

Professing Feminism: Cautionary Tales from the Strange World of Women's Studies. By *Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge*. Basic Books, New York, 1994, 235 pp., \$24.00.

*Reviewed by Lenore Manderson, Ph.D.*²

Women's studies programs date from the late 1960s/early 1970s, as interest in feminist theory and scholarship developed. There were clear advantages to the establishment of separate programs to enable the consolidation of the field and to provide a mechanism to support its development in research and teaching. In much the same way, area studies departments — centers of Asian studies, Latin American studies, and so on — served this function also (and continue to do so); gay and lesbian studies programs — relatively few — similarly have provided an intellectual focus for research and teaching in sexuality; and, in the past decade, cultural studies programs and departments have facilitated the development of this emerging field. These institutional developments have been supported by other academic activities, including conferences and seminars, scholarly journals and other publishing, and the establishment of professional associations.

While the establishment of separate programs was useful to legitimize feminist scholarship and women's studies, it is important to ask, What value *now* is there of maintaining this separation? How can training in discrete academic disciplines be incorporated within an interdisciplinary study program? Under what criteria should courses be offered by cognate departments for inclusion in women's studies majors? What is the relation between theory and praxis? And, to what extent have women's studies programs been able to accommodate the theoretical diversity that has emerged in feminist scholarship, and what are the implications of this pedagogically and in research?

The problem now, as identified by Patai and Koertge, is the extent to which women's studies programs have become sites of ideological battle, with scholarship antipathetic to politics. Patai and Koertge provide a number of examples of this, referred to acronymically and regarded entirely as negative developments: IDPOL (identity politics), FEMPED (feminist pedagogy), TOTALREJ (the uncompromising rejection of patriarchal cultural heritage), and BIODENIAL (the repudiation of the biological basis of sexual difference). The issues are trivialized by the use of this mnemonic/heuristic device, as they are by the flip subtitle of the book.

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Patai and Koertge argue that some academic staff and some students have been militant in their insistence on the necessary integration of theory and practice, and in their lack of tolerance of different world views — for example, by assuming a homogenous or “correct” theoretical line (hence, “political correctness”). This is a position that can be only partially supported, since feminist theorists have — as their theory has become increasingly sophisticated — diversified considerably. But Patai and Koertge hold that there is no place within women’s studies programs for students to weigh these philosophic shifts. Further, they argue that women’s studies programs are antagonistic to scholarship, in denying philosophic tradition and scholarly antecedents to contemporary feminist theory and empirical research. They argue that social constructionist theory has been so promoted as to preclude any biological basis to social life, to preclude any discussion of this as a possibility, and to assume canonical status rather than an analytic approach.

Patai and Koertge go further to challenge the validity of feminist models alternative to logical and positivist epistemologies and to treat somewhat sourly feminist critiques of “malestream” thought. Hence, by implication, they dismiss French philosophical developments, articulated as “feminisms of difference” (e.g., Irigaray, Cixous, and Kristeva), which have had major impact on feminist theory in the past decade.

Patai and Koertge are also critical of the pedagogic approaches within women’s studies programs, although there is no good reason to suppose that their teaching and learning alternatives to didacticism are unique. Indeed, the approach within some women’s studies programs appears to have much in common with problem-based learning and practicum approaches in medical schools. The authors are also critical of curricula, dismissing in this context the need for women’s studies programs to draw boundaries and decide on the inclusion/exclusion of various courses as parts of a women’s studies program. The inclusion of any subject (Patai and Koertge’s example is the sociology of the family), simply because it deals with or includes women, seems to me an inadequate rationale.

Patai and Koertge are correct to point out the difficulties of identity politics in academia — a matter by no means unique to women’s studies programs. It is, too, entirely legitimate to question the philosophical basis of any area of teaching and learning, and to question the degree to which the broad aims of scholarship are advanced through the institutionalization of particular approaches. I accept too the inherent problems when an academic program is built around ideological or philosophical commitment — this would be as true for Marxist theory as for feminism, and hence for departments of political economy as much as for women’s studies. It is also true, of course, that ideological battles are part of the everyday intellectual scenery in many humanities and social sciences departments today, where their presence flags the intellectual liveliness, rather than death, of their disciplines.

Despite my own concern with identity politics and ideological adherence to particular lines of enquiry and interpretation, I am not convinced that this book is useful in elucidating the issues. The problem — apart from my difficulty with the somewhat lambastic style of the text — is one of evidence. Patai and Koertge are extremely critical of what they perceive to be demagoguery in women's studies. But it is bad science to base their criticism on interviews with a self-selected population, to quote selectively from e-mail correspondence to advance their arguments without acknowledging alternative views and practices, and to substantiate their claims with a few lengthy quotes and case studies. The book stands, then, as the opinion of two disgruntled academics. There is a need for an objective review of women's studies, as one hopes there is, from time to time, in any field of study. But this requires a more comprehensive review of the programs and their offerings, a careful and reliable survey of academics and students from those programs, and an analysis of the position of the field and its political developments in an historic and social context. Since the science (and the art) of criticism is entirely lacking in this volume, it remains, instead, at the level of opinion.

Embattled Eros: Sexual Politics and Ethics in Contemporary America. *By Steven Seidman.* Routledge, New York, 1992, 220 pp., \$45.00 (hardback), \$14.95 (paperback).

*Reviewed by David F. Greenberg, Ph.D.*³

In an earlier book, Seidman (1990) chronicled the development of a distinctive sexual ethic in the United States. Over the course of the 19th century, fear of sexual activity (as manifested, e.g., in fear of masturbation and in advice to limit the frequency of marital coitus) diminished, and greater emphasis was placed on the positive role sex could play in expressing, preserving, and enhancing love between spouses. It was thought to make a positive contribution to mental health. Romantic love was sufficient to legitimate marital sex, independently of procreation.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Annual Review of Sex Research (Vol. 6). Edited by Raymond C. Rosen. Society for the Scientific Study of Sex, Mt. Vernon, Iowa, 1995, 244 pp., \$35.00.

Reviewed by Scott L. Hershberger, Ph.D.¹

The sixth volume of the *Annual Review of Sex Research* provides reviews of areas in sex research which are of current interest. What is most striking about this collection of seven articles is what they have to say about the breadth of research activity taking place in sexual science today. As attested to by these articles, sexual science reaches across psychology, sociology, medicine, biology, and a host of other disciplines, making it truly an interdisciplinary science. In fact, there is no discipline that exists in which sex research is not of some relevancy. In the opening editorial comment, Rosen writes that the major task for the editors was to produce a "balanced overview of different theoretical and methodological approaches to sexuality research." It is hard to conceive how this goal could have been better accomplished. Also heartening is the appearance throughout the articles of several traditionally neglected themes. I mention just two: possible evolutionary explanations and a renewed interest in female sexuality.

In the first article, Fagot reviews research examining gender role development in children. Gender role development involves the process by which children acquire knowledge concerning their own sex, the behaviors that are identified with one sex more than another, and the differences in roles males and females are expected in play in society. Research is reviewed from three predominate theoretical perspectives: social learning, cognitive-developmental, and schema theory. The social learning point of view proposes that gender role development primarily occurs through environmental shaping; that is, children are "socialized" into specific sex roles.

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