

SEXISM AS A MEANS OF REPRODUCTION: SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE POLITICS OF ACADEMIC PRACTICE

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Abstract Personal experience remains an important resource in the collective effort to document the many faces of sexism - a problem with a name, but an elusive diagnosis. This article, based on a lecture of the same title prepared for the Sexism Workshop at Goldsmiths College in 2014, builds on personal experience to address the persistence of sexism in the academy. The individual experiences on which it is based are both personal and generic, and the aim of revisiting them here is diagnostic: to examine sexism as a means of reproduction. We can learn, I suggest, not only more about the mechanisms of sexism in the academy, but the politics of reproduction more generally, from this analysis. In turn, we can evaluate our own relationship to academic reproduction from two interlinked points of view. On the one hand, in tried and true feminist tradition, personal experience remains a vital resource for collective, transformative politics. Equally important, on the other hand, is the use of personal experience as a guide, or gauge, to determine our own professional practice. The question of how we understand the means by which the academy is reproduced helps us to ask sharper questions about our own reproductive practices, as well as to intervene in the means of reproduction we want to challenge.

Keywords sexism, reproduction, feminism, higher education, professional ethics

A FEMINIST EDUCATION

There was not a lot of feminist literature on the curriculum throughout my high school education in the Boston suburbs in the 1970s. In fact there was none. It wasn't until I became a first year undergraduate in 1978 that I began to experience the radical infusion of feminist thought that would fundamentally change my life. It was exhilarating to discover - in my late teens - the transformative power of feminist writing, feminist activism, feminist groups, feminist professors and feminist theory. And it was nothing short of electrifying to be at the receiving end of the gigantic download of feminist scholarship into the academy that was still accelerating in the late 1970s when I entered university. By the time I graduated in 1982, feminism had permeated my entire being and my main objective was to become a

feminist theorist myself.

Undertaking graduate training in feminist theory proved almost impossible, however, since there were no graduate programmes in women's or gender studies available to me – only programmes in traditional disciplines in which a focus on gender would be permitted as a specialist interest. Even by 1982, there were no PhD programmes in Women's, Feminist or Gender studies anywhere in the United States or Canada. It took me a year to find the only postgraduate programme in Women's Studies in all of Europe, Mary Evans' MA course at Kent, where I enrolled in 1983. While I was completing this intensive one year postgraduate course I continued to look in vain for PhD programmes in which I could continue to study feminist theory. But critical feminist scholarship was not yet part of a viable scholarly trajectory, and the reproductive mechanisms of the academy remained staunchly aligned with the traditional disciplines. There were some exceptions, and eventually I completed my doctorate at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in 1992. In total I spent nine years in a meandering path through graduate school, the last three of which concurrent with full time employment in my first two academic posts - and I became a professional feminist theorist in the end. But the gap between my early feminist education and what it didn't and couldn't lead to in 1982 taught me my first important lesson in the reproductive mechanisms of the academy: no amount of intellectual force, talent or even scale can overcome a lack of institutional capacity to support the ongoing reproduction of a scholarly community.

As I watched the explosion of women's and gender studies over the course of the late 1980s and early 1990s, I naively thought the reproductive bottleneck I faced in my early twenties had given way to a tumult of new opportunities for younger scholars. And at one level this is undoubtedly true. But having now worked as a full time academic for over twenty-five years, I have learned that the reproductive life cycle of critical feminist thought is rather more complicated: unsurprisingly, it is not a linear progress narrative. Besides the macro-structural politics of degree programmes, research funding, new academic appointments, and the perpetual debate over the need to protect the 'core' disciplines, there is an ongoing quotidian struggle about the place of both feminists and feminism in the academy that has not changed very much at all since I was a graduate student. One of the later lessons I learned about the reproduction of feminism in the academy is how far the talk about 'paying more attention to gender issues' or 'offering better support to junior women colleagues' are from the reality of what goes on even in comparatively progressive departments in the humanities and social sciences - in which all-male committees, all-male reading lists, all-male panels at nearly all-male conferences and tiresome small talk about Man United remain far too common and 'acceptable'. In fact breath-taking incidents of sexism are still so ubiquitous and so ordinary, I keep a special diary in which I write them down. A recent entry reads:

Jane and I were sitting in the coffee room yesterday morning discussing a forthcoming seminar we are planning when one of the male professors walked in. He's one of the younger and nicer ones - friendly, unstuffy, easygoing. Seeing only the two of us in the room he asked: 'Oh, is this a gender neutral room now?' There were so many questions I had about this comment I didn't know where to begin. 'Gender neutral'? '*Neutral*'? I haven't heard this word used this way before: did he mean 'unbiased'? 'Non-discriminatory'? 'Impartial'? How would the presence of two women make a room a man was entering 'gender neutral'? It was almost like a Freudian slip and he meant 'neutering' - 'is this a gender neutering room' (because if two women are here gender must not matter? because if they are talking to each other they are excluding men from their conversation and so now we're even?) I have no idea what he meant and Jane and I laughed it off, of course. Later I wished I'd replied: 'No, the neutering doesn't begin until after lunch'.

This article, somewhat unusually for an academic journal, relies almost wholly on another anecdote from my 'sexism in the academy' archives – indeed from when I was a graduate student. I chose to revisit this episode in a lecture I gave at the workshop on sexism that took place at Goldsmiths in 2014, and I agreed to write it up for publication despite the fact that it's a very personal piece and wasn't originally conceived as a lecture I would ever consider publishing.

I was persuaded to change my mind, to rework the lecture and to publish it, by a number of people who heard me read it the first time, and also because of what I felt after I had done so, which was both relieved and angry. I was relieved to have been able to revisit one of the more challenging episodes that occurred during my lengthy period of graduate study, from the position not only of having survived it, but of having enjoyed a long and very satisfying career as an outspokenly critical feminist academic. But in addition to relief, I felt anger in equal measure to have discovered how clearly the audience of largely twenty-something and almost entirely female students understood and identified with my description of the academic sexism I experienced more than thirty years ago. I realised, of course, that I could never have given such a lecture without the enormous security of not only being in a very senior academic position, but even more importantly, having gained the crucial experience of how to handle even quite extreme episodes of sexism in the academy. I realised I should write this article because it really shouldn't be the case that one of the main things a young woman needs to know in the academy today is how to handle sexism gracefully.

