*No Respect? Disciplinarity and
Media Studies in Communication*

Feminist Communication Scholarship and "The Woman Question" in the Academy

Lisa McLaughlin

Feminist scholarly practice poses a challenge to disciplinarity merely by existing. By "disciplinarity," I refer to the theories, practices, and institutional arrangements that discriminate among forms of knowledge, specify knowledges and knowledge relationships that coalesce around "objects of study," and demarcate boundaries within which knowledges may take on the appearance of coherence. As one of the most vital institutional sites for the articulation of the feminist movement's commitment to the struggle against the devaluation of women, women's studies programs have provided indispensable leadership in the project to transform knowledges and practices that exclude and marginalize persons on the basis of gender, race, and, to a lesser extent, class. Beginning primarily in the 1980s, feminists in the field of communication joined in this effort. Similar to the broader area of feminist scholarship, feminist studies in communication gained much of

their strength as modes of inquiry by questioning the boundaries of intellectual investigation and recognizing that interdisciplinary scholarship is central to doing so.

The extent of diversity of its interdisciplinary perspectives establish feminist communication studies as a model of and for women's studies, one that exhibits feminist scholarship's force as a self-reflexive intellectual endeavor. In the pages that follow, I will also argue that feminist communication studies is a model for the uneasy position of women's studies in a disciplinary-based academic environment. Feminist communication studies share with other feminist scholarship the risk of becoming coopted and diluted through institutionalization. Perhaps more profoundly, however, we share the risk of nonrecognition within a field and an academic environment that attempt to impose "discipline" on knowledge through institutional mechanisms for specifying the boundaries of scholarly inquiry and practice. Moreover, as I will argue, feminist studies in communication occupy an especially precarious position, as a "special interest" that remains largely unrecognized and unauthorized, not only by the field of communication and the disciplinary-based academy, but also by other feminist scholars, whose interdisciplinary inquiry is often circumscribed within the "traditional" disciplines and thus fails to take

note of the hybrid area of communication scholarship. The routine exclusion of feminist communication scholarship subverts its potential as a transdisciplinary force in the academy. The question, ultimately, is how to influence the academy and the world through a transformative presence in the public sphere.

In order to contextualize the position of feminist communication scholarship in the disciplinary-based academy, I first wish to highlight what I will call "the woman question" by describing the politics and bureaucratic structures working against interdisciplinary, critical inquiry, and the presence of marginalized groups.

The "Woman Question" in the Academy

"The woman question" is an embattled theoretical site that takes on a specific meaning as a point of contention between the often divergent goals of feminists and Marxists. In short, "the woman question" attempts to understand the specific status of women within the context of relations of production. Hartmann (1981, p. 3), in "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism," argues that "the woman question" has never been "the feminist question," which is, instead, directed at understanding men's dominance over women. Feminist criticisms of "the woman question" range from anti-materialist positions, which understand Marxism as a sex-blind philosophy that ignores the specific construction of female subjectivity and the psychic invest-

ment of men in women's oppression (Harding, 1981; Al-Hibri, 1981), to positions that understand patriarchy as a set of materially-based social relations between men which create conditions for interdependence and solidarity that allow women to be dominated in the interests of men (Hartmann, 1981). To summarize the issues at stake far too briefly, then, "the feminist question" locates patriarchy and capitalism as separate struggles with separate mechanisms ("dual systems"), whereas "the woman question" locates women's oppression within the interests of capital ("unified systems").

Feminists writing about the academy have tended to embrace theories of patriarchy, attributing an environment of material, sexual, and racial inequality to the prevalence of masculine value systems and models. Masculine values are thought to structure traditional theory and research, particularly in the sciences, where control, rationality, and objectivity hold powerful sway (DuBois, 1983; Harding, 1981, 1986; Keller, 1985). Patriarchy, according to these arguments, orders the world and the academy by dichotomizing people and experiences and valorizing cultural notions associated with masculinity: the rational mind, bias-free research, and quantitative data that stakes its claim to Truth (Spender, 1982, 1985).

What approximates Truth for many feminist scholars is the knowledge that the academy acts to perpetuate and maintain exist-

ing power structures in a manner that marginalizes women and rewards men. This political claim wanders astray, however, in constructing the underlying power dynamic as a monument to the male psyche and its manifestation in patriarchy. To do this is to attribute considerable institutional power to the "fact" of maleness and very little to the complexity of politics and economics within and around institutions. It is also to retain a utopian notion of universities as sites for contest over definitions only, as places where struggles are waged in a cultural arena existing separately from the economic and the political, where struggles are more directly for money and power. [1] Yet, this is to deny the political reality that struggles for definition are not separate from those "directly" for money and power, for they often occur in the same place. Today, as perhaps always, money and power are companions to many of the victories occurring in the competition for cultural hegemony. No institutional sites exist as "little islands of life that have resisted the encroachment of systems," [2] and thus they cannot be analyzed without concern for the political-economic context.

There is little question that men have been the predominant colonizers of the intellectual arena and have influenced the mainstream valorization of science, rationality, and objectivity. Yet, the history and complexity of the academic environment suggests that it is analytically and politically debilitating to locate inequities around men's interests in oppressing women.

