These two books have very different stories to tell about the state of feminism in the American academy. The story told in Professing Feminism is already notorious beyond the academy; Gender and Academe will almost certainly never circulate so widely. Together, though, these books imply more than either does alone about how centrally academic feminism figures in current struggles over the nature of academic work and the policing of the academy’s borders.

Professing Feminism, according to its authors, is an “inquiry... concentrated on feminism as it is practiced in Women’s Studies at colleges and universities” (xvii). Daphne Patai, a literary scholar, and Noretta Koertge, a historian of science, insist that their inquiry is an inside critique, aimed at calling academic feminism back from what they diagnose as its current ills to its liberal origins. “We are feminists and... friends of feminism,” they write in their “Postscript,” feminists arguing from within feminism about the means for achieving the “basic goal of the liberation of women from all that impedes their ability to lead full and productive lives” (218). Their methods of inquiry draw on the feminist models of ethnography and

oral history explored in Patai’s earlier *Women’s Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (coedited with Sherna Berger Gluck; Routledge, 1991): interviews with “thirty women from around the country,” current and former faculty members, students, and staff in Women’s Studies programs, along with comments posted on the Women’s Studies e-mail discussion forum, constitute *Professing Feminism*’s chief body of evidence for its assertions. These thirty interviewees were not selected at random; it would appear that a sense of persecution at the hands of Women’s Studies made interviewees especially eligible as informants. *Professing Feminism* deploys its much-criticized methodology to represent the landscape of academic Women’s Studies as unrelievedly harsh, windswept, tyrannical, and bleak—ridden with “ideological policing,” intimidation of students, intellectual “intolerance” (xv), and “belligerent anti-intellectualism” (17)—while convincingly registering the authors’ own “sadness and dismay” (216) at the prospect they draw.

Yet despite Patai’s and Koertge’s insistence that they are offering a critique from inside feminism, *Professing Feminism*’s reliance on the shock-rhetoric of exposé positions its readers as outsiders by definition. From the book’s melodramatic subtitle forward, *Professing Feminism* tempts its readers with the quasi-anthropological thrill of peering into the “strange world of women’s studies,” represented as an exotic place of tribal conflict over fetishized differences and exclusionary rituals of initiation from which the author-explorers have barely returned alive to tell their tales. If Patai and Koertge sadly tell of some teachers turning Women’s Studies classrooms into places where true belief is defended against all outsiders, the rhetorical tactics of *Professing Feminism* unhappily mirror this paranoia. “Feminism in the lecture hall, seminar, or committee room,” they argue, “provides us with a virtual laboratory in which to study in microcosm the likely effects of social changes, were they to be set loose in the larger society” (xvii)—a “highly visible stage” on which the book’s audience can observe the workings of academic feminism from a safe distance. Karen Kidd, in the Women’s Studies e-mail list’s scrappy on-line discussion of *Professing Feminism*, perfectly captures Patai and Koertge’s metaphorical positioning of their imagined audience(s) in this structure of surveillance when she “wonder[s] if part of their agenda isn’t more along the lines of ‘public shaming’ than anything else (picture Hester Prynne, up on the scaffold!)”—but then adds, “I hope my hunch about this is mistaken.”

Responding to *Professing Feminism* is thus a highly fraught exercise; to deal, one by one, with the serious issues it raises, especially Patai and Koertge’s often wrenching narratives of faculty members self-“exiled” from Women’s Studies, is to ignore the book’s fundamental split with respect to its imagined audience, and thus with respect to the bedrock questions of relations between academic knowledge and worldly power. Still, *Professing Feminism* raises several issues of real importance for Women’s Studies as a discipline or an interdisciplinary congeries of academic practices. Chief among them, I think, are questions of how to conduct rigorous inter-
disciplinary inquiry and pedagogy in Women’s Studies, given the limits of individual faculty members’ disciplinary expertise and the anti-intellectual strain in Women’s Studies—the tendency of some Women’s Studies scholars and students to reduce what Patai herself once called feminism’s goal of “knowledge for women” (Patai, Women’s Words 138) to immediately practical, instrumental, or experