



Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia Inc

Learning for Life and Work in a Complex World

Volume 38

Refereed papers from the
38th HERDSA Annual International Conference

6 - 9 July 2015
Melbourne Convention and Exhibition
Centre (MCEC), Melbourne, Australia

Lipton, B. & Mackinlay, E. (2015) Daring to lead with feminism: Stories from Gender Studies academics in Australian higher education. In T. Thomas, E. Levin, P. Dawson, K. Fraser & R. Hadgraft (Eds.), *Research and Development in Higher Education: Learning for Life and Work in a Complex World*, 38 (pp 279-292). Melbourne, Australia. 6 - 9 July 2015

Published 2015 by the
Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia, Inc
PO Box 27, MILPERRA NSW 2214, Australia
www.herdsa.org.au

ISSN 1441 001X
ISBN 978-0-908557-96-7

This research paper was reviewed using a double blind peer review process that meets DIISR requirements. Two reviewers were appointed on the basis of their independence and they reviewed the full paper devoid of the authors' names and institutions in order to ensure objectivity and anonymity. Papers were reviewed according to specified criteria, including relevance to the conference theme and sub-themes, originality, quality and presentation. Following review and acceptance, this full paper was presented at the international conference.

Copyright © 2015 HERDSA and the authors. Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of research or private study, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patent Act, 2005, this publication may only be reproduced, stored or transmitted, in any form or by any means, with the prior permission in writing of the publishers, or in the case of reprographic reproduction in accordance with the terms and licenses issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside those terms should be sent to the publishers at the address above.

Daring to lead with feminism: Stories from Gender Studies academics in Australian higher education

Briony Lipton

The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia

briony.lipton@anu.edu.au

Elizabeth Mackinlay

The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia

e.mackinlay@uq.edu.au

Leadership is now central to the management of the neoliberal, corporate university. Despite the introduction of equity policies and guidelines to improve the gender profile of Australian universities academic women remain underrepresented in the professoriate as well as in formal academic executive and faculty decision-making positions. This paper navigates the uncertainty and complexity of university leadership in Australian universities and the consequential gendered implications this has for academic staff. It exposes the gendered failings of current equity measures such as merit and diversity and why a feminist discussion of women and leadership in academia is necessary to address the ongoing paucity of women in positions of authority and influence. This paper draws upon qualitative interviews with Gender Studies academics to better understand what it means to be a feminist teacher and leader and how these experiences offer new insights into university leadership in a new era of higher education.

Keywords: leadership; feminism; Gender Studies

Introduction

In what is considered one of her openly feminist non-fiction works, *Three Guineas* (1939/1993), Virginia Woolf commented on the academic procession of educated men she saw marching figuratively past her window. She declared that in relation to the social, educational, political and cultural institutions of patriarchy and the ceremonies that defend them, women have ‘outsider status’ (Goldman, 2006, 110). The interrelated themes of ‘women as outsiders’, and the absurdity of masculine institutions and rituals preoccupied Woolf throughout much of her life and other texts such as *A Room of One’s Own* (1929/2001) elaborate the marginalisation of women from centres of power. Woolf’s feminist writings in *Three Guineas* directly challenged the kind of education that patriarchy provided, questioned the values upon which such education was based, and lamented the exclusion of women. If she were alive today, Woolf might well ask the same kinds of questions: have academic women joined the parade of men, are women excluded or included in this procession and on whose terms, or are we performing a pageant of our own making (Murphy & McNett, 2000)?

For decades feminists in Australia and overseas have decried academia and university management as a ‘boys club’. Unlike in Woolf’s era, women are by no means absent from the contemporary academy; and yet women are far from achieving parity with men in professorial and formal leadership positions. Women now make up approximately forty-four per cent of academic staff in Australia, but represent only twenty-eight per cent of staff above senior lecturer level and only twenty-five per cent are university vice-chancellors (Australian Government, 2014; Universities Australia, 2010). In addition to this, women over represent at

the lower levels of academia and are also more likely to occupy fixed-term contracts. Indeed, it is the performance of feminist leadership in teaching and learning within and against the procession of academic men, which takes centre stage in this paper.

Leadership is now central to the neoliberal, corporate, self-managed university and is entangled with notions of disciplinary knowledge, merit and excellence, and yet questions remain about who does the counting, how the counting is done, who gets counted and why. The underrepresentation of academic women in Australian higher education is not simply about the percentage of men and women. As Blackmore (2013) proposes, a refocusing of feminist inquiry away from numerical representation to a more nuanced understanding of women and leadership is needed and that we need to look more closely at social relations of gender and power. A shift in perspective: from using the academic gaze on ‘others’ to turning the gaze towards itself (Stanley, 1997). The question therefore arises: what can a feminist discussion of leadership tell us about the ongoing paucity of academic women in university leadership positions? This paper draws upon interviews with Gender Studies scholars in Australia who are ‘daring to lead with feminism’. Their testimonies reveal the paradoxical relationship between neoliberal university practices and feminism and what it means to be a feminist teacher and leader in performative times.

