on campus. For example, George Bass, one of the Advisory Board members, was the founder and acting director of Brown University's Rites and Reason Theatre, a "research and development theatre dedicated to giving expression to the diverse cultures and traditions of continental and diasporic Africans and the vast Africana experience."¹²⁶ Created in 1970 and becoming part of the Program in Afro-American Studies in 1975, the Rites and Reason Theatre implemented its signature Research-to-Performance Method (RPM) playwriting, which combines "scholars, writers and community persons" in an artistic collaboration, which makes scholars artists, and artists scholars.¹²⁷ George Bass wrote in his acceptance letter for the Advisory Board position, "I welcome an opportunity to lend my support to our mutual concerns for the strengthening of our intellectual and cultural life at Brown." This collaboration hinted toward a mutual interest in things that went beyond academia at Brown. Mutual concerns about intellectual and cultural life at Brown between Rites and Reason Theatre and the Pembroke Center were those of liberating oppressed peoples. However, this collaboration was instituted and facilitated by the president of the university and was thus limited to the administrative roles of the Advisory Board. Of course, Rites and Reason Theatre and the Pembroke Center could collaborate beyond the collaboration delineated by the Advisory Board.

¹²⁶ "Rites and Reason Theatre," Africana Studies, Brown University, accessed March 29, 2013, http://brown.edu/Departments/Africana_Studies/rites_reason.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

However, it was unclear in the proposal for the Pembroke Center *how* it would interact with these other programs, Centers, and Institutes. In response to its proposal, Professor R. S. Jones, director of the Afro-American Studies concentration and the Research Director for Rites and Reason Theatre, warned the Pembroke Center about its potential for racism. He wrote, “The Center has an opportunity, if it should declare itself committed to the study of non-white women, to set itself apart from other women’s studies departments which have been racist—if only because of the things they do not do and the perspectives they do not consider—as our Program [Afro-American Studies] has been sexist.”¹²⁸ Jones pointed to an important discussion that was arising about the exclusion of women of color in women’s studies and feminism. As he noted, a similar conversation was happening about sexism in Afro-American Studies (also known as Black Studies, Ethnic Studies, etc. at other institutions) and Black Power Movements. Despite this consciousness of racism on one hand and sexism on the other, there was no recommendation for combination of the centers or explicit mention of a partnership of any sort. The Sarah Doyle Center and Third World Center had historically teamed up to sponsor events that included women of color.¹²⁹ Plus, they held regular joint meetings with coordinators of the TWC.¹³⁰ Elizabeth Weed even identified a need for incorporating women of color into its mission: “SDC must establish contact with more

¹²⁸ R.S. Jones, Memorandum to Pembroke Center Review Committee, dated April 24, 1981, p. 2, appendix to “Proposal: Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women,” Papers of Howard Swearer, HRS IV.33 OF-1C-15, Folder: Pembroke Center (80-81/81-82), Brown University Archives, John Hay Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

¹²⁹ Elizabeth Weed, “1977-78 Annual Report (Sarah Doyle Center),” p. 4, Papers of Howard Swearer, HRS III. 221 OF-1C-15, Folder: Sarah Doyle Women’s Center (78-79/79-80), Brown University Archives, John Hay Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 5.

minority women to discover if, and in what ways, it can be a resource to them.”¹³¹

However, there was no mention of how this incorporation would happen, much less the necessity for their collaboration, in the Pembroke Center’s proposal.¹³²

This lack of definitive collaboration emphasized a dilemma of institutionalization: it specialized issues of oppression so that eradication of oppression became subverted to institutional organization. As such, it allowed the Pembroke Center to treat race as a footnote to their endeavor; it was not part of their conception. Thus, these Centers’ needs for institutional security overshadowed their original purpose. Even with moves toward interdisciplinary conversation, this interdisciplinarity was contained in its institutionalization. In this sense, interdisciplinary work became less a tool for interrogating and deconstructing oppression, and more an instrument for the university to appear cutting-edge and diverse. Therefore, without explicit plans for collaboration beyond the Center from its conception, the Pembroke Center became tokenized by the university, becoming the university’s instrument for denying its entrenched patriarchal values.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 9.

¹³² “Proposal: Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women.”