The history of the field of communication in the United States itself yields clear evidence that the ideals of scientific method and objectivity were primarily in the interests of capital, as scholars responded to the needs of an increasingly industrialized, professionalized, and militarized world by choosing administrative and normative research over critical and interpretive research. Administrative research thus serves as a rather perverse example of Said's (1983) assertion that there are actual affiliations between the world of ideas and scholarship and the world of corporate, state, and military power. Yet, the goal of administrative research, which is to service the scientific and technological needs of a global capitalist economy, is entirely incommensurate with Said's vital concerns, which are directed toward fostering an awareness of the deleterious effects of packaging our knowledge in useful bundles and encouraging a critical engagement with the workings of global imperialism and corporate and state interests. A recognition of the political/economic ties that bind should be directed toward enabling us to interfere in the affairs of the everyday world, to question and dismantle power structures and the assumptions underlying them, rather than to support them through our research. One way to conduct this interference is by critically evaluating the academy in relation to its role as a site for an ongoing political and social praxis. In order to do so, we must recognize the existence of an academic mode of pro-

duction composed of an elaborate mix of politics and ideologies, organizational structures, and material resources, with a division of labor characterized by gender, class, and racial hierarchies.

Mohanty (1994, p. 148) provides an example of the profound contradictions one faces when critically assessing the academic environment. According to her, the academy does not exclude gender, race, class, and sexuality; rather, its primary function is to *manage* gender, race, class, and sexuality by domesticating and commodifying them. "Patriarchy," although a commonly identified foundation for the exercise of the academy's managerial authority, fails to provide an adequate explanation for the fact that the management of diversity is most effectively achieved, not by force or coercion, but by securing places within pluralistic ideologies influenced by the struggle of women and people of color and evidenced in policies such as Affirmative Action (p. 148). The quest for "multiculturalism" provides a similar example. "Multiculturalism" is, of course, an indispensable critical term when used to designate an egalitarian representative space where cultural differences are tolerated, celebrated, and politicized. Yet our radical conceptions often reveal a startling propensity for being recuperated to liberal-pluralist, and even conservative, discourses that work to tame counterhegemonic discourses and reproduce the dominant symbolic order. As Hennessy (1993, p. 10) observes, courses on multiculturalism and diversity can

serve as "one of the academy's most skillful *crisis management* strategies" by exposing students to cultural "difference" without questioning how and why social differences are reproduced in relation to larger social structures. As a stop-gap measure intended to stifle the protests of female and minority populations, the presence of a few women and persons of color and an alternative course or two may be therapeutic, or, at the very least, provide good public relations for Affirmative Action efforts. But this is not equivalent to questioning the social, historical and political conditions of multiculturalism and diversity and attending to the economic and political power structures within which they are embedded. In other words, when the radical force of "multiculturalism" is emptied out, it can be employed as a strategy on behalf of conservative forces in the university.

The notion that patriarchy operates as a system separate from the economic serves to undercut transformative possibilities to be realized at the level of structure, where economic hierarchies are built into relations of domination and subordination. Moreover, any diagnosis proposing that female oppression is a result of masculine ideology remains tied to the tradition of foregrounding male involvement in the production of knowledge. Here, rather, I wish to foreground both the status of women's studies in relation to the academic mode of production and the status of feminist communication studies as a participant in the

production of feminist knowledge. I want to argue that "the woman question" should be inseparable from "the feminist question" if we are to understand the situation of women within the academy and society at large. The experience of marginalized groups within the academic environment can only be understood in relation to the question of who controls and possesses the mode of production and its product (knowledge, research, theory, expertise, students) and who does not.

Feminist Scholarship in the Academy

Politically and theoretically, and through the variety of forms that it takes, feminism focuses on the devaluation of women and asks how gender, race, and class figure in their status. In truth, what may appear a unity of concerns encompasses an enormous and contentious set of questions about the specificity of women's marginalization. The unified front suggested by "feminist" and "feminism" can be misleading. Although they are general political labels indicating support for the women's movement, the terms are also classifications that disguise an unharmonious set of philosophies, definitions, procedures, and goals. Perspectives range from the psychological and the psychoanalytical to the economic and ideological, the variety of feminist approaches attesting to the complexity and contradictions within the definition of feminism.

Feminists have worked, with some success, to locate their concerns within the academy, struggling to gain a foothold in the university alongside groups that include minorities and Marxists, each with a conceptual affinity to the cause of empowering the marginalized. Not surprisingly, oppositional social movements have provided the springboard for alternative academic programs. The first black and African-American studies programs came into existence in 1968 at San Francisco State and Cornell, as responses to militant political organizing by students and faculties at these universities. The University of California at Berkeley instituted a department of ethnic studies in 1969, the same year that the first women's studies program was formed at San Diego State University. As of 1990, 520 women's studies programs existed in the United States (National Women's Studies Association Task Force Report on *The Women's Studies Major*, quoted in Mohanty, 1994, p. 150).

Feminist alliances in these programs have been built around, and sometimes in spite of, diverse approaches and the resistance of the disciplines, notably in arts and humanities areas. Traditional disciplines including history, sociology, philosophy, political science, and literary criticism have been slow to embrace women's studies programs. Despite sometimes being awarded departmental status, hiring and tenuring their own faculty, and awarding bachelor's degrees, alternative programs of study are rarely permitted to award advanced degrees (Aronowitz, 1993, p. 27). Along with other post-

sixties institutional developments (for example, African-American, Black, and Latino studies), women's studies programs have come under frequent attack from disciplinary perspectives claiming they are "methodologically flawed, their knowledge-objects ill-defined, their faculty underprepared when measured by credentials and publications records, and their proclivity for unrigorous pedagogies a disservice to students" (p. 27). Joining in the attack are media pieces chiding women's studies programs for perpetuating "soft" intellectual approaches, victim mentalities, and "politically correct" orthodoxies (examples: Kaminer, *Atlantic Monthly*, Oct. 1993; Lehrman, *Mother Jones*, Sept./Oct. 1993). All in all, the frequency of attacks by colleagues in "the disciplines" joins with budget woes, a prevailing conservatism, and negative public sentiment to pose a constant threat to the existence of alternative programs in the academy.