A WENCH IN THE WORKS

While I was in graduate school I had the usual mix of experiences, and ups and downs, and there is much in the following anecdote that anyone who has

studied for a PhD will recognise. This is helpful because it is the texture of the exchanges out of which the fabric of pedagogy and teaching are woven that I want to focus on here. We all know graduate school is a place where we rebel and conform, fail and succeed, and surprise and disappoint ourselves and others. These experiences are crucial in shaping our own practices as we grapple with the ever changing circumstances of higher education, which is why it's crucial for us never to stop thinking critically about them, writing about them, and learning about them. All of us will also have experienced key turning points in our educations, and the anecdote I describe here, of a tutorial that turned out badly, was one of those moments for me. It took me to the limits of what I was capable of coping with at the time, and it led me to a new start.

In the beginning, it seemed like a positive sign to be invited to participate in an individual tutorial with one of the most senior professors in my department in only the second term of my first year as a PhD student. My supervisor had suggested it would be great for him to work with me on some of the core issues in social theory and method, and at our first meeting Professor P (as I will call him) gave me a list of books to buy for a series of tutorials on key thinkers on the topic of 'social life'. At Professor P's suggestion, we first read Fustel de Coulanges' work on the city, and my second essay offered an analysis of Emile Durkheim's book *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*.¹ After summarising Durkheim's overall argument (that people are bound together by social categories and rules), his topic (classification), and his method (of inductive empiricism), my essay went on to consider the following claim by Durkheim:

1. Émile, Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Allen and Unwin, New York [1912] 1976. Hereafter *Elementary Forms*.

The Australian does not place things in the same clan or in different clans at random. For him as for us, similar things attract one another while opposed ones repel one another, and it is on the basis of these feelings of affinity or of repulsion that he classifies the corresponding things in one place or another (*Elementary Forms*, p170).

I quoted extensively from Durkheim to document his model of binding social classifications, and his account of the 'internal relationships', such as kinship systems, which are the basis for the elementary categories of religious life (p172). These are famously described by Durkheim in terms of the dichotomous oppositions sacred/profane and ideal/real, which are in turn also linked to male/female. Key to Durkheim's account of these dichotomies - I carefully noted in my essay - is his insistence that all classification systems are hierarchical, and indeed that the establishment of hierarchy is the primary aim of all classification systems. He claims for example that:

men would never have thought of arranging their knowledge in this way if they had not known beforehand what a hierarchy was' and that

‘a classification is a system whose parts are arranged according to a hierarchy...*the establishment of which is the aim of all classification*’ (p173).

Although it is immediately obvious how much trouble a feminist analysis of Durkheim could easily cause, I was hardly unaware of the hierarchical nature of my own position as the tutee of very senior Professor and I tried, for better or worse, to be ameliorative. Rather than critiquing his gender binarism directly, I politely suggested that some of Durkheim’s own examples suggested that not all differences are necessarily organised in a strictly hierarchical, antithetical or even dualistic manner. Indeed, if you look carefully, I went so far as to claim, you can see that he uses several different models of difference in his work. ‘Durkheim’s divergent differences’, as I called them in the title of my essay, explained some of the inconsistent statements he makes not only about the sacred and the profane, the real and the ideal, or totem and taboo, but the relation of classification to hierarchy more generally. After all, there are important differences between differences: some depend on the presence or absence of a single quality (A-Not-A dichotomies, such as sacred vs. profane) and others are seen to originate out of inherently binary qualities, such as up vs. down (A-B dichotomies). I ended my four and a half page (typewritten) essay by proposing that hierarchy was more important to the first of these two kinds of dichotomy than the second, and that distinguishing between these and other versions of difference revealed the limits of the claim that all classificatory differences required, and were exclusively meant to uphold, social hierarchies.

Since I had (like most postgraduates in the mid-1980s) been introduced to poststructuralism and semiotics, as well as postcolonial and critical theory, and since the human sciences had been in the midst of a major ‘reflexive’ turn since the 1970s that involved re-examining many of their own basic premises - including auto-critiques of their neo-colonialism, masculinist bias, and ethnocentrism - I did not consider my essay on ‘Durkheim’s Divergent Differences’ particularly controversial. I had, moreover, been explicitly told by Professor P and other postgraduate tutors that we should not simply describe other peoples’ arguments but develop original critical positions of our own. At the same time, I wasn’t so naive as to think that offering a feminist-inspired critique of one of Durkheim’s core arguments - as a first year graduate student - might not risk being seen as either arrogant or disrespectful. So I had gone out of my way to quote the original sources at length, and even to try to be ‘helpful’ in showing that Durkheim gave several different accounts of how dichotomous categories could be organised. Since the essay was, furthermore, intended as a ‘thought-piece’ to stimulate discussion in a one-to-one tutorial, I assumed a degree of independent thought would not go amiss.

Unfortunately I was wrong on all of these assumptions - very seriously wrong. In fact, I have kept this paper, still in its original envelope, because of how incredibly naive I was about how its contents, its style, its conclusions, and

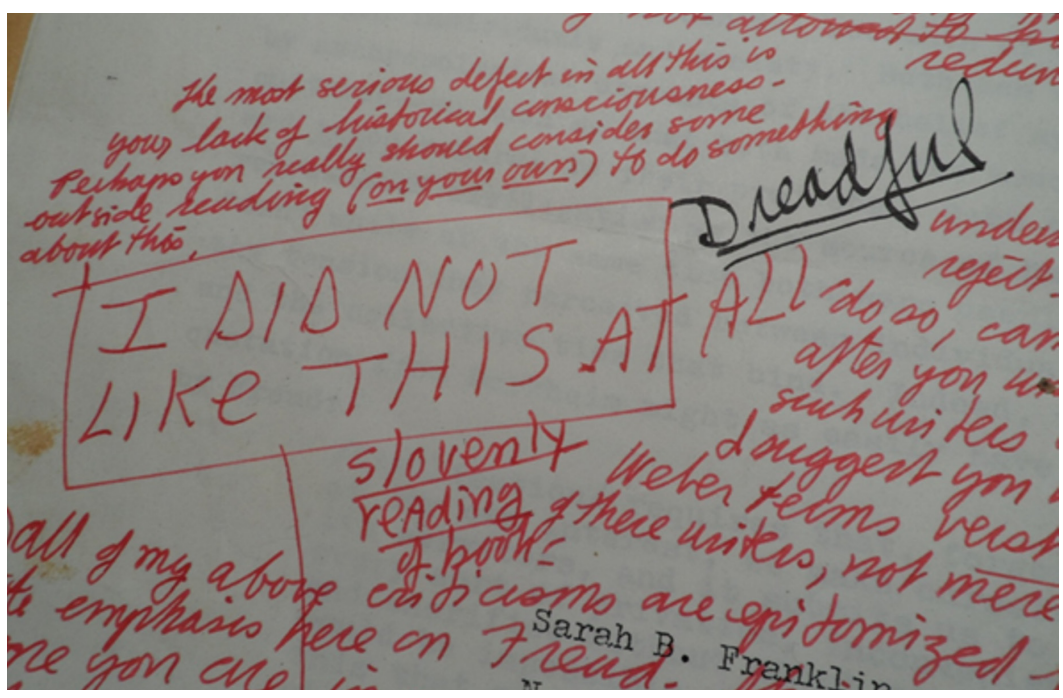
its basic premises would be received. Unbeknownst to me when I delivered my suggestive account of 'Durkheim's Divergent Differences' was the detonating trigger effect this essay would have on my reputation and my position in my department: the aftermath would blast me into a new orbit altogether. But it is not always possible to see these things coming.