Feminism and leadership

The influence of leadership has become central to university governance, as institutions alter their structures and systems in an effort to develop new and improved corporate profiles in order to maintain legitimacy, funding, and prestige. Teaching performance, research funding, research outputs, and student completions are all subject to intense scrutiny. We define feminist leadership as a theory and practice, informed by the feminist subjectivities of academic women in positions of authority and influence. Lumby and Coleman (2007, 2) state that:

all educators are potentially leaders in that all may create followers by influencing those around them, whether as teacher leaders, heads of department, faculty or service support team, bursars, members of a senior leadership team, principal, [or] vice-chancellor.

Indeed all academics are leaders in their occupation. A feminist perspective of educational leadership creates the conditions conducive to improved quality of teaching and learning outcomes. As such, leadership should not be merely equated with seniority or formal positions. We concur with Blackmore that, feminist perspectives of university leadership “offer alternative ways of thinking about leadership as a situated social and political practice, a habitus produced over time and not merely equated to position” (2006, 195).

Leadership is continually being defined and measured in response to these changes to the higher education environment. In university policy, leadership is positioned as a solution to problems and as a reform measure (Blackmore, 2013). Yet leadership also “has the potential to disguise the corporatisation and values shift in academia by diverting attention to personal qualities, skills and dispositions required for organisational transformation” (Morley, 2013, 117). Principles of neoliberalism, underpin such reforms in Australian higher education and this has had a significant impact on the status of academic women, as well as perceptions around the values of feminism and Gender Studies in the Australian academy.

Feminism in the neoliberal academy

Neoliberalism is a pervasive isomorphic ideology prefaced on economic liberalism. It is a political theory that is able to adapt and flex to take into account other ideological projects. Neoliberalism can be understood to appropriate social justice principles such as feminism, and projects such as equal opportunity and diversity, as a way of creating new means of capital accumulation. In the university organisation, neoliberalism perverts feminist ideals in the pursuit of profit and these redefined concepts are then implemented and actualised by new managerialism. The introduction of affirmative action, equal employment opportunity, and workplace diversity in universities can be interpreted as the mainstreaming of feminist principles. However, such feminist claims have become secondary to those of neoliberalism and as a consequence limited the success of such programs (Newman, 2013; Ahmed, 2011).

Neoliberalism individualises and internalises the norms of capitalist logic and self-interest (Skeggs, 2014). While these concepts imply an underlying concept of social justice, neoliberalism's appropriation of rights-based discourses creates a thinly veiled and precarious form of equality, without any commitment to action or redistributive justice. The reframing of equity and diversity around the individual and choice enables neoliberalism to smooth out "problematic antagonisms" (Newman, 2013, 213). Indeed, the apparent oversaturation of gender equity and diversity policies, procedures, and guidelines can be understood as contributing to a perceived irrelevance of feminism in neoliberal times, which has in turn affected the status of the Gender Studies discipline in the Australian academy. Women have been included in the economy and in policy without any real change to existing gendered social structures.

While it can be said that this reformation of the Australian university has offered academic women new leadership opportunities, these are often a horizontal side step away from the central governance and strategic operations of the institution. As Morley (2013) notes, leadership can be punishment as well as reward. Women in both academic and professional positions in middle management can be understood as undertaking 'organisational housework' (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007). What is also less recognised is the continued "numerical dominance of men in senior academic *and* administrative positions at the apex of the university hierarchy" (Simpson & Fitzgerald, 2013, 3) and this has an impact on the direction and (re)production of universities' values. Women's underrepresentation in educational leadership is not about women's lack of ambition or capabilities. Instead it is, as Blackmore and Sachs propose: "a consequence of the limited opportunities created in an environment of systematically gendered cultural, social and structural arrangements that inform women educator's choices and possibilities relative to their male colleagues" (2007, 13).

Neoliberalism in the university organisation undermines feminism and by extension, the gender equality project. This may explain why the representation of women in academia actually falls short of many institutions' gender equity goals. Indeed a failure to achieve such targets has seen Universities Australia avoid setting any numerical objectives in their "Strategy for Women: 2011-2014". A reversal in the percentage of women in Group of Eight (Go8) universities is now evident despite over a decade of sustained recruitment of female academics (Feteris, 2012). Gender studies scholars as well as self-identified feminist academics across the disciplines must continually negotiate their status and legitimacy within the university.

Gender Studies in Australian Universities: Yesterday and today

Today, more women than ever are active participants in higher education in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010; Australian Government, 2014) and women's presence in the academy has increased, in terms of enrolment, employment and the curriculum. Various titled Women's Studies, Women and Gender Studies or Gender Studies, the discipline has developed globally to not only "fill the gaps" where women were "missing" in the traditional post-secondary curricula, but also as Orr and Lichenstein assert, to "sustain feminism by doing work that has shifted the paradigms by which we gain, understand, and apply knowledge" (2004, 1). Gender Studies enacts distinctly feminist agendas that position the discipline as a knowledge formation: as a philosophical, epistemological, theoretical and methodological academic and disciplinary identity/ies within institutions. Gender Studies is a pedagogical revolution and an agency for changing the status of women in social, economical, political and cultural fields. It acts as a vehicle for transforming lives. The call to progressive social change is thus a central commitment of feminism (Sprague, 2005) and is emphasised in the diverse yet distinctly feminist ways that Gender Studies perceives, positions and performs "education as a site for possible political action" (Weiler, 2001, 2).