Final Thoughts

In her article, “Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History,” Nancy Fraser argues that second-wave feminists used analysis of economic, cultural, and political gender injustice as a means to critique “androcentric state-organized capitalism” as a systematic form of female oppression. Over time, she argues, these three dimensions of gender injustice have become fragmented from each other *and* from their critique of capitalism. The result: the use of feminist critique to legitimate neoliberal capitalism, a new form of systematic oppression.¹³³ Thus, she argues, “This is a moment in which feminists should think big,” to reclaim our ideas so that “we might just bend the arc of impending transformation in the direction of justice—and not only with respect to gender.”¹³⁴ Feminists need to reconnect “personalized subjection” to a critique of the system that bore that subjection.¹³⁵ In other words, in order to reinvigorate feminism toward its original goals of social justice (and not just for women), we need to keep in mind that personal experiences of social inequity and structural capitalist discrimination mutually affect each other. We cannot adequately critique one without analyzing the other.

This applies to academic feminism as well. Examining and developing theories on structures of white male dominance is irrelevant unless it is tied to the lived subjection of actors in those structures. If academic feminism wants to serve a purpose beyond careerism and academic legitimation, we must rearticulate its practicability in people’s

¹³³ Nancy Fraser, “Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History,” *New Left Review* 56 (2009): 99.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 117.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 115.

lives. Without doing so, academic feminism satisfies itself with theory, thereby remaining in the hypothetical, proposing names and terms for sexism without *doing* anything about it. By re-infusing personal experience as legitimate academic evidence of structures of social injustice, academic feminism can hope to move toward justice.

Therefore, we must insert the personal experience in academics. Personal issues are often labeled too emotional, too subjective, too unprofessional. Similarly, women have been marginalized on the basis that we are too emotional, too irrational to function adequately in a high-pressure professional environment. Therefore, *those labels for personal issues are symptomatic of the trivialization of women*. Thus, they have been pushed to the side in favor of institutional, professional, or corporate achievement.

The Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women at Brown University has produced—and continues to produce—groundbreaking theoretical work, earning international notoriety as a theoretically radical feminist center. Its research on the “Cultural Constructions of Female,” its seminars with intellectuals like Jacques Derrida, and its disregard for disciplinary boundaries all speak to its political fervor to challenge the way we think, analyze, and question. However, by failing to sustain a pointed self-awareness of its use of institutional politics and an institutional structure as a means to gain security within the academy, the Pembroke Center has become insular.

While the Center made claims to its interest in the cultural-political aspect of academic feminism through its relationship with the Sarah Doyle Women’s Center, it did not provide clear ways in which that relationship would be actualized. In addition, though it articulated a concern of ignoring issues of race, the Center made no clear moves to establish collaborative ties to groups that were concerned with issues of race and

ethnicity on campus. As a result, the Center allowed itself to be tokenized by the university, used to promote the university's interest in issues of gender and interdisciplinary study. Thus, instead of using its radical theoretical work as a tool for social justice, the Pembroke Center allowed its theoretical work to remain *theoretical*.

In fact, the Center's theory has become an alienating force. Their theoretical academic language has run away with itself, becoming inaccessible and privileged. Only people positioned in a certain way will have first, access to this material and second, the tools to learn how to understand the material. Furthermore, theoretical academic language has sterilized issues of social injustice, whereas they are, in fact, quite messy. Placing them in academic jargon only serves to remove them from their context, making them safe and insular. In doing so, accountability for social and economic injustice remain theoretical too. Structures of injustice are not abstract, distinguishable elements of our society. They exist in how we think, how we interact with people, how we make assumptions. Structures of oppression are *ingrained* within us. Therefore, we must look inward as much as outward in order to actualize change.

I do not wish to dismiss the Pembroke Center's work. I think the Pembroke Center is closer than most academic programs to doing the kind of humanities work that should be happening in academia. However, I do not see the Center's efforts to disseminate their work. Yes, they have journals and published scholars. *But what are they doing to reach outside of academia? What are they doing, even, to reach Brown's campus?* As an undergraduate Gender & Sexuality Studies concentrator, I had relatively no knowledge of what the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women did. I thought "Pembroke Center" was the name of the building for the Gender & Sexuality

Studies concentration. I regret that I had to embark on a considerably lengthy thesis project (in the History department, no less) to learn about the Pembroke Center. It seems to me that by integrating more undergraduates in the Center, as was its original purpose with housing the Women's Studies concentration, the Center may expand its audience. After all, undergraduates are less ingrained in the academic structure than the scholars producing the published works. What's more, many undergraduates pursue work outside of academia. Therefore, by making more of an effort to reach them, wouldn't the Center reach more of the non-academic world?

It is my hope for this project to begin a conversation, to open up questions about where women's studies at Brown began to see where it can possibly go. As such, this project poses more questions than it answers. In doing so, I hope not to reject the work that has been done, but rather to reflect on the work that *can* be done, to utilize the potential of women's studies in order to re-orient academia toward social justice by way of self-reflexivity.

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