

honor, be prepared to resist the insertion into the science curriculum of courses whose content is tailored to the demands of any ideological faction.

Beyond this, there is the matter of courses, seminars, symposia, and the like, that claim to address scientific matters while falling outside the official boundaries of science departments. We urge scientific professionals to scrutinize these offerings, whether or not invited to do so; to participate in them if possible, and with appropriate skepticism. We urge them not to fear making judgments, not to hesitate, for

the sake of someone else's imagined good social intentions, to make their misgivings public. One can't assume in these matters that possession of an advanced degree or a professorship equates to intellectual legitimacy.

We realize, of course, that the greatest disincentive to participation in such controversies is the time and effort it takes, costs that will add greatly to the burden of sustaining a serious research program and fulfilling generously one's teaching responsibilities. Intellectually, these quarrels tend to be tiresome. Nature is the scientist's worthy adver-

sary: we use the figure in defiance of the fact that science critics will sniff it out as evidence that we are slaves to the Western patriarchal paradigm of dominance and control. Academic leftists, on the other hand, tend to be unfocused bores, and a certain deliberate, cheerful, simple-mindedness is needed to hear them out sufficiently to catch the drift of the arguments and to formulate an apposite response. It is an unlikable chore, but one that a good many of us ought to be doing, out of loyalty to our own disciplines and to—forgive the thought—civilization. □

How Feminism Is Now Alienating Women from Science

NORETTA KOERTGE

Twenty years ago the dominant mood of feminism could have been represented by the World War II poster of Rosie the Riveter. Activists were rolling up their sleeves and demanding access to traditionally male jobs. Women were no longer always willing to be nurses, or legal secretaries, or lab technicians. They were demanding the opportunity to be electricians, engineers, forest rangers, and astronauts—and gender stereotypes that implied that women couldn't deal with machines or think analytically were anathema to them.

A feminist Rip Van Winkle who fell asleep during the seventies would be amazed at the contrasting ethos prevalent within academic feminism today. The tough-minded and strong-armed Rosie Riveters have been displaced by moralizing Sensitive Susans, each desperately seeking to find a new ideolog-

ical flaw in the so-called hegemonic discourse of patriarchal, racist, colonial, Eurocentric culture.

All of this might be cheerfully relegated to the Ivory Tower's already overflowing dust bins if one were not concerned about its impact on idealistic young women who are making curricular and career choices while struggling to construct lifestyles that will be quite different from those of their mothers and grandmothers.

As Daphne Patai and I interviewed faculty, students, and staff from Women's Studies programs for our book *Professing Feminism*, there emerged a complex picture of what we call "negative education"—a systematic undermining of the intellectual values of liberal education. And as Paul Gross and Norman Levitt have so impressively documented in *Higher Superstition*, it is the natural sciences that are under the heaviest fire.

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Young women are being alienated from science in many ways. One strategy is to try to redefine what counts as science. For example, instead of teaching about the struggles—and triumphs—of great women scientists, such as Emmy Noether, Marie and Irene Curie, and Kathleen Lonsdale, feminist accounts of the history of science now emphasize the contributions of midwives and the allegedly forgotten healing arts of herbalists and witches. More serious are the direct attempts to steer women away from the study of science. Thus, instead of exhorting young women to prepare themselves for a variety of technical subjects by studying science, logic, and mathematics, Women's Studies students are now being taught that logic is a tool of domination and that quantitative reasoning is incompatible with a humanistic appreciation of the qualitative aspects

of the phenomenological world.

Feminists add a new twist to this old litany of repudiations of analytical reasoning by claiming that the standard norms and methods of scientific inquiry are sexist because they are incompatible with "women's ways of knowing." The authors of the prize-winning book with this title report that the majority of the women they interviewed fell into the category of "subjective knowers," characterized by a "passionate rejection of science and scientists." These "subjectivist" women see the methods of logic, analysis, and abstraction as "alien territory belonging to men" and "value intuition as a safer and more fruitful approach to truth" (*Women's Ways of Knowing*, by Mary Belenky et al., p. 71).

The authors, some of whom were trained as psychologists, admit that because of the high value Western technological societies place on objectivity and rationality, these women's ways of knowing have certain "maladaptive consequences," but they emphasize that even the most epistemologically mature women in their study continue to rely heavily on subjective experience. Even those they describe as "integrated knowers" have a need to "connect" in an empathetic way with the material they study. These women are uncomfortable with the idea of a detached, impartial observer; they dislike debates, and they find it impossible to separate a critique of ideas from a criticism of the people who hold them.

Given the traditional roles of nurturer and peacemaker ascribed to women, it is perhaps not too surprising that the researchers found these profiles, although one wonders how much such attitudes were reinforced by current feminism. But what is absolutely shocking to me are the conclusions that

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these feminists, who are presumably trying to better the lot of women, draw from their research. Instead of arguing that young women need special help in learning how to debate and deal with abstractions, instead of calling for studies of how best to alleviate math anxiety and science phobia, instead of deploring the forces that threaten to make many women innumerate and scientific

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ically illiterate, the authors argue that society must simply place more value on "maternal thinking."

In addition to these generic repudiations of the methods of scientific inquiry, feminists have criticized the content of various sciences, taking a special dislike to biology. In our book we describe a series of recurring maneuvers that we call the game of *Biodenial*. Some feminists, for example, have claimed that the pain of childbirth is a social construction that would disappear in a more women-positive society and that the biological classification of human beings into two sexes is inspired by the political desire to clearly demarcate those who are to dominate from those who are to be oppressed. And of course there is the recurring talk about human parthenogenesis.

Once again it is difficult to imagine that even the perpetrators of these fantastical views take them seriously. Yet the effects are very real. Women who do decide to become scientists find themselves under attack from the self-proclaimed "echt" feminists, who call them "Athenas" and "Queen Bees." In many scientific disciplines, women are a tiny minority and find themselves in a climate where they could use a little feminist support as they seek to gain acceptance and equal treatment, but they may well not find it in today's feminist circles.

Even more troubling are the deleteri-

ous effects on the young women who buy into the feminist attacks on rationality and science. To give just one example: Traditional feminists often talked about the misogynist elements in Freud's theorizing and pointed out weaknesses in his methodology—the case of Dora was a favorite example of how Freud browbeat clients in his attempt to find the repressed memories

he "knew" were there. What a painful irony that today's feminists have so uncritically endorsed the methods by which hypnotists and psychological counselors purport to unearth repressed memories of childhood sexual abuse and Satanic rituals of the most bizarre kinds. I cannot think of a better demonstration of how the credulous trust of subjective beliefs and the dismissal of the methods and content of science can turn out to be dangerous to all involved.

Feminism has a great past and there remains much to be done to ensure that women really do have an equal opportunity in all aspects of society. What would our great feminist foremothers say about what's happening today—Harriet Mill, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, all of the women who fought for the right to go to college and enter med school, the women who couldn't get into Caltech or the Chemical Society or the Royal Society until a relatively few years ago? I think they would be proud of the gains women have made in this century, but it might break their hearts to see the strange doctrines now being promulgated in the name of feminism.

Editor's Note

Related reading: Barbara Walker, "Science: The Feminists' Scapegoat?" *SKEPTICAL INQUIRER*, 18: 68-72, Fall 1993. □