A discussion of the history of Gender Studies in Australia begins with its relationship to the women's liberation movement of the 1970s. Indeed, Boxer (1982, 678) explains that "women's studies was conceived as the academic arm of women's liberation" and Butler et al. (1991, 3) make clear that while it has developed into a "comprehensive intellectual and social critique", the discipline's roots remain firmly planted in the political women's movement. Magarey and Sheridan (2002, 131) describe the development of Women's Studies in Australia as a "reflex of the social movement upon the world of learning". National conferences with a political focus stirred up challenging and innovative scholarship on the social, economical and political status of women. Following the Whitlam government's abolition of tertiary fees, women turned to the universities to provide the intellectual contexts and spaces, which "spoke specifically to them about their place in the world" (Magarey & Sheridan, 2002, 131). Flinders University was the first tertiary institution in Australia to open its doors to feminist scholarship and established a program officially called 'Women's Studies' in 1973, and by the mid-1980s, women's studies had found a foothold in many others including the University of Sydney, the University of Queensland, the University of Adelaide and the Australian National University (Magarey & Sheridan, 2002, 132).

By the turn of the 21st century, Gender Studies could be found in almost all Australian universities in some form and continues to make pioneering waves in the development of Humanities and Social Sciences. The discipline has increasingly turned its attention to exploring the crossings and intersections between femininity, masculinity, sexuality, race, class and culture. Today, the University of Melbourne, Monash University and Victoria University; University of Queensland; University of Tasmania; University of Western Australia; Australian National University; University of Sydney, University of New South Wales and Macquarie University; University of Adelaide, Flinders University and the University of South Australia; all offer undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Gender Studies as minor and/or major programs of study. However, the fight to sustain Gender Studies as a necessary part of Australia higher education curriculum is a constant one as the backlash against the 'F' word continues. The recent battle waged at the University of Queensland to keep Gender Studies on the books is a good example of this. After 41-years of offering, the then Dean of the Faculty of Arts declared that Gender Studies was no longer relevant or viable for students, reflecting the myth that there is no need to "do gender" because gender concerns and equality is now everywhere (Hofman, 2013; Smith, 2013).

To better understand the paradoxical position of Gender Studies academics in the neoliberal university, this paper expands upon Newman's (2012, 2013) theorisations of "spaces of power" to describe the ways in which Gender Studies academics find and create spaces for feminism in the Australian academy. These spaces foster feminist politics and perspectives that enable academic women to actively resist hegemonic structures and discourses. Newman exposes two dominant narratives that we argue limits the status and visibility of Gender Studies academics and which are frequently used to define the relationship between feminism and neoliberalism, that of neoliberalism's appropriation of feminist identity politics, and "of how processes of 'mainstreaming' have served to both acknowledge and depoliticise feminist claims" (2013, 202). Because of the way in which neoliberalism individualises the social and collective, feminism is made culpable for its depoliticisation, its widening interpretations and broadening political objectives.

Our study endeavours to open up a space for a politics and historicity of the present as proposed by Newman that will enable an exploration into the relationship between neoliberalism and feminism, of its contradictions and of feminist achievements. Feminism is needed most, precisely when it is understood as having been rejected, and women, and particularly women of colour will invariably experience the most disadvantage and inequality in this process of "reflexive modernisation" (Newman, 2013, 204). We hope that by unpacking the relationship between feminism and neoliberalism through the experiences of Gender Studies academics it will be possible to reveal the multiplicity of ways in which feminism/s are practiced in the university organisation and what new insights this might reveal, which will enable us to better understand the ongoing paucity of women in leadership.

Teaching and learning like a feminist in higher education: Our study

In 2013, we embarked on a national project to interview academics working in the discipline of Gender Studies across Australian Universities to gain an understanding of the affective and critical dimension of the ways in which 'knowing, being and doing' as a feminist in higher education is experienced and embodied today. The overarching question guiding this research: 'What place does feminism have in higher education today and where are the academics, researchers and educators who still dare to say the 'f' word?' We aimed to explore the impact of the feminist backlash and great feminist denial upon the position of Gender Studies scholarship in Australian higher education. Particularly the tensions between second wave and third wave ideologies as enacted and performed in teaching and learning. We were also concerned to ask: 'What does Gender Studies and feminism look like in Australian universities today? Who are we to teach Women and Gender Studies and how do we *do*, know and live feminism as academics? Is feminism still the activating politic of Gender Studies or have we betrayed our radical political roots by trading action for abstraction, practice for theory and risk for legitimacy?'