Since a lot of what we learn in graduate school comes from failure and sometimes shocking disappointment, my little essay-bomb was going to teach me something much more useful than how to read Durkheim. I was about to have an intensive personal tutorial concerning the academy and its own internal reproductive mechanisms. Soon, I would discover as a result of my careful deconstruction of Durkheim's divergent differences, I was no longer in Kansas. And when I got my paper back in its 'Intramail' envelope, and I undid its little string-and-button fastener, and withdrew its contents into the light of day, it seemed for a moment as though the essay inside it must have belonged to someone else, for its pages had undergone a rather dramatic change in colour – as, almost immediately, did I.

My short essay about Durkheim was returned to me completely covered in red ink. So violently enraged had my tutorial supervisor become with his red marking pen that the paper looked like the bloody aftermath of a road accident. Even though I could tell immediately that I had obviously hit a nerve, and that Professor P had wildly over-reacted, I was still taken aback by the vehemence of his declarations.

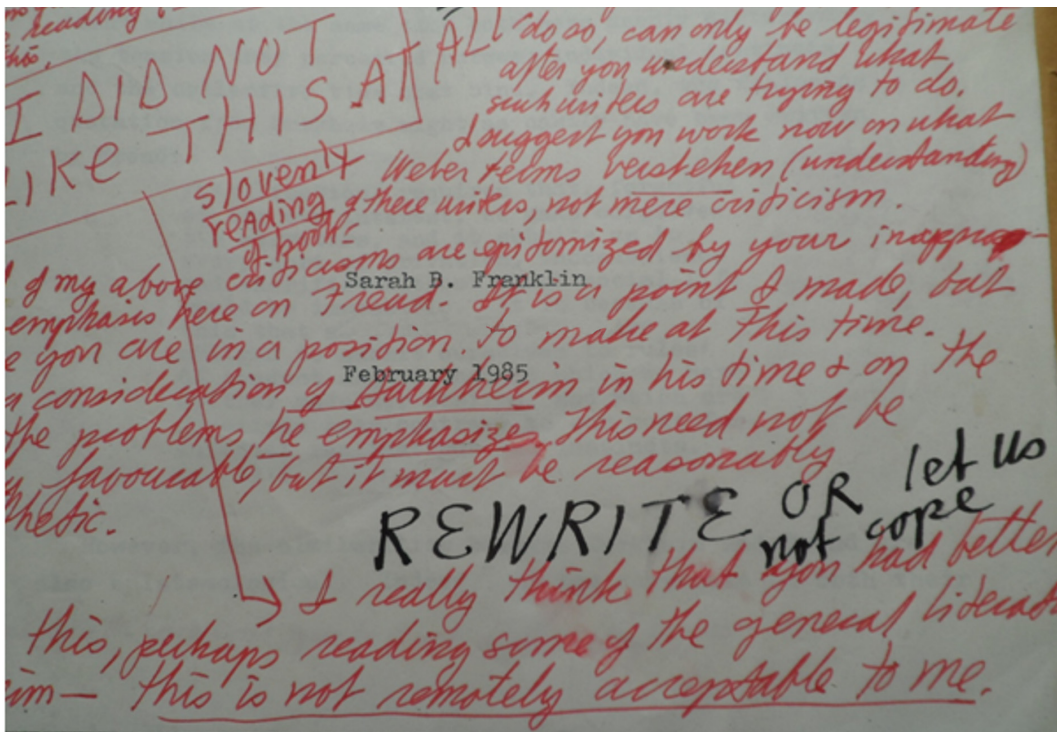
'Dreadful' he had scrawled in huge letters in the centre of the title page, underlining it twice for emphasis. 'I DID NOT LIKE THIS AT ALL' he had

Figure 1: My short essay about Durkheim was returned to me completely covered in red ink.



added in capital letters inside a red square that was meant to showcase them within a frame, but which, in his outraged state, he had written straight through, leaving the word 'ALL' outside the box. 'Slovenly reading of book!' Professor P protested, underlining his accusation and adding an exclamation point for emphasis amidst a garbled red sea of reproachful commentary. Clearly his sense of scholarly propriety had been deeply offended, and I wondered nervously how to respond as I took in the hysterical scene of complaint that not only covered every page I had submitted, but some additional index cards stapled onto to the top of the paper, which hung there balefully, like last-minute navigational tips nailed to the mast of a sinking vessel. Altogether the pages appeared both exhausted and abused: the bedraggled remnants of what had clearly been a lengthy battle.

Figure 2: 'This is not remotely acceptable to me.'



REWRITE OR LET US NOT COPE

Professor P's protest was vividly graphic: the pages of my essay had been written over several times, using a variety of instruments. Droplets of some kind (tears?) had smudged the ink in places. A frequent underlining of words gave the comments a frantic, overwrought quality that was exacerbated by the sheer quantity of comment overwhelming the pages: sentences tumbled over each other, scrawling like animals trying to escape, before being sliced off by the sharp paper edges.

Chaos appeared to have broken out in earnest on the cover sheet - where the main assault had been backed up by several rear-guard actions. Arrows dived across the sentences, which criss-crossed the pages in long streams of bright red writing. A gasping sense of depletion emanated from the diminishing font Professor P had used for the strange ultimatum at the centre of his long, red rant, using a black fountain pen. Like a parting sigh, 'REWRITE OR let us not cope' evoked a tragically exasperated tutor, on his last legs in the face of an intransigent scholarly recidivist. But this exhausted plea was in fact a command. Both its position and the choice of 'special' writing implement theatrically accentuated Professor P's parting declaration. By the time I was reading his exit line, the final curtain had already fallen, and he had left the stage. Having conveyed his disappointment in such a prolix and colourful soliloquy, he never spoke to me again.

True to his word, my red ink-strewn tutorial paper also marked the end of my progression as a graduate student, which rapidly came to a halt. Professor P didn't want me to rewrite my essay (or anything else). He didn't want to discuss it, and he clearly thought I was beyond the pale. His disingenuous black-inked instruction to 'rewrite' was not a request, or even a suggestion. It was a dismissal. Belatedly I realised I had failed a crucial test: my pretension to be 'helpful' aside, I had blown my cover as a feminist (I had quoted Monique Wittig) and now I had been deemed unfit to participate in scholarly reproduction. As I was shortly thereafter instructed by my supervisor, enough was enough. I either had to 'put my scholarship before my feminism' or I would not be approved to progress to the PhD.

Clearly my error hadn't only been to suggest that 'Durkheim's Divergent Differences' might better be appreciated as a plurality of forms rather than a binary doctrine undergirding the inevitable and invariant reproduction of hierarchy. The accusation that I was writing in bad faith appeared to have stuck - but not because I wasn't writing well, and not because my thought was 'muddled'. To the contrary, the problem with my thought process was that it was too definite: it was too forceful, too feminist, and too much. As a consequence of having caused such distress to a distinguished member of the faculty, and in order to avoid any further trouble, higher level decisions had been taken. And they did not concern Professor P's suitability to be employed in a university teaching capacity, or his entitlement to perform lengthy character assassinations in lieu of offering constructive advice to his students.

Predictably, but disappointingly, the disciplining powers would lean the other way - towards the problem with me, my immature ideology, and my 'stifling' biases. The time had come, I was told in the wake of Emile-gate, for my loyalty to the standards of the academy, and my future place in its reproduction, to be made explicit by agreeing to write a Phd about 'something other than gender'. I was a good student, I was reminded - a very good one. All the more reason for me to sort myself out, the pointed praise implied.

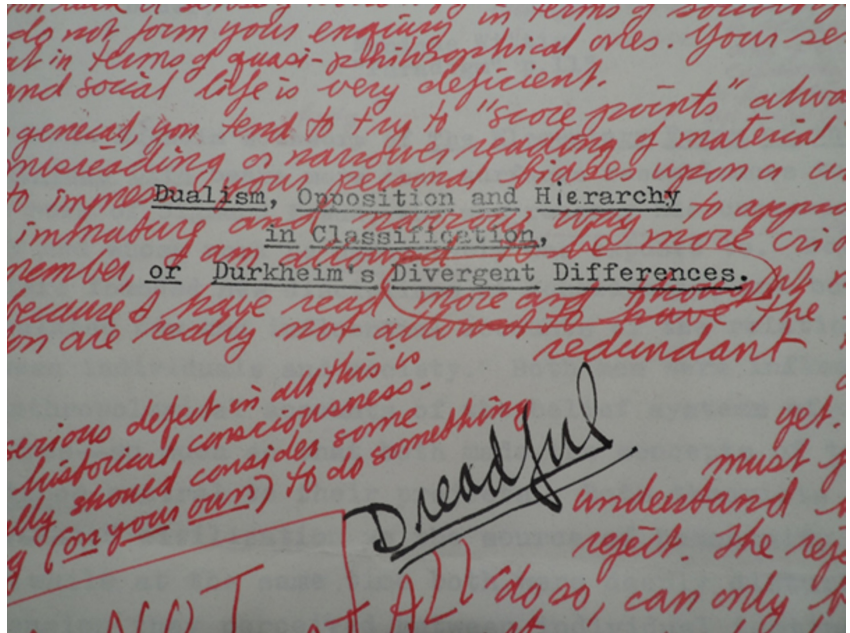


Figure 3: 'Your sense of social life is very deficient'.

Professor P, I was repeatedly reminded, was a very sensitive and vulnerable individual. I would need to be very gentle with him - he had been known to struggle to cope with graduate students in the past.

At least, my supervisor reassured me, I needn't fear losing my scholarship. Professor P had agreed to give me an 'A' for the tutorial, she explained, 'since the problem wasn't with the quality of your work'. I didn't need to ask her what the problem was - it now seemed everyone in the department knew. I might as well have had a raised red fist tattooed on my forehead. My stubborn attachment to feminism was impeding my ability to complete a PhD on gender. I had an inappropriate attitude toward the founding fathers, as revealed by my 'slovenly' and 'mischievous' approach to Durkheim. I wasn't destined to become a conduit for proper scholarship. I hadn't passed GO. I had become a failed reproductive mechanism. A spanner in the works. Or a wrench. Or a wench! *A wench in the works*. That was what I had become. It has been my motto ever since.

NOTHING PERSONAL

In the same way I know that my tutor's reaction was not about me personally, I also know that my personal story could be almost anyone's: the thing about reproductive mechanisms is that they are by definition generic. My experience is very recognisable: most academics have experienced kindred 'tutor-geddens' that they remember all too vividly, and like me they also understand these encounters differently over time. We all have had encounters of this kind and mine is hardly unusual - except perhaps that it was so graphically explicit.

I take seriously what my curious palimpsest reveals about sexism as a means of reproduction precisely because this story is not about individuals. The reproduction of sexism in the academy remains uncomfortably prominent at many levels, and the academy is by no means the only powerful contemporary social institution in which sexism remains a serious obstacle to greater inclusiveness - especially at the highest levels (and nor is sexism the only form of exclusion). Moreover, sexism is not only a problem of reproduction - but as we can see, also of non-reproduction (the question of who and what will be reproduced, versus being weeded out, redirected, or simply swept aside, are the two sides of reproductive politics). Sexism is thus an instructive model of how the selective mechanisms of institutional reproduction function more generally - both in the academy and elsewhere. In other words, sexism as a means of reproduction helps us to understand the processes of selection that determine which forms of institutional life are enabled to continue, to regenerate, and to be passed on.

What my bloody document reveals, in other words, is not only the over-reaction of an exasperated tutor to a situation those of us who teach have all encountered - which is that of a student who provokes us in some way, makes us feel uncomfortable, or threatens our sense of self-control. Neither is this a tale of woe intended to provoke sympathy and finger-pointing: few people get through graduate school without encountering inappropriate levels of hostility towards them from one source or another - if not several. Although this anecdote concerns an individual, my point is not about blaming individuals. The protection shown toward Professor P confirms what we already know about the often surprisingly high level of institutionalised tolerance and protection offered to certain 'awkward' individuals - many of whom are older, male academics nearing, or past, retirement, whose systematically dysfunctional behaviour is frustratingly condoned and excused through a series of ever more elaborate and exhausted euphemisms, denials and clichés. The important question is not even why such behaviour is institutionally 'normal'. The important question is how and why such behaviours are institutionally *reproduced*, and, correspondingly, what does not get reproduced as a result?

What this particular episode of 'tutor-rage' also reveals is a familiar abhorrence of feminist critiques of the patriarchal canon, and the often surprisingly vehement campaign against their legitimacy as a form of academic critique. These disciplinary measures are means of ensuring, among other things, that feminist critiques do not impede the smooth reproduction of the white male genealogy of 'founding fathers'. This is not an individual story because the sexism it describes is systemic - even to the point of being cliché, a stereotype, predictable. This is not an individual story because the individual case isn't even individual: it is part of a larger pattern. Our challenge is to describe the mechanisms that perpetuate the intolerance of feminism in the academy, and to determine what they reveal about sexism as a means of reproduction.

BAD CHARACTER

One of the striking features of many sexist episodes in the academy is that they are often not so much about policing ideas, or disciplining directions of

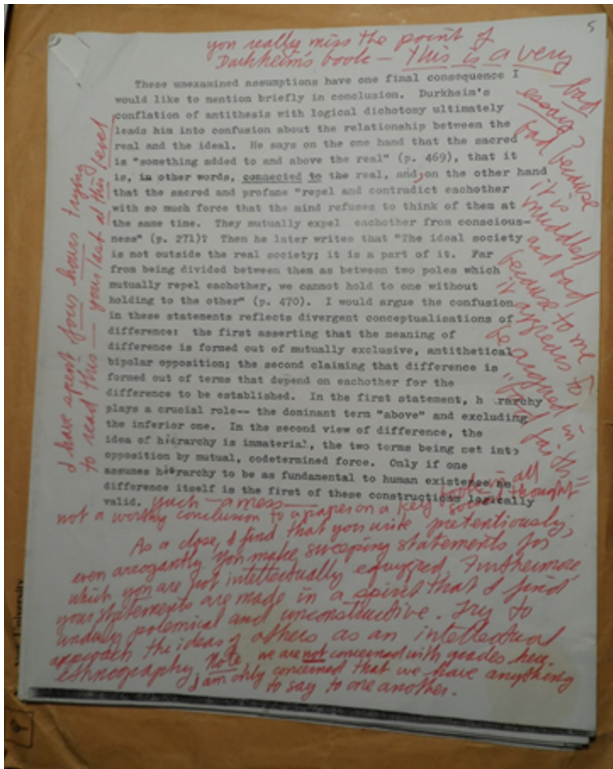


Figure 4: As a close I find that you write pretentiously and arrogantly. You make sweeping statements for which you are not intellectually equipped. Furthermore your statements are made in a spirit that I find unduly polemical and unconstructive.'

thought, as about stigmatising certain kinds of identity. My story is nothing personal - but it resulted from my having been identified as a certain kind of person. Indeed, one of the key things the intolerance of feminism in the academy tells us about sexism as a means of reproduction is that a key issue here is the question of *character*. There might as well be signs in the hallways: 'No Feminist Thinking Allowed'. It is revealing to reread the actual essay and to be reminded how well-mannered and mild it is, for even though it does contain some 'quasi-philosophical arguments', the points are relatively simple. From the tone and force of the criticisms against it we would expect to find an angry and arrogant essay full of sweeping generalisations and very little reference to what Durkheim actually wrote. But in fact the tone is

respectful and if anything the appeal to reinterpret Durkheim's argument about the essential role of hierarchy appears ameliorative rather than critical. Consequently it is clear Professor P's extreme over-reaction was never really about the specific words on the page - it was about their general direction, their source, and above all their *character*. As he says himself, it is an entire intellectual formation - which he sees as a form of 'bad faith' - that he is seeking to police, to block, to discipline and to shame.

For while the essay may have been mild mannered, it is not shy about the F word and begins with a quote from Monique Wittig, from her essay 'Paradigm', in which she states that 'any difference constituting concepts of opposition is a difference belonging to a political, economic and ideological order'². Wittig's claim is not much different from the kind of statement Derrida, Foucault or even Marx might have made, but it establishes for Professor P the unacceptable and inappropriate character of the author from the start. His explicit intolerance of a feminist intellectual standpoint is at times mocking as well as outraged. In response to my having put Durkheim's reference to 'man' in inverted commas in one of the essay's opening sentences, the inverted

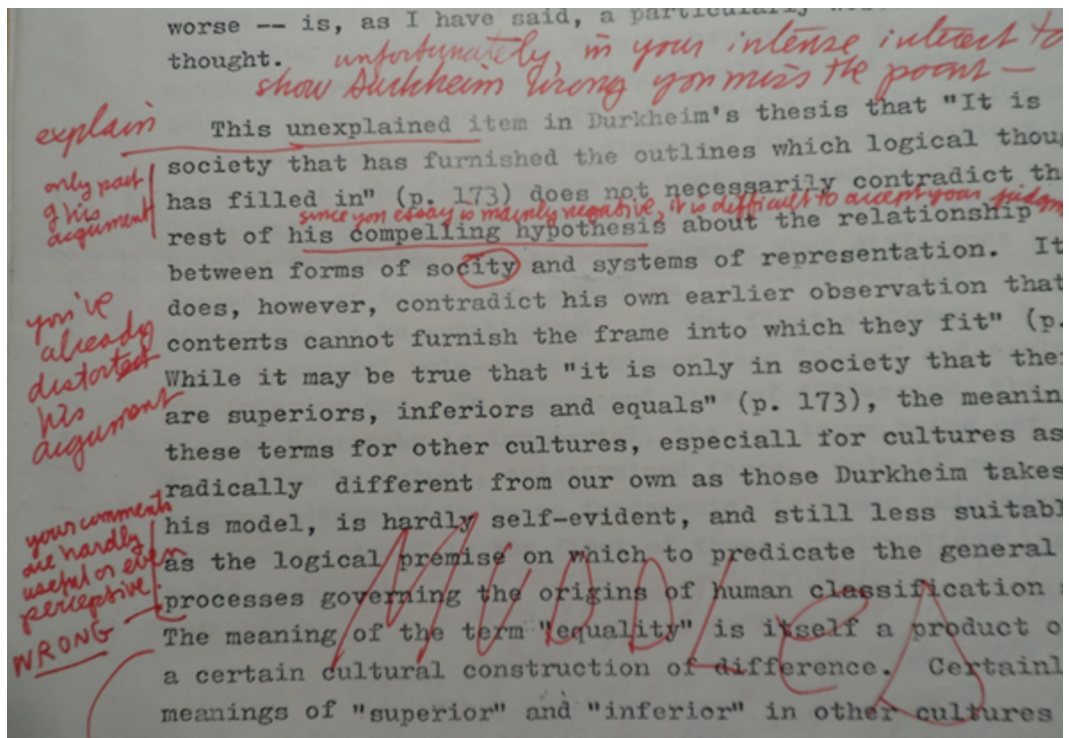
commas are repeated in a reproachful imitation by Professor P referring to Durkheim as 'him' and then writing in parenthesis '(yes, "him", since I refer to Durkheim)'. This sarcastic diacritical play with pronouns perfectly sums up Professor P's concern that it is my predisposition to understand Durkheim from a critical feminist perspective that not only prevents my being able to interpret him properly, but which leads me to 'distort' his thought. 'WRONG' Professor P writes in the margin. 'MUDDLED' he has scrawled in giant letters across the entire concluding paragraph.

2. Monique Wittig, 'Paradigm,' *Homosexualities and French Literature*, Elaine Marks and George Stambolian (eds), Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1970, p115.

'Your comments are hardly useful or even perceptive', 'since your essay is mainly negative, it is difficult to accept your judgment', 'you've already distorted his argument', 'you miss the point'.

I would be less concerned about this 30 year old essay, and I wouldn't be writing about it today, if it were as outdated, retro, and faintly humorous as it should be. If, like manual typewriters, the type of professor I had in graduate school, the type of criticisms he made, the style his behaviour typified, his fountain pens, *his character*, or the type of protection he received, were obsolete, I'd happily throw this essay in the bin where it belongs. I haven't kept it as a badge of honour, it's not a party piece. I don't think it's funny, and I'm not even 'over it'. It is a timepiece: I'm keeping time on the jokes about 'him' being 'him' because he's male.

Figure 5:
'Unfortunately, in your intense interest to show Durkheim wrong, you miss the point'.



This essay is temporal recording device because its age is a reminder of a problem the academy has yet even to acknowledge fully: the everyday institutional sexism that grows like grass all over campus - unchecked, unacknowledged, and indeed largely unchanged *because* it is ignored. Unfortunately, the same violent messages about my character, my feminism, and my proper place in the academy I encountered thirty years ago, remain all too visible today. Equally worrying is how many people in the academy in 2015, both young and old, women and men, are prepared to overlook and minimise the reproduction of sexism that occurs all around them - in classrooms, in course syllabi, in reading lists, in promotion committees, and in the myriad excuses that are made about why these institutionalised patterns and practices persist. One of the main reasons I have kept this paper is that accompanying all of the unfortunate patterns and practices of institutionalised sexism is a widespread and ongoing denial that they exist at all - a denial that serves also to obscure the all too common reluctance to name or confront sexist incidents even when they are blatantly obvious.

This problem is related to the character issue because of the circular quality to characterisation – a term that refers to the naming of an essential quality or trait. Crucially, the performative circularity of characterisation - marking you as what is named even before it is named as such - is also temporal: character is predictive. One of the challenges of naming - or ‘calling out’ - sexism is that this action characterises the challenger as a feminist. And the problem with feminist challenges is that they are perceived not only to be ‘distorting’ and ‘biased’ but derivative of a specific kind or type of character. Similarly, if sexism is never named, a different kind of performative circularity occurs: ‘Are you calling me sexist?’ This is a call people will hear very differently depending on their relationship to institutionalised and normalised sexist behaviour.

INDEXING SEXISM

Given its many uses and its long service, I am not without a sense of gratitude to Professor P for being so honest - for actually writing down, so frankly and in such detail, what he really felt about me and my unacceptable essay on Durkheim. Professor P’s words, while hurtful at the time, have been helpful in the long run as a reminder of truths we sometimes think (or are told) we are imagining. In the remainder of this paper, I therefore want to consider further what these words reveal about the ongoing trouble with gender within the academy. I want to make a very broad claim - even broader than Durkheim’s - about sexism as means of reproduction in academic life. This is not only a description of what sexism is, or how it works, but about what reproduction *is*, and how *it* operates through violence and prohibition as well as encouragement and support. I want to use scholarly sexism to look at how the reproduction of the academy works through prohibition, intimidation, threats, and brute force as well as denial, silencing, shaming and deception.

I want us to observe closely where and when these tactics and methods are *selectively* but *routinely* applied. And above I want to examine the *double standard*, or what Marilyn Frye refers to as the ‘double bind’, that allows some people to be celebrated, supported, encouraged and literally lifted into positions *because they are critical* while other people are blocked, obstructed, shamed, and penalised for exactly the same kinds of activities.³

Let’s return, then, to the index cards Professor P helpfully stapled to the title page after he ran out of room to write anywhere else:

3. Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*, The Crossing Press, Trumansburg 1983, pp1-16.

Your first paper on Fustel troubled me, but this second paper confirms my worst suspicions about your approach to books. You approach books in a narrow, essentially destructive and combative way. You seem more intent on ‘scoring points’ than in trying to absorb and understand another’s view. One should approach a book in the manner similar to doing ethnographic fieldwork. At this point, I have **very serious** misgivings about what you grasp when you read a book. Do you think it is possible for us to have any intellectual dialogue? If you cannot “respond” to Durkheim in a constructive manner, what then? Your essays are now taking on a certain ‘character’ in the sense that I can now discern what seem to be your difficulties:

Your discussions are polemical but essentially ungenerous and parochial. You should try to focus on what are the **primary** interests of the writers, not your interests. Your approach is stifling and will inhibit intellectual growth. It also is poor literary criticism, which should be a considerable part of your exercise.

You lack a sense of sociology and anthropology. You really do not form your enquiry in terms of sociological issues but in terms of quasi-philosophical ones. Your sense of society and social life is very deficient.

In general, you tend to try to ‘score points’ always making a misreading or narrower reading of the material if it will not allow you to impress your personal biases upon a writer. This is a very immature and narrow way to approach material. Remember, I am allowed to be more critical than you are because I have read more and thought more on these issues. You are really not allowed to have the right to make certain assertions just yet. Rather, you must first try to understand **before** you reject. The rejection, if you do so, can only be legitimate after you understand what such writers are trying to do. I suggest you work now on what Weber terms *verstehen* (understanding) of these writers, not mere criticism.

All of my above criticisms are epitomized by your inappropriate emphasis here on Freud. It is a point I made, but not one you are in a position to make at this time. I want a consideration of Durkheim in his time and

on the terms of the problems **he emphasizes**. This need not be entirely favourable, but it must be reasonably sympathetic.

There is clearly a sense here that at one level Professor P wants to be helpful, but he also understands himself to be engaged in a battle, and with an opponent who is essentially disrespectful towards the basic ground rules of scholarly engagement. He reproaches this behaviour as immature and combative, and he feels defensive towards its ‘essentially destructive’ character. His response is both authoritarian and policing, repeatedly declaring what is and is not *allowable, acceptable, permissible* or *appropriate*. ‘This is not remotely acceptable to me’ he states, clearly offended by what he perceives as arrogance and disrespect.

But what is also of interest here is the sense of injury to the lifeblood of the academy, and of a degenerative threat to the moral basis of scholarly enquiry – which must be protected against ungenerous, disrespectful and intellectually deficient interlopers. As we saw earlier, in the emphasis on ‘bad faith’, ‘mischievousness’, and the issue of ‘character’, part of the way reproductive disciplining works is anticipatory: *keeping out the bad blood*. In this way the canonical genealogy is also racialised: only those of the right kind of ‘stuff’ should be seriously engaged. Notable in Professor P’s language is the use of references to the morbid consequences of the wrong sort of ‘muddled’ and ‘distorting’ critique, resulting in a ‘stifling’ of intellectual growth, by imposing a ‘narrow’ set of ‘personal biases’ that make dialogue impossible. Interesting also is the language he uses to describe the proper way to ‘approach’ and to ‘absorb’ or to ‘grasp’ books, ideas and arguments, which is to be ‘sympathetic’ and responsive, and to focus primarily on what the writer is himself (‘yes, “him”’) interested in. The careful work of contextualising Durkheim’s writing in its proper time and place is expected in order to understand ‘the problems he emphasizes’ rather than ‘impressing’ one’s own ‘personal biases’. It is hard not to notice the strongly gendered quality of these invocations, and it is impossible to miss the genealogical ones. Rendered through a more familiar kinship model, it is clear that the academy continues to operate as a paternalistic descent system, in which paternity is equated with the ability to pass things on, and a corresponding entitlement to respect, protections and service.

We see clearly the well-established, and familiar (and familial), hierarchies of academia in the explicit comments: ‘Remember, I am allowed to be more critical than you are because I have read more and thought more on these issues. You are really not allowed to have the right to make certain assertions just yet’. This unusually explicit statement of the rules of academic hierarchy (it is not normally spelt out quite so blatantly) is accompanied by the apportioning of rights and roles: ‘All of my above criticisms are epitomized by your inappropriate emphasis here on Freud. It is a point I made, but not one you are in a position to make at this time’. Here in plain sight, and formally

described, is the explicit articulation of the reproductive logic of territory, patronage, initiation, and above all of lineage. Implicit in the accusations of deficient knowledge, poor scholarship and immaturity is the promise of a potential future bestowal of the 'right to make certain assertions' - once one can demonstrate the ability to 'respond' appropriately.

But if it is the case that 'we' - as in those of us who work in universities - are all perfectly well versed in these features of academic professionalism, and indeed the rules of reproduction, as they might be called, then what is particular about sexism? Isn't Bourdieu's point that 'inculcation' is the true aim of 'the pedagogic function' in the University?⁴ Perhaps, but what sexism reveals is how unevenly these 'rules' are applied, depending on what type of person you are perceived to be. Even Professor P's self-inflicted fatigue is staged as a proof of his diminished vitality in the face of an essentially destructive force: 'I have spent **four hours** trying to read this - your last at this level'. He perceives a fatal and deliberate misperception. 'You really miss the point of Durkheim's book - this is a very bad essay, bad because it is muddled and bad because to me it appears to be argued in "bad faith"'. Not only 'bad' (four bads), but 'mischievous'. Professor P experiences a palpable revulsion not only towards a wilful interpretation he finds offensive and distasteful, but towards the *illegitimacy of its authorship*: 'Yuck - a mess', he writes, adding: 'You write pretentiously and arrogantly. You make sweeping statement for which you are not intellectually equipped. Furthermore your statements are made in a spirit that I find unduly polemical and unconstructive.' *WRONG!*

4. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Culture and Society*, trans Richard Nice, Sage, London 2000, p177.

'I am only concerned that we have anything to say to one another', he insists in a moment that seemingly approaches a more reconciliatory mood. But since he is already convinced his interlocutor is 'bad', and the lines of communication have already been closed, this statement appears disingenuous. The force of sexism as a means of reproduction is achieved through means of either prohibition or cultivation *to select a path* - for example by blocking a conversation or an argument when it flows in the 'wrong' direction, or enabling the 'right' kinds of thinking or critique by creating spaces for them to move into. Conversation is precisely the currency through which these exchanges do or do not take place. Of course once we think of the transmission of knowledge in this way, we can no longer see this process merely in terms of abstract ideas or thoughts that are passed on, put into circulation, or spread about in a spirit of 'free' enquiry: we see instead a process not unlike horticulture, in which some seedlings are kept and cultivated, while others are discarded and 'weeded out'.

THOUGHT PROCESSES

This is why we need to think about sexism as a means of reproduction in terms of its precise mechanisms, and this is how sexism helps us to understand what reproduction is, and how it works, as well as how the academy preserves a

certain shape. Re-production, especially in its Marxist-feminist sense, refers not only to the explicit use of power within institutions, but to the conditions of consciousness that enable the maintenance of existing institutional patterns, habits and structures. It thus refers to the patterns of thought that condition patterns of action, and set the limits of possibility to the working conditions of the academy. Again, it is not only the actions of a punitive individual that this case illustrates - it is the logic of those actions, and the legibility of their permissibility - raising the question of why they are protected, and why such actions are not more vigorously resisted?

Part of the problem is that first of all such actions need to be named. Today the material conditions of the academy are often critiqued in terms of the onslaught neoliberal, market-driven, short-term strategies that are rightly perceived to undermine the power of critical thought. The impact-maximising culture of targeted, customer-relations-driven academic production which is currently typical of the UK is rightly decried as a sham. Just like the audit culture before it we know impact is a managerial ruse. However an older and equally insidious form of colonising analogy has successfully reproduced itself within the academy for a much longer period of time, and this is the relentlessly masculinist and patrilineal culture of disciplinary genealogies, canonical inheritances, and loyalty to the founding fathers.

Universities are unfortunately excellent places to look for evidence of how sexism functions as a means of reproducing the ancient equations between genius and masculinity, discovery and paternity, and conceptual thought as a form of sexual potency. Yet the reproduction of these patterns, however obvious, can be difficult to name. And as long as sexism continues to be denied a name, it is ignored as a force, and persists as a problem to be tolerated, excused and perpetuated through neglect, lack of effort and a refusal to take stronger measures to eliminate it - such as quotas. From the very highest levels of university planning, where all white and all male meetings are still commonplace, to the routine sexism of promotions and appointments committees (rife with their tiresome fixations on 'big names', 'high fliers', 'meteoric careers', and 'rising stars') to the laddish status quo of student societies and fraternities, the reproduction of sexism within the university is a well-oiled machine. Add to this the ubiquity within the university at every level of sexual harassment and abuse against female students and staff and it appears that ironically higher education sets a very low bar for tackling sexist behaviour; or no bar at all.

NON-REPRODUCTION

As for the feminist scholarship that was so prolific and widespread in the 1980s, it is unfortunately the case that much of it has 'simply disappeared' off of syllabi, library shelves, reading lists and bibliographies. Even the 'new materialist feminism' seems often to forget there was an 'old feminist

materialism that came earlier.⁵ Although feminist critiques of the literary canon, historiography, the social sciences, the sciences, and medicine could now be integrated into every level of pedagogy, the reverse is true - they have been largely weeded out. Feminist critiques of the patriarchal canon have been eliminated not only through dismissal, mockery, refusal, neglect, and intimidation but through being characterised as 'dated', irrelevant, passé, and obsolete. Indeed most of the time the reproduction of the standard 90% white male curriculum, 90% white male committees, 90% white male shortlists, and so on, happens more subtly - indeed it seems often to happen automatically without out anyone at all consciously designing this form of selective institutional reproduction! It happens for so many reasons it often happens without anyone seeming to make it happen and it happens even when people think they are trying to make it *not* happen the same old way all over again. Most of the time the reproduction of the standard 90% white male academy happens so 'naturally' it is actually even possible for people to think it must be happening because it is white men who have had the most interesting and important ideas!

This is why we need to think about sexism as a means of reproduction, and why sexist institutions, and institutionalised sexism, can help us to understand *what reproduction is*. Re-production, especially in its materialist-feminist sense, such as what Donna Haraway calls 'world building', refers the maintenance of existing institutions and structures, as well as the forms of aspiration, imagination and habitual perception that shape their development over time.⁶ From a socialist-feminist point of view, reproduction is a mode or a means that supports and supplies the productive economy - often invisibly. In most industrial societies this 'mode of reproduction' includes the unpaid or very low paid feminised work - work that is considered 'non-economic', and which, like childcare and housework, is privatised, domestic, taken for granted, and yet rigidly enforced.⁷ This reproductive work - the work of care, provision and sustenance, or cleaning and supporting, belong not only to a system of social division - between paid and unpaid labour - but to an ideology, a system of cultural values and normative discourses that instruct individual subjects in how to behave, how to know their place, how to serve and how to obey. And we should not forget that although the operations of power can be complicated and hidden, they can also be obvious and blunt.

Thinking about the reproduction of everyday sexism in the academy means thinking about ordinary institutionalised practices such as citing, naming, attributing, genealogising, cataloguing and typologising. It means paying attention to how the work of feminist and female academics is treated in the academy today - always being slotted in like service workers to some white male-defined 'school of thought' like Foucauldian, Bourdieuan, Lacanian, Freudian, Deleuzian, Latourian, Weberian, Parsonian, *Durkheimian*. Thinking about institutionalised sexism in the academy means asking why the pay gap

5. For discussion see Sara Ahmed 'Open Forum Imaginary Prohibitions Some Preliminary Remarks on the Founding Gestures of the New Materialism,' *European Journal of Women's Studies* 15:1, 2008, pp23-39.

6. Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness @ Second_Millennium. FemaleMan© Meets_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience*. Routledge, New York 1997.

7. See Ann Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework*, Robertson, London 1974.

remains so pronounced between male and female academics - especially in the professoriate. It should no longer be tolerable to publish course syllabi that mention no women theorists at all, to fund conferences that have no women speakers at all, or to continue to teach the genealogy of the founding fathers in terms that refer exclusively to men and their seminal ideas. We need to address these issues because this problem has a name, a history and a bad track record that stretches back for millennia.

CONCLUSION

In thinking about the politics of reproduction in the academy it is useful to consider not only the histories of sexism that reveal to us how the default mechanisms of academic paternalism are perpetuated, but also how we would like to see these patterns changed. In offering a personal anecdote around which to structure this paper I am also suggesting a method for becoming more pedagogical about sexism - more empirical, even, by taking notice. And by taking notes! None of us can work in the academy without participating in many of the mechanisms we feel uncomfortable with, and critical towards. So it is worth both reflecting on our own practices, and asking our students to do likewise. A good question to ask ourselves is what we want to reproduce through our own practices - in the classroom, in peer review, on appointments committees, and in tutorials and feedback sessions. Citation, for example, is a very simple reproductive mechanism that can be used both to track lineal patterns of canonical exclusion and to challenge existing genealogies. In paying attention to reproductive patterns it is equally crucial to reflect on ideas or currents we don't want to reproduce, perhaps by not participating in them (such as the current celebration of impact), or by redefining them ('impact' looks very different if it is defined as active reception). We need to put feminist reproductive politics at the heart of our work in the academy - by passing on as many feminist resources as we can to transform consciousness about sexism in the academy, by citing feminist authors, teaching feminist scholarship, and thus preserving the legacies of feminist interventions in the past.⁸

We need to remember too that there is power in becoming a failed reproductive mechanism, an unacceptable conduit, and a degenerative agent. Because by becoming a wench in the works we also become agents of change. We slovenly readers and quasi-philosophical mischief-makers, with all our bad, bad, bad character flaws intact, can raise our arms to say that what is truly DREADFUL and UNACCEPTABLE and *WRONG!* is the suggestion that the only appropriate response to canonical academic patriarchy, institutionalised sexism and chronic anti-feminism is to 'absorb' it and 'respond' to it on its own terms. Another response is to refuse to reproduce this fallacy and instead to diligently nurture and share collective feminist resources for challenging sexist academic hegemony in every aspect of our working lives.

8. For discussion see Sarah Franklin, 'After IVF: the reproductive turn in social thought.' Inaugural Lecture, available online at <http://www.reprosoc.sociology.cam.ac.uk/media/books/sfinauguralbooklet>, 2013, and Sarah Franklin, *Biological Relatives: IVF, Stem cells and the Future of Kinship*, Duke University Press, Durham 2013.

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