Of course, a number of women's studies programs exist through alliances of persons across disciplines and departments; that is, many programs are not constituted as degree-granting departments, but, instead, as the intersection of faculty from a variety of fields and disciplines who teach courses on women from the standpoint of their respective expertise. This might suggest that the collaboration across departments and areas helps to protect the area of women's studies from vilification. Nevertheless, women's studies retains its enemies; with cultural

studies and race and ethnic studies, the area of women's studies possesses little institutional power, and yet it is perceived by many of its critics as "the enemy within" (Aronowitz, 1993, p. 27). To make a long story short, the animosity toward alternative programs of study in the university is more than an issue of ambience— its effects are also concretized through employment practices, funding sources and resources, publication, tenure and promotion procedures, student assistantships, courses, departments, and institutional procedures. As Stanley (1990, pp. 5–6) has observed, a variety of official and unofficial gatekeepers—publishers and their readers, professors, department heads, deans, vice-chancellors, and administrators, and internal and external referees for books, journal articles, examinations, and job applications—control the academic market and thus exert substantial influence over the place of women scholars and feminist studies in the academy.

Very often, the "place" of feminist scholars and scholarship is to be found in adherence to the conservative requirements of the traditional disciplines and the departments in which they are managed. Feminist scholars labor to expand the curriculum to include alternative works and specific experiences but are not to question the allegedly consensual standards within each discipline (Aronowitz, 1993, p. 28). Although feminist involvement in the area of cultural studies encourages interdisciplinary inquiry, cultural studies is often se-

questered within disciplines and risks becoming institutionalized in such a way as to refer to any scholarship that pursues the study of "culture" and thus to lose its political/critical edge (in much the same way that women's studies scholarship risks losing its own progressive potential when it is subsumed under "gender studies"). Feminist research and writing, although interdisciplinary projects, are often required to be clearly identifiable within disciplinary terms, recognizable as history, sociology, philosophy, or literary criticism. Feminist scholars within departments are asked to behave as "congenial colleagues . . . playing the game in ways that do not challenge the structures of established authority" (p. 28). Although, by definition, feminist scholarship cannot be forced into disciplinary frameworks, feminist work is often "disciplined" into conforming to disciplinary requirements that set the standard for what counts as legitimate inquiry. To resist, feminism's scholars and teachers must fight local battles in and through their respective departments, thus being forced to fragment what was to have been a concerted effort.

The relationship of feminism to the disciplines is ambivalent, and, at times, contradictory. Feminists resolutely attempt to fit diverse scholarship into a unified endeavor, viewing their role within the academy as one that questions the disciplines by working in, across, and against them (DuBois, et al., 1987; Shumway & Messer-Davidow, 1991). Yet, even as

they rebel against the disciplines, many feminists encourage respect for them. Feminists struggle for incorporation into the curricula of the discipline but fear that feminist politics will be compromised, absorbed, and diluted when incorporation becomes appropriation (see DuBois, et al., 1987). For some, the strategic relief from this dissonance is what may become a new orthodoxy: positioning women's studies in the academy as a discipline in and of itself (e.g., Bowles & Duelli Klein, 1983).

The relationship between feminist scholarship and the disciplines highlights the fact that disciplines have a two-fold character: they are both enabling and constraining. On the one hand, they work to produce the world through research and education, form communities based on inquiry, specify objects of study, provide jobs, prestige, funding, awards, contracts, and scholarly materials, and improve our explanations of various phenomena (Messer-Davidow, et al., 1993). On the other hand, disciplines function by regulating their practitioners and circumscribing intellectual labor within the boundaries of specific knowledges.

The constraining character of disciplines is at great odds with feminist politics. Feminism has always interrogated absences, inquiring after both the spoken and the unspoken, the represented and the unrepresented. Disciplines, however, function through dividing practices designed to separate various forms of subject matter. Foucault, in *The Archaeology of*

Knowledge, provides ample evidence of how discourses are produced through disciplines and institutions as techniques of control that work to protect the coherence and integrity of fields, their boundaries and practitioners. Moreover, Said (1983, p. 143) observes that the shelter offered by specialized fields and subfields also screens out that which cannot be absorbed and churns out, over and over again, that which can. The sort of "modeling" achieved by disciplines is evidence of a structural rigidity that depoliticizes knowledge and is too easily incorporated into the conservative aims of professions and institutions, as specific knowledges are packaged and commodified according to what they do and whom they serve. Competition and competency also become part and parcel of membership in the disciplines, since one cannot simply call oneself an historian, sociologist, or literary critic, but instead, must pass through rules of accreditation, speak the language, master the idioms, and accept the authorities in the field (Said, 1983, p. 141). This specialization of language and concerns results in constituencies of experts who speak only to and for one another. The most profound result of the structures placed on knowledge is that certain questions and certain answers become off-limits. The conflicts posed for feminists by this arrangement are manifold, since feminist politics demand that attention be paid to critical issues that have been traditionally defined as insignificant: the experiences of women and other margin-alized groups that have been excluded from the world of ideas and the public arena.