Stories play an important role in understanding and actual and existing worlds (Haraway, 1994), qualitative open-ended interviews or 'conversations' were undertaken at a number of 'Sandstone' and 'Gumtree' universities across Australia with female academics teaching in Gender Studies. Fifteen participants were interviewed and included women in a variety of academic positions: Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor, and Professor, as well as a number who also held formal university leadership responsibilities as Heads of School, Program Coordinators or Convenors, and Chairs of university committees. In our conversations together, each sought to reflect the complex entanglements of different political and feminist identifications and commitments they face in the academy. From our reading of

the participants stories, what is so significant, about the feminist experiences of female Gender Studies academics, is that: “feminist women leaders are at risk both personally and professionally as they challenge the status quo and unsettle what is perceived as the ‘natural order’ of organisational life” (Fitzgerald, 2014, 8). Given the debates around the limits of feminism as an identity and the precarious status of Gender Studies as an academic discipline in Australian universities, the experiences of the women we spoke with are critical to not only understanding the status of women in academia, but to the continued relevance of feminism in discussions of gender equality in academia. We now interweave the words of some of our interviewees - Belinda, Mary, Sarah, Beth, Melissa and Lisa - with an analysis of the kind of feminist stories they tell about being feminist in the academy within and against the tide of neoliberalism. The names included here are pseudonyms and are used to protect the identities of the women that we interviewed for this project. The project received ethical clearance from the University of Queensland and informed consent was obtained from all participants in this project.

Discussion

The neoliberal ruse that is appropriation, serves to undermine the importance of feminism and Gender Studies in contemporary society, which in turn affects universities decisions around the value of feminist knowledge(s) and pedagogy. Newman states that: “blaming feminism for its own undoing too easily slides into the continued demonisation of feminism and its achievements by the conservative right, fed by the popular press” (Newman, 2013, 203). Despite this, feminist theorists are not immune to the internalisation of this neoliberal narrative. Hemmings (2011) critiques the stories which feminist theory so often tells of itself and its development as “interlocking narratives of progress, loss, and return” (2011, 3). She suggests that the dominance of these narratives not only oversimplifies different areas of feminist theory, but it contributes to the eclipsing of feminism with neoliberalism. These stories, as Newman suggests, “are not exclusive to feminism but pervade accounts of other social and political movements that oscillate between accounts of progress and achievement or of loss, incorporation and depoliticisation” (Newman, 2013, 203). These tropes are inevitably entangled and to understand this as a process highlights the relevancy of such explorations of the relationship between feminism and neoliberalism and its impact on women and leadership and the representation of female academics in higher education. Holding to Hemming’s (2011) hope that feminist stories have the potential for something ethically accountable and politically transformative to happen, we now turn to explore the narratives of progress, loss and return that Gender Studies academics tell about leadership. There is, as Newman proposes a need to challenge dominant narratives of erasure and appropriation and reintroduce “questions of contradiction and ambivalence” (2013, 200) and so our decision to structure our discussion in this way is not to legitimise one narrative over another but to make connections and identify the spaces of power that the women we interviewed occupy and create through their practices.

Progress

Hemmings identifies narratives of progress as those stories which provide a positive account of movement from:

A time when we knew no better, a time when we thought ‘woman’ could be the subject and object of liberation, to a more knowing time in which attend to the complexity of local and transnational formations of gender and its intersections with other vectors of power. (2011, 34)

Progress stories such as these are replete with excitement, accomplishment, and position feminist praxis as dynamic and attentive to current contexts. In these narratives, feminism and Gender Studies take on transformative and intersectional kinds of subjectivities and performativities, which find life in a new kind of critical energy in the language and discourse of gender, race, class, ethnicity and sexuality. Belinda identifies this as explicitly being located in discourses of intersectionality:

I think my own feminist politics comes out in my work on a number of levels. It's hard to pinpoint things as being exclusively feminist in origin, rather than just a commitment to inclusive work that recognises intersectionality and so on.

Mary explains explicitly how a movement beyond what might be thought of as 'second wave' discussions of 'patriarchy' and 'women's liberation' takes place in her life as a feminist academic:

I'm now teaching first year Gender, Sexuality and Diversity Studies. I love it because it's political and I've hinted at the difficulty of how we negotiate these identities...As soon as we start to say there's a thing called woman and this becomes the thing by which we try and analyse everything, all of a sudden a whole lot of other critical skills to analyse the complexities of power relations don't become possible.

During our conversations with women, we asked if they might provide us with a metaphor to describe themselves as feminist academics in the current climate of our work. Melissa's choice of metaphor reflects the sense of optimism she feels right now for what is possible and permissible as self-identified feminist in higher education:

Motorbike. [I like] their freedom, their movement, you move into that class, do what you have to do, get out. [It's] a fast ride. You represent something - a great machine of the 20th century like the women's movement. A bit of grunt, a bit of noise, a bit of style, a bit of danger. That's all women's and gender studies should be. I live the metaphor.

Loss

Feminist narratives of loss are typically those of neoliberal appropriation and depoliticisation that Hemmings (2011) and Newman (2012, 2013) refer to. Stories of feminist erasure and irrelevance can be understood as lapsarian nostalgia for feminism/s past. That is, a romanticised longing for a 'golden era' in feminist history. This reminiscence locates the positive feminist future in the past. A reluctance to discuss feminist practice in the classroom comes from a position of marginalisation caused by neoliberal practices. Neoliberalism is attributed with the collapse of the social state, dismantling earlier institutional forms such as the welfare state, forms of citizenship, and privatising public functions (Clarke, 2008). Incredibly, the very "bureaucratic systems through which equal opportunities had become inscribed became threatened as bureaucracy itself became discredited" (Newman, 2013, 213). Feminist claims have become secondary as neoliberalism appropriates notions of equity and diversity. Sarah, for example, reflects:

I don't feel validated by my institution, in terms of the feminist work that I do. In fact, I think some of them think gosh, Sarah's - she's nice. She does her job well, but she's still a crazy feminist.

For Sarah, such disavowal of her scholarship and capacity as an intellectual is one of the micro-aggressions she experiences day in and day out:

[It's] something that I'm very aware of, and it's terrible I think. Because it actually - I find it very short sighted of the institution, because there's so much interest at an undergraduate level...I just feel that they don't see - so I attract a lot more PhD students than my senior colleagues. Often that is attributed to my personality.

Similarly, Lisa notes that:

As a feminist you...do feel, well I feel vulnerable at time in this climate where student's rights are the most important thing on earth and within this Faculty...within this School...feminism is a dirty word really.

Belinda describes a loss of traction in terms of the entanglement between her feminist identity and her feminist teaching:

I mean I feel like we've - I've been a bit reluctant to kind of answer you on topic about the feminist classroom or my feminist politic and that's just because that whole concept of feminism and feminist is - I'm just not there anymore in a way that I would have been 20 or 30 years ago.

Similarly, Mary describes her sense of irrelevance as a self-identified “ratbag queer foul middle class feminist academic”:

I don't have tenure, I'm a casual tutor. I'm living off paintings I did 10 years ago and my tax return until [my Director] gives me work next year...My investment in the academy at the moment, it's 10 years of my life but I haven't sold my arse to them yet...I'm poor [but] I don't think I can be a total fuck tart, I'm too old, I'm too crusty, I'm too angry.

The anger, panic and/or academic “anxiety about my own position” that Belinda, and others such as Sarah and Mary articulate around identity positioning, research and teaching performativity as feminists is not unfounded. Merit is designed to obscure such maintenance of the status quo, and is part and parcel of a neoliberal corporatised university. It implies that the best person for the job should be appointed in relation to his or her abilities and achievements, irrespective of status, gender or other facets of identity and is supposed to replace inherited privilege as a means of allocating rewards, power, and resources and instead establish legitimate hierarchies and safeguard academic excellence. Meritocracy establishes everyone as ‘equal’ and thus there is no inequality that cannot be justified as part of the meritocratic system. Equal and unequal status is then distributed accordingly (Jenkins, 2013). “According to this defence” Jenkins critiques, “there may be inequality, but it is not inequitable” (95). An acceptance of merit prevents an interrogation of its systems through its naturalisation as an apolitical process. Jenkins notes that definitions of “‘excellence’ forecloses criticism by over determining the kinds of questions that can be presumed to have ‘merit’” (Jenkins, 2013, 89) and poses the question: how can we challenge merit when the opposite of merit is gender inequality? What counts as ‘success’ or ‘excellence’ in the meritocratic process creates performative competition. Sarah recounts the obstacles she faces to promotion:

Well as I said I decided to go for a teaching award as part of a campaign to get promoted...I thought okay how can I get a teaching award? The best thing to do would be to put up something to do with my indigenous women's voices class because I think that's what I do best and love the most and has probably got the best bet. So I looked at the criteria - this is the true story of how I came to do it. I looked at the criteria and the one that I chose - so I've got the lowest level of award that is a faculty award but this is a stepping stone perhaps to getting a university-wide award. I said that it was my command of materials in the area that led to an excellence in something blah, blah, bah. So that was the focus, kind of like curriculum and materials. It wasn't about what a fabulous teacher I am. I think I'm a pretty good teacher but I didn't have the evidence. I just think all this stuff is total bullshit but you've got to have evidence. I thought I can show evidence about the materials but I don't know if I could show evidence or learn the lingo, how to write the application to show something else... My position in it it's really interesting because I'm the expert but then I'm not, I'm wanting to de-centre myself so that's another story.

The precarity of the academic workforce and the higher education sector's emphasis on quality assurance compels Sarah to apply for a teaching award in order to secure a promotion, something that academic women may feel they need in order to feel that their knowledge/s and practices are acknowledged and validated by the institution. The paradox of promotion for academic women might be considered a narrative of loss. As a consequence of the imbricated relationship between feminism and neoliberalism, equity and diversity policies merely aim to assist women to better navigate the prevailing higher education landscape, and to assimilate into the overarching neoliberal-patriarchal structure on the condition that women modify their behaviour to appease rather than disrupt "the world of men" (Fitzgerald 2014, 6). In order to join the parade of men, as described by Woolf "the only path to success", Feteris (2012) observes, "is for women to learn to become honorary men".