---

*Feminist Communication
Studies in the Academy*

If disciplinary requirements are (at least a part of) the problem for women's studies programs, what is the place of feminist communication scholarship in relation to both disciplinarity and women's studies? Feminist communication scholarship is, for the most part, radically interdisciplinary; yet, we share a number of problems with areas of women's studies that adhere more closely to the division of intellectual knowledge into disciplines. Surely, one reason for this is that we are also asked to conform to "disciplinary" requirements. Communication's status as a "discipline" may be something of a chimera kept alive through vague pronouncements and political/institutional strategies. Yet the field of communication also "disciplines" its subjects and objects of inquiry in a very real manner, as illustrated in a compelling essay by Blair, Brown, & Baxter (1994). In it, the authors expose the workings of an institutional research-and-publication apparatus that sanctions both who counts as a scholar and what counts as legitimate inquiry within what they refer to as the "discipline" of speech communication. They argue convincingly, and with startling evidence, that the institutional norms, rules, and procedures around review and publication within a major speech communication journal worked to authorize

male-influenced paradigms based upon impersonal abstraction, disciplinary territoriality, individuation and hierarchy, and, ultimately, to "discipline the feminine" by enforcing conformity to "mainstream," "neutral," "deferential," and "scientific" modes of inquiry and presentation.[3]

Although many feminist communication scholars eschew attempts to impose disciplinary constraints, some share an ambivalence toward disciplinarity with other feminist scholars. Although some feminists have argued for communication as a model for breaking down disciplinary walls (examples: Rakow, 1993), others have suggested that feminist theory can help the study of communication gain legitimacy and respectability by encouraging cohesiveness around the tolerance of difference and the acceptance of our diverse perspectives on theory and methodology (examples: Spitzack & Carter, 1989). Communication scholars are encouraged to be "open, as a discipline, to the types of questioning and self-reflective processes" initiated by feminist theory (Press, 1989, p. 200), when, in fact, "open" and "discipline" are fairly incongruous.

We face all of the institutional issues encountered by other feminist scholars — problems with gatekeepers, resources, jobs, procedures, and practices. The examples of our institutional marginalization and cooptation within the academic environment and the field of communication are abundant. With other feminist schol-

ars, our central problem, which was once exclusion, may now be tokenism. Departments often refuse to hire additional feminist scholars once they have already employed one person who "does feminism" or "does gender," their search committees operating on the misguided assumption that areas like "feminist studies" or "gender studies" are so coherent as to require only one scholar as a representative of "the woman's perspective." Equal Employment Opportunity employers fill their quotas but are unable or unwilling to ensure a comfortable, safe, and productive working environment for the women and minorities that they have attracted to their positions. Courses appear that feature gender and ethnicity as "special topics," while the curriculum as a whole remains untouched by questions of justice and diversity.

These are issues facing feminists from across the academy. Feminist communication scholars face another issue, however: because we share a discursive and material space with women's studies scholars who retain an uneasy connection with the canons of their own disciplines, our scholarship risks being overlooked, as an area of study that does not cohere within traditional disciplinary boundaries.[4] Feminist communication scholarship meets with a triple jeopardy — marginalized and disciplined within communication studies, women's studies, and the academy as a whole. There are many possible political/institutional explanations for the current

situation. It is tempting, for example, to attribute a low status in the academy to our arriving late to the feminist insurrection. Rakow (1989, p. 209) has pointed out that it was not until 1986 that "feminist scholarship was a publicly perceptible endeavor." In 1986, the newly formed Feminist Scholarship Interest Group of the International Communication Association (ICA) sponsored the first programming ever devoted to feminist concerns in that organization. The Women's Caucus of the Speech Communication Association (SCA) and the Committee on the Status of Women of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AE-JMC), both of which had been active for over a decade, sponsored their first panels on feminist scholarship (Rakow, 1989, p. 209). Special issues of *Communication* and *Journal of Communication Inquiry* also featured feminist scholarship, while other communication journals published their first feminist pieces. Significantly, the idea for the collectively-edited *Journal of Communication Inquiry* "Feminist Issue" was born at the University of Iowa when an informal study group observed that there were few models combining feminist and communication interests: communication research had largely ignored feminist theory, while feminist theory had largely ignored communication.

Feminist communication scholarship does appear to have experienced a critical organizational moment in 1986. It also had earlier moments, however. Prior to 1986, "the field" did take some formal notice of feminist scholarship, as evidenced in a 1974 issue of *Journal of Communication* featuring "Women—A Symposium," a series of nine articles pursuing the question of whether the "women's movements of the recent past have resulted in some changes" in roles, images, and messages (p. 103). A number of questions, many more than I am able to confront here, arise in pursuit of the reasons for what appears to be a dismal lack of momentum in the twelve years between 1974 and 1986, when feminist communication scholarship finally experienced its moment institutionally. One obvious question is what political-economic conditions hampered the institutionalization of feminism within communication (in the form of books, journals, conferences, classes, and employment opportunities) and thus prevented it from becoming "publicly perceptible" until 1986? And, for that matter, what conditions presently encourage the location of feminist scholarship within special interests and issues at the same time as they discourage the appearance of feminist scholarship in mainstream publications and institutions? Ultimately, in pursuing such questions, we are bound to find that our institutional standing cannot be reduced to the rationale that we are a "young area" that must "mature" in order to gain credibility. "Dues paying" lacks explanatory power in relation to the institutional constraints and obstacles

that have stood in the way of publicly perceptible interventions by feminist communication scholars in the fields of communication and women's studies.