Universities by their very existence as producers of knowledge claim to be impartial, inclusive, and socially democratic but in actuality they are in opposition to much equality work. A feminist academic identity is in binary opposition to that of the 'ideal academic'. Thornton argues that the ideal academic: "continues to be constituted in the image of Benchmark Man. This normative masculinist standard favours those who are Anglo-Australian, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class, not elderly, espouse a right-of-centre politics and a nominal mainstream religion, if any" (2013, 128). This is because under the logic of capital, male bodies are understood to have the most capacity to accumulate capital. The presence of Gender Studies academics is a direct affront to the hegemonic masculinity that governs Australian institutions. When describing the double-bind of being female and feminist in the academy, Sarah suggests that

Women who do feminist stuff are either thought of in that way or as aggressive. It's always some sort of hyper-feminine category that you're boxed into.

In popular discourses, understandings of women and leadership are conflated with 'women's styles of leadership', which equates women leaders with the gendered feminine attributes of caring and sharing. This is one of the ways in which neoliberalism appropriates feminist concepts for capital investment rather than social improvement. Mary recalls her experience of working with a 'Queen Bee' (see Staines, Tavriss, & Jayaratne, 1974) academic bully in her institution:

Because our Director was a woman who was an avowedly – she was a power white woman, she was a power feminist. So it's different types of feminisms [at play] and what gets used as feminism in different spaces too. This is my cynicism that this language gets used by particular women who have a lot of power in order to silence other women and in order to deny their own power.

Often policies generated to support the advancement of women are unsuccessful, not necessarily because opponents of social change quash them, but because, as Bacchi notes, “issues get represented in ways that subvert progressive intent” (2000, 47). Blackmore (2013) asks feminist theorists to consider how leadership might enrich institutional life. This richness is not captured in the current discourse of diversity or recent theorisations of leadership, noticeably because such concepts and terms fail to acknowledge the legacies of past and occurring inequalities of gender, class, and race. For instance, a gendered rationale for women's participation in paid labour is that, as managers, or regulators of new managerialism, women were seen to be softening and humanising organisations. Feminism can be understood as functional to neoliberalism in distinctive yet contradictory ways. Selective incorporation of gender equity can be understood as the domination of neoliberal forms of appropriation of feminist politics (Newman, 2013). As Ball (1994, 125) notes gender equality is not a priority for the neoliberal academy because effectively “equity is off the agenda”; inequality is the cornerstone of the market. Women's participation in paid employment is good for capitalism. Women's equality under neoliberalism is partial and conditional.

Return

By challenging dominant feminist narratives of loss and appropriation it is possible to reveal how Gender Studies academics/feminists are shaping and contesting contemporary organisational governance and ‘working the spaces of power’ (Newman, 2013). Skeggs (2014, 15) notes that “living within the logic of capital doesn't prefigure internalisation” and as such there are opportunities to subvert and to challenge hegemonic structures. There is a need to rethink the relationship between feminism and neoliberalism in terms of reciprocal appropriations where there is space for new discourses and new articulations. It is necessary to explore the contradictions in neoliberalism and of its competing projects since they require different agents, and occur in different temporalities and spatialities. Newman urges us to ask: “what is happening in particular spaces of power in a particular political-cultural moment” (2013, 206). As Melissa states, “We've got power and privilege, we speak from a privileged position in the academy, so we need to get better at using that”. Melissa's words recognise the progress made by feminist academics in their infiltration into the academy in the 1970s and despite the precarious status of the Gender Studies discipline in Australian universities today, Gender Studies academics inside the academy are nevertheless in a position of power and influence. For Lisa, getting better at using power and privilege means that she has learnt to move away from directly talking about feminism because of the resistance from students, to going “down a more indirect path” and introducing feminist language, theory and knowledge “by stealth”.

It is a recognition that Gender Studies academics are “working in and against” institutions (Newman, 2013, 208), from outside and within. Similarly, Sarah describes a potentiality in moving beyond a narrative of loss. She states that it is not about:

What spaces do we have left, now that they're closing down - it's more about where it fits in the institutions. So I actually think more discussion on teaching and learning is needed.

While it must be acknowledged that a loss of rights and privileges previously fought for and won, have now been lost through this complex entanglement of feminism and neoliberalism, Sarah offers teaching and learning as a frontier for feminist intervention. However she is cognisant of the shrinking spaces of power, the tightening borders, material constraints and “coercive governance regimes” (Newman, 2013, 217), which compromise the strength of such a return narrative. Sarah states:

I just think just continuing to do that, and to keep that space opened for feminist enquiry in the university. I think it has to be conscious - you can't just ever take it for granted. You have to - I'm really aware that if I took off a year or something, that that space would just close up. I think that's what a lot of people in doing topics under that banner - whether they're doing it in the Gender Studies Department or whether they're doing it in some other program or discipline - is something that we're aware of. If we don't do it, those options aren't there and students see it, too.

Sarah's words are not a loss narrative, but instead, illustrate that “by generating new discursive repertoires” as Newman proposes (2012, 4), in teaching, research and service practice; it is possible to create new spaces in which feminist politics within the neoliberal academy can be affecting and effective. It is about making visible the position of Gender Studies academics, and of academic women, it is about asserting and performing difference and giving voice to those who are marginalised. Gender studies academics undertake a form of creative labour that produces alternative ways of thinking and practicing that has the potential to see beyond neoliberal compliance and challenge managerial processes and decisions.

The experiences of Gender Studies scholars highlight these contractions and the uncertainties of a feminist politics from within Australian higher education. Yet what these women's reflections of their feminist identities and practices and presence as Gender Studies teachers offer is the possibility for alternate physical and intellectual spaces of power and resistance and these are especially articulated in narratives of return. Beth cites that feminism and neoliberalism in the academy are imbricated and inextricably linked:

What preoccupies us a lot at the moment, is academics, which is what's going on in higher education, and cutbacks and bureaucracies and more and more streamlining all the time. I mean some of that you might be able to do something with. It's not a monolith, but it's as if the space we're in as - leaving aside the feminist academic question - but you can't really - but a space where women as academics, and in what preoccupies us a lot in our daily work, and a sense of trying to get it done, is that stuff.

All academics are experiencing the shifts in institutional values and increased performance anxiety with the continual monitoring and monetising of research output. However, despite wanting to address university management and feminist issues separately, for Beth, they cannot be separated. Neoliberal managerialist processes nevertheless create an environment in which new spaces of influence for social justice ideas can develop, “in which activists could ‘bend’ the new logics, taking equality rationales into service provision by resignifying ‘quality’, inscribing equality into audit and performance management measures, linking

‘diversity’ to the expansion of participative technologies and so on” (Newman, 2013, 213). By virtue of their complex status within the academy, Gender Studies academics nevertheless create spaces for agency within institutions by being critical of organisational and ideological structures, by fostering collegiality, and in their commitment to feminist pedagogy. For some of the women we interviewed, spaces of agency come hand in hand with spaces of collectivity as women and as feminists. attributes her success as an academic in part to working in community with and being nurtured by other feminists:

But I think a lot of it is from - I have got from feminism. Because I've been so lucky and I've had strong, feminist mentors in the Academy...Working in that very supportive environment with those women, given that I was very junior and on the edge of all their conflicts and political battles that just went over my head really because I was just a part timer or a casual, I've got a very supportive feminist background in my career history... So I like to now - I'm quite collaborative.

Lisa suggests that she sustains her capacity for change and transformation in the neoliberal academy by:

[Not mixing] outside of feminist lands. I feel like we don't have to explain. We only speak feminist here...and [feel] really safe knowing there [are] kindred spirits around...We have more support in being feminists, we will be backed up [because] it feels like there's a critical mass of us [to speak back to] the hierarchical issue and the power issue.

Conclusion

As the stories of Belinda, Mary, Sarah, Beth, Melissa and Lisa have shown, Gender Studies academics have not joined the parade of men, which Woolf observes in *Three Guineas*. In this text and other writings by Woolf, such as her essay “Professions for Women” (1931/2008), Woolf seeks to tell the truth about her experiences *as a woman in a woman's* body as always in relation to patriarchal structures, particularly education, which seek to censor, dominate and oppress her. She urges women to reflect upon their position right now and what might be done:

You have rooms of your own hitherto exclusively owned by men...But this freedom is only a beginning—the room is your own, but it is still bare. It has to be furnished; it has to be decorated; it has to be shared. How are you going to furnish it? How are you going to decorate it? With whom are you going to share it, and upon what terms? These, I think are the questions of the utmost importance and interest. For the first time in history you are able to ask them; for the first time you are able to decide what the answers should be. (1931/2008, 144-145)

We might say then, for at least the second time in history, feminist academics in Gender Studies in Australia, are asking the same kinds of questions as Woolf about their positioning, and the possibilities such performativities of identity as feminists hold in a neoliberal world. The stories that the women we spoke to shared, tell us that their feminist identities and practices have not been sublimated into the overarching neoliberal agenda that governs contemporary Australian universities. Rather, these women demonstrate that they are ‘daring to lead’ by challenging the status quo. Despite significant changes in Australian higher education; the introduction of neoliberal forms of university governance, from the celebration of Gender Studies as an academic discipline to fighting for its continuation in academia, the

voices of the women interviewed highlight that feminist academics are aware of these changes and challenges, and are adapting their practices and redirecting their feminist focus in their professional and political lives, creating new 'spaces of power', which will ultimately benefit female academics, across disciplines. Willingly then, we echo Woolf's sentiment and ask those of us who proudly claim the 'f' word, to stay the course and dare to:

Set fire to the old hypocrisies. Let the light of the burning building scare the nightingales and incarnadine the willows. And let the daughters of educated men dance round the fire and heap armful upon armful of dead leaves upon the flames. And let their mothers lean from the upper windows and cry, 'Let it blaze! Let it blaze! For we have done with this 'education!'' (Woolf, 1938/1993, 45).

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the women working as Gender Studies academics in Australia who so generously gave their time and wisdom to speak to us and share their experiences as proud feminists in higher education. Without them, this paper would not have been possible and we hope that our words carry the flame of feminism long into the night and beyond into the dawn of "post"-neoliberalism.