Since 1986, feminist scholarship has gained slow but steady ground in the field of communication. Overall, however, feminist theorists in other fields persist in ignoring both communication phenomena and communication scholarship. In 1987, Steeves' evaluation of the relation between feminist theoretical frameworks and media studies concluded that feminist media scholars should be more attentive to complex feminist theories. Since then, feminist media scholarship appears to have become increasingly informed by feminist theories and perspectives from across other disciplines and fields. Meanwhile, however, our own scholarship continues to be mostly ignored in the work of other feminists. This is part of a larger picture in many respects: even though some scholars outside of our field have begun to recognize the centrality of communication in their examination of the social, communication studies suffer from a crisis of legitimacy in the academy, a state of affairs that has even led to speculation that communication research may disappear, absorbed into other disciplines or into the growing area of cultural studies (Hardt, 1992, p. 8).

Feminist scholars outside of our field have tended to either neglect aspects of the communication processes that are key to their work, offer irresolute and uninformed observations about communica-

tion phenomena, or "reinvent the wheel" by discovering new territory whose ground has, in fact, already been broken by scholars of communication. What has been missing from feminist scholarship for a number of years is a thorough understanding of the media and media scholarship. For example, Nancy Reinhardt (1981), a feminist theatre scholar from Harvard, laments the dearth of critical feminist work in theatre studies by comparing it to the "wealth of innovative work in feminist media studies," by which she means film and television studies.[5] The media scholarship mentioned by Reinhardt is represented by Gaye Tuchman, et al. (1978) and in articles appearing in *Women's Studies International Quarterly* and *Journal of Popular Culture*, although most examples from this sparse list were written by scholars outside the field of media studies. Reinhardt's lack of familiarity with media studies becomes most apparent in her observation that television is an individual, relatively personal, cultural form like the domestic novel, whereas "opera and the legitimate stage" are "the public and social arts" (p. 28). Leaving aside the bourgeois nature of this observation, it is nonetheless clear that she misses the point (well-documented in critical media scholarship) that television is perhaps the most *public* media of the public sphere, in the sense of being a primary means of communication to a large audience in late capitalism, whereas opera and theatre are, culturally and economically, accessible to very few.

The area of feminist scholarship that might be most valuable for media scholars today exhibits an especially glaring disregard for the media and media scholarship. Feminist scholarship that appropriates and reconstructs Habermas's notion of the public sphere has made an important contribution to democratic political theory by providing revisionist histories inclusive of counterpublics, arguing that the bourgeois public sphere represents a masculinist ideological notion, and offering reconceptualizations that attempt to create an egalitarian basis for democratic participation in the public sphere.[6] Yet, viewed in relation to the vital role played by the communications media in the context of a contemporary practice of democracy, feminist reconstructions fail by ignoring or uncritically accepting the efficacy of traditional and alternative media in the dissemination of feminist views to a wider public.[7] Nancy Fraser's (1989; 1990; 1992) work on the public sphere is among the most insightful critical feminist scholarship to date, particularly in its implications for a consideration of the role of the media in both "actually existing" and radical democracies. Nevertheless, although Fraser examines the politics of needs interpretation in the public sphere, she fails to address the issues at stake in disseminating counterclaims through the hegemonic mechanisms of the media, which are, after all, the primary site for "talk about needs" in late capitalism. This also becomes apparent in her (1992) analysis of the Clar-

ence Thomas/Anita Hill debacle, in which an otherwise sophisticated and unique argument is diminished by imperceptive observations that overlook the mass mediation of public spheres. Nowhere is there a sense of the selecting, ordering, and judging procedures by which the media facilitate and obstruct the creation of counter-claims and the creation of oppositional impulses in the public sphere.

None of this disregard is about malice, of course. It is doubtful that many feminists notice communication scholarship to the extent that they are able to take a position for or against it. Those outside of the field of communication simply do not know what they are missing. They are not inconsiderate toward our scholarship; they simply do not consider it. Radway's (1984) prominent study of romance readers, an important influence on feminist communication scholarship, provides one example of this inattention. Since writing the book, Radway (1986) has lamented the fact that her ethnographic work was untouched by an awareness of contributions made by British Cultural Studies scholars and others who had been exploring phenomena of communication and culture for a number of years prior to the book's publication.

Of course, the work of both Fraser and Radway is labeled groundbreaking despite missing a sustained engagement with communication scholarship, feminist or otherwise. The legacy of their work, in this respect, is very differ-

ent from much of feminist communication scholarship. I want to suggest, however, that in order to secure a foothold in the public arena, we must move beyond a view of ourselves as victims of the patriarchal academy, the oversight of our "sisters," or the lure of the shelter offered by disciplinarity. Rather, I wish to resurrect a rhetorical question offered by Press (1989) that demands more engagement by feminists in communication and other areas: "How much new ground are we really breaking?" (p. 199). Press (pp. 198–199) has suggested that, instead of remaining locked into the epistemological frameworks of disciplines and their methods of inquiry (criticism), we should seek to challenge their form and content (critique). According to her, we can determine feminist theory's status as criticism or critique by evaluating the amount of form and content that it appropriates from preexisting "patriarchal" theories (p. 199).

I wish to extend Press's argument, however, by suggesting that we must seek to interrogate all knowledge, not only that which springs from patriarchal theories but also that which informs feminism. It is vital to the fostering of critical knowledges that we reflect on the categories employed in all theories and methodologies, even those termed feminist, when carrying out our analyses. Our present situation in the academy may, in many ways, be due to a too often uncritical adherence to existing feminist theories and methods that, when coupled with a drive to-

ward feminist unity, ultimately hampers our role in knowledge production. Over and over again (and similar to the larger field of communication), the work of feminist communication scholars explicates theoretical influences from other fields and then reveals how, for example, the arguments of Dale Spender or Sandra Harding can be used to understand practices within the field of communication. Feminist theories of how patriarchy shapes the world are applied to communication in order to argue that communication practices are similarly shaped in the world. Thus, feminist communication scholarship risks falling short of its potential and becoming, at best, expository and, at worst, redundant (although it is certainly not alone in being so), failing to forge new knowledges and repeating the shortcomings of the old ones. [8]

We are often too ready to delegate our authority to accepted feminist methods and truths and too reticent to question and build on them. In so doing, we become disciples to other feminists, in the sense of being on the receiving end of knowledge, but not in the sense of exercising knowledge as it is positively articulated to power. [9] One reason for this is that consciousness-raising remains the predominant model on which feminist scholarship is based. In communication, feminists work to expose the masculine bias in research (see Spitzack & Carter, 1989), recover the voice of the woman as a significant subject for communication analysis (see Foss

& Foss, 1991), and unearth female resistances (see Ang, 1985; Brown, 1990; Lewis, 1990). The politicization of the personal is an important aspect of both the feminist movement and feminist scholarship, and the contribution of consciousness-raising to education and the creation of political unity cannot be denied. Yet, consciousness-raising is only one step toward social change. Moreover, consciousness-raising is indebted to theories of male and female differences and their accompanying bi-polar oppositions. Thus, despite its aims to give the private a social dimension and to deconstruct false dichotomies, feminist consciousness-raising often fails to recognize the dialectical relationships between private and public, consumption and production, and liberation and control, and, in doing so, valorizes the culturally-defined female term of an artificial binary construction.

Feminist cultural studies, as one example that predominantly follows the consciousness-raising model (see Brown, 1990), tends to concentrate upon the way women resist in the private sphere through acts of consumption, while leaving aside the matter that the transformative potential of resistance and difference can only be realized by their politicization, which, in turn, can only be achieved by articulating consumption to production and struggling for representational space in the public sphere. The private, as that which is defined as off-limits, is thus valorized as off-limits, and therefore resistant, while little

work is directed toward challenging the boundaries between private and public that are constructed within discourses of domination in the first place. Exposing and recovering theories, voices, and resistances leaves unfinished what Said (1983, p. 158) calls "the crucial next phase: connecting these more politically vigilant forms of interpretation to an ongoing political and social praxis." Without that connection, criticism amounts to no more than "the murmur of mere prose."

The various institutional sites for communication activity in late capitalism provide fertile ground for analyses that move beyond the recovery of sublimated narratives and experiences and toward an understanding and transformation of the hard (material and discursive) facts of publics, institutions, politics, and economics. As feminists in the field of communication, we share a rich opportunity to move beyond interpretation to its politics by engaging with questions of how the discourse of and about communication helps to shape public life and establish our place in the academy.

Conclusion
If we assess the value of conducting feminist scholarship that falls outside of the disciplines, what we find is potentially liberating. To remain outside of disciplinarity is to remain open to crossing borders rather than to working on them, to challenge existing knowledges with questions and answers gleaned from many places, and to speak from a political standpoint

that seeks justice rather than agreement. If, as Collins (1991) suggests, the role of the feminist is that of outsider within consciousness—one who works critically and self-reflectively in, across, and against the disciplines—the ground-breaking opportunities for feminist communication scholarship are rich. But, first, we must work on becoming a truly transdisciplinary endeavor, to move beyond borrowing theories and methods, in jigsaw fashion, and to engage in real interference: the crossing of borders, the overcoming of obstacles, and the visualization of a relationship between personal experiences, social processes, our research and activities, and the public sphere. Feminist communication scholarship may be the exemplar for transdisciplinarity today in demonstrating that the deepest divisions between disciplines are methodological (DuBois, et al., 1987), which is to say that there is an order placed on all knowledge that frames the range of the askable and discussable. We should then seek to be militantly *antimethodological* in Said's (1983, p. 149) sense, crossing and questioning the artificial boundaries within which disciplines, fields, discourses, and practices are made to cohere.

Of course, institutional constraints seem calculated to dissuade us from ever making concerted efforts to subvert the structure of disciplinary boundaries. We are, after all, dependent on bureaucratic institutions for our funding and administration. But disciplines are not the only institutional possibility; they only serve to anchor academic interests to the institutional status quo. The feminist movement, as well as the Left and various other movements, need radical institutions, but these spaces can be secured in a number of ways: by subverting traditional institutions, by enhancing already progressive institutions, and by creating new institutions and institutional forms (Trend, 1992, p. 123). Since ideas and goals need concrete mechanisms for their realization, we need to test a variety of strategies appropriate to challenging the character, boundaries, cohesive capabilities, and dynamics of the various sites in academic and other institutions, particularly those of the state. This, I think, is what Bennett (1992, p. 32) means by "putting policy into cultural studies" as a way of concretely and immediately influencing the specific political agendas, calculations, and procedures of institutional apparatuses. I must reiterate that this should not amount to an acceptance of the status quo, but rather, an effort to take advantage of the contradictory spaces within educational and other institutions in order to radicalize them.

Our place in the university often seeks to silence us, but it cannot entirely prevent us from engaging in radical critical practice unless we surrender our role in public debate. As feminists in communication, we do not need a home among the disciplines, but we do need the authority that finds its home in the disciplines and in the public arena. We need

to gain the status of what Fraser (1990) calls a "strong public," one that functions in both forming opinions and making decisions, as opposed to a "weak public," which engages in opinion-formation alone. As a strong public, we should seek to expand our representative space in the university and other public domains by letting our interests, needs, and scholarship be known and by influencing the programmatic, institutional, and governmental conditions determining educational policy and practice. This demands a sustained engagement with the political-economic aspects of academic, state, and corporate institutions, one that cannot be effected from the standpoint of patriarchy and difference theories alone, regardless of their influence on our scholarship. If our efforts are to have any transformative potential at all, they must be directed toward fostering a system where women's questions become an integral factor in "the woman question" and where knowledge and action are judged, not for their conformity, but for their emancipatory potential.

Author
Lisa McLaughlin *is with the Department of Communication at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1285.*

Notes
1   This view that the cultural, political, and economic are separate spheres has been embraced by social theorists including Juŕgen Habermas and Claus Offe. But, in light of the blurring of lines between these three spheres within the institutions of late capitalism, the "ideal speech situation" ap-

pears both utopian and untenable, something that Habermas (1989, p. 299) seems to recognize in backing away from the concept as misleading when applied to concrete forms of life.
2   The quotation is from Fields (1988, p. 148).
3   The essay by Blair, Brown and Baxter (1994) criticizes a 1992 report by Hickson, Stacks, and Amsbary, "Active Prolific Female Scholars in Communication," arguing that the report's authors position female scholars as an object of surveillance to be judged by masculine criteria for prominence in the area of speech communication. What is most enlightening about this essay, however, is that Blair et al. also focus on two reviewers' comments, written after the authors submitted a journal article responding to the Hickson et al. report. Reviewers referred to Blair et al.'s submission in terms such as "petty," "feline," "ball-bashing," "unprofessional," "anti-intellectual," etc., and defended the Hickson report as a celebratory documentation of the discipline's "advancement of women in the field" (Blair et al., p. 399).
4   The oversights are apparent, for example, in feminist scholarship anthologies, which are often organized along strict disciplinary lines (a chapter per discipline as in Spender, 1981 and Langland & Gove, 1981). Authors of other anthologies (example: DuBois et al.) pride themselves on moving beyond the discipline-by-discipline approach and, instead, attempt an analysis of "the whole" of feminist scholarship, which in this case refers to only five settings: anthropology, history, education, literature, and philosophy (p. 6). Moreover, even the most interdisciplinary of feminist studies anthologies (example: deLauretis, 1986) are heavily invested within the disciplinary boundaries of history, sociology, and literature, for example, and feature no work by feminist communication scholars.
5   Reinhardt (1981), p. 28.
6   Examples: Benhabib (1992), Felski (1989), Fraser (1990), Landes (1988), Pateman (1988), Young (1990).
7   See McLaughlin (1993) for an elaboration of this argument.
8   There are some notable exceptions to what I am arguing here, for example: Press's (1991) *Women Watching Television* expands on categories of cultural analysis to provide a very useful intervention in the cultural studies debate over the relative forces of hegemonic domination or popular resistance. Steeves (1993) also synthesizes

and builds on critical scholarship (women in development, grass-roots development critiques, and political economy) in order to offer a revised model for rethinking development and communication and challenging power relations from the standpoint of women.

9 See Shumway and Messer-Davidow (1991) for an explication of the etymology of "discipline" and its roots in classical Latin, where it takes on a double sense as both knowledge and power.

References

Al-Hibri, A. (1981). Capitalism is an advanced stage of patriarchy: But Marxism is not feminism. In Lydia Sargent (Ed.), Women and revolution (pp. 165–193). Boston: South End Press.

Ang, Ien (1985). Watching Dallas: Soap opera and the melodramatic imagination. (Della Corning, Trans.). London: Methuen.

Aronowitz, S. (1993). Roll over Beethoven: The return of cultural strife. Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press.

Benhabib, S. (1992). Situating the self: Gender, community and postmodernism in contemporary ethics. New York and London: Routledge.

Bennett, T. (1992). Putting policy into cultural studies. In Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, & Paula Treichler (Eds.), Cultural studies (pp. 23–34). New York: Routledge.

Blair, C., Brown, J. R., & Baxter, L. A. (1994). Disciplining the feminine. In Quarterly Journal of Speech, 80, 383–409.

Bowles, G., & Duelli Klein, R. (Eds.) (1983). Theories of women's studies. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Brown, M. E., ed. (1990). Television and women's culture: The politics of the popular. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Collins, P. H. (1991). Learning from the outsider within: The social significance of black feminist thought. In Joan E. Hartman & Ellen Messer-Davidow (Eds.), En-gendering knowledge: Feminists in academe (pp. 40–65). Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.

de Lauretis, T., ed. (1986). Feminist studies/Critical studies. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

DuBois, B. L. (1983). Passionate scholarship: Notes on values, knowing, and method in feminist social science. In G.

Bowles & R. Duelli Klein (Eds.), Theories of women's studies (pp. 105–116). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

DeBois, E. C., Paradise Kelly, G., Lapovsky Kennedy, E., Korsmeyer, C. W., & Robinson, L. S. (1987). Feminist scholarship: Kindling in the groves of academe. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Felski, R. (1989). Beyond feminist aesthetics: Feminist literature and social change. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Feminist Issue, The (1986). Journal of communication inquiry, 11.

Fields, A. B. (1988). In defense of political economy and systemic analysis: A critique of prevailing theoretical approaches to new social movements. In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), Marxism and the interpretation of culture (pp. 271–313). Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Foss, K. A., & Foss, S. K. (1991). Women speak: The eloquence of women's lives. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.

Foucault, M. (1971). The archaeology of knowledge. New York: Harper and Row.

Fraser, N. (1989). Unruly practices: Power, discourse and gender in contemporary social theory. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Fraser, N. (1990). Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. In Social Text, 25/26, 56–80.

Fraser, N. (1992). Sex, lies, and the public sphere: Some reflections on the confirmation of Clarence Thomas. In Critical Inquiry, 18, 595–612.

Habermas, J. (1989). The crisis of the welfare state and the exhaustion of utopian energies. In S. Seidman (Ed.), Jürgen Habermas on society and politics: A reader (pp. 284–300). Boston: Beacon Press.

Harding, S. (1981). What is the real material base of patriarchy and capital? In Lydia Sargent (Ed.), Women and revolution (pp. 135–163). Boston: South End Press.

Harding, S. (1986). The science question in feminism. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Hardt, H. (1992). Critical communication studies: Communication, history and theory in America. London: Routledge.

Hartmann, H. (1981). The unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism: Towards a more progressive union. In

Lydia Sargent (Ed.), *Women and revolution* (pp. 1–41). Boston: South End Press.

Hennessy, R. (1993). *Materialist feminism and the politics of discourse*. London and New York: Routledge.

Hickson, M., III, Stacks, D. W., & Amsbary, J. H. (1992). Active prolific female scholars in communication: An analysis of research productivity. *Communication Quarterly, 40*, 350–356.

Keller, E. F. (1985). *Reflections on gender and science*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Landes, J. (1988). *Women and the public sphere in the age of the French revolution*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Langland, E., & Gove, W., eds. (1981). *A feminist perspective in the academy: The difference it makes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lewis, L. (1990). Consumer girl culture: How music video appeals to girls. In M. E. Brown (Ed.), *Television and women's culture: The politics of the popular* (pp. 89–101). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

McLaughlin, L. (1993). Feminism, the public sphere, media and democracy. In *Media, culture and society, 15*, 599–620.

Messer-Davidow, E., Shumway, D. R., & Sylvan, D. J. (1993). *Knowledges: Historical and critical studies in disciplinarity*. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia.

Mohanty, C. T. (1994). On race and voice: Challenges for liberal education in the 1990s. In H. A. Giroux & P. McLaren (Eds.), *Between borders: Pedagogy and the politics of cultural studies* (pp. 145–166). New York: Routledge.

National Women's Studies Association Task Force (1990). Report on *The women's studies major* (unpublished manuscript).

Pateman, C. (1988). *The sexual contract*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Press, A. (1989). The ongoing feminist revolution. In *Critical Studies in Mass Communication, 6*, 196–202.

Press, A. (1991). *Women watching television: Gender, class, and generation in the American television experience*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Rakow, L. F. (1989). Feminist studies:

The next stage. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication, 6*, 209–13.

Rakow, L. F. (1993). The curriculum is the future. *The Journal of Communication, 43*, 154–162. (The Future of the Field II)

Reinhardt, N. S. (1981). New directions for feminist criticism in theatre and the related arts. In E. Langland & W. Gove (Eds.), *A feminist perspective in the academy: The difference it makes* (pp. 25–51). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Said, E. W. (1983). Opponents, audiences, constituencies and community. In Hal Foster (Ed.), *The anti-aesthetic: Essays on postmodern culture* (pp. 135–159). Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press.

Shumway, D. R., & Messer-Davidow, E. (1991). Disciplinarity: An introduction. *Poetics Today, 12*, 201–225.

Spender, D. (1982). *Invisible women: The schooling scandal*. London: Writers and Readers Publishing.

Spender, D. (1985). *Man made language*, 2nd ed. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Spitzack, C., & Carter, K. (1989). Research on women's communication: The politics of theory and method. In Kathryn Carter & Carole Spitzack (Eds.), *Doing research on women's communication: Perspectives on theory and method* (pp. 11–39). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Stanley, L. (1990). *Feminist praxis: Research, theory and epistemology in feminist sociology*. London and New York: Routledge.

Steeves, H. L. (1987). Feminist theories and media studies. In *Critical studies in mass communication, 4*, 95–135.

Steeves, H. L. (1993). Creating imagined communities: Development communication and the challenge of feminism. *Journal of Communication, 43*, 218–229. (The Future of the Field I)

Trend, D. (1992). *Cultural pedagogy: Art/education/politics*. New York: Bergin and Garvey.

Tuchman, G., et al., eds. (1978). *Hearth and home: Images of women in the mass media*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Women — A Symposium (1974). *Journal of Communication, 24*, 103–155.

Young, I. M. (1990). *Justice and the politics of gender*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.