References

- Ahmed, S. (2012). *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Durham: Duke.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2010). Education and Work, Australia [Electronic version]. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics. Accessed 20 March, 2011, from <[http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/BF843E083D8F5705CA2577F20010B4FF/\\$File/62270_may%202010.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/BF843E083D8F5705CA2577F20010B4FF/$File/62270_may%202010.pdf)>
- Australian Government. (2014). Department of Education and Training Higher Education statistics. Accessed 8 November, 2014, from <<http://education.gov.au/staff-data>>
- Blackmore, J. (2013). A feminist critical perspective on educational leadership. *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 16 (2): 139–54.
- Blackmore, J., & Sachs, J. (2007). *Performing and Reforming Leaders: Gender, Educational Restructuring, and Organizational Change Account*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Boxer, M. J. (1982). For and about women: The theory and practice of women's studies in the United States. *Signs*, 661-695.
- Fitzgerald, T. (2014). *Women Leaders in Higher Education: Shattering the Myths*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Gill, R. (2010). Breaking the silence: Hidden injuries of the neoliberal university". In R. Ryan Flood & R. Gill (eds.), *Secrecy and Silence in the Research Process: Feminist Reflections* (pp. 228-244), Oxon: Routledge.
- Goldman, J. (2006). *The Cambridge companion to Virginia Woolf*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Haraway, D. (1997). *Modest Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan@_Meets_OncoMouseTM: Feminism and technoscience*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hemmings, C. (2011). *Why stories matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hofman, H. (2013). Feminists rise up: UQ scraps Gender Studies major. *Radio National*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 7 March. Retrieved from <<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/drive/feminists-rise-up3a21-uq-scraps-gender-studies-major/4559238>>
- Jenkins, F. (2013). Singing the post-discrimination blues: Notes for a critique of academic meritocracy. In K. Hutchinson & F. Jenkins (eds), *Women in Philosophy: What Needs to Change?* (pp. 81-102), New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lumby J., & Coleman, M. (2007). *Leadership and Diversity: Challenging Theory and Practice in Education*. London: Sage.
- Magarey, S., & Sheridan, S. (2002). Local, global, regional: Women's studies in Australia. *Feminist Studies*, 28(1), 129-152.

- Morley, L. (2013). The rules of the game: Women and the leaderist turn in higher education." *Gender and Education* 25(1), 116–31.
- Newman, J. (2013). Spaces of power: Feminism, neoliberalism and gendered labour. *Social Politics* 20(2), 200-221
- Newman, J. (2012). *Working the Spaces of Power: Activism, Neoliberalism and Gendered Labour*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Orr, C. M., & Lichenstein, D. (2004). The politics of feminist locations: A materialist analysis of women's studies. *NWSA Journal*, 16(3), 1-17.
- Skeggs, B. (2014). Value beyond value? Is anything beyond the logic of capital? *The British Journal of Sociology* 65(1), 1-20.
- Simpson, A., & Fitzgerald, T. (2013). Organisational and occupational boundaries in Australian universities: The hierarchical positioning of female professional staff. *Studies in Higher Education* 38(1), 1–13.
- Smith, M. (2013). Why we need Gender Studies. *Women's Agenda*, April 13. Retrieved from <http://www.womensagenda.com.au/talking-about/opinions/why-we-need-gender-studies/201304171996#.VN1bDaN--Ul>.
- Sprague, J. (2005). *Feminist Methodologies for Critical Researchers: Bridging Differences*. Rowman Altamira.
- Staines, G., Tavis, C., & Jayaratne, T. E. (1974). The queen bee syndrome. *Psychology Today*, 7, 55–60.
- Stanley, L. (1997). *Knowing Feminisms: On Academic Borders, Territories and Tribes*. London: Sage.
- Thornton, M. (2013). The mirage of merit: Reconstituting the 'ideal academic'. *Australian Feminist Studies* 28(76), 127-143.
- Universities Australia. (2010). *Universities Australia Strategy for Women: 2011-2014*. Canberra.
- Weiler, K. (2001). Introduction. In K. Weiler (ed.), *Feminist Engagements: Reading, Resisting, and Revisioning Male Theorists in Education and Cultural Studies* (pp. 1-12). New York: Routledge.
- Woolf, V. (1929/2001). *A Room of One's Own*. London: Vintage Press.
- Woolf, V. (1931/2008). Professions for women. *Virginia Woolf: Selected Essays*. Oxford: Oxford World Classics.
- Woolf, V. (1938/1993). *Three guineas*. London: Hogarth Press, Penguin Books.

Copyright © 2015 Briony Lipton and Elizabeth Mackinlay. The authors assign to HERDSA and educational non-profit institutions a non-exclusive license to use this document for personal use and in courses of instruction provided that the article is used in full and this copyright statement is reproduced. The authors also grant a non-exclusive license to HERDSA to publish this document in full on the World Wide Web (prime site and mirrors) and within the portable electronic format HERDSA 2015 conference proceedings. Any other usage is prohibited without the express permission of the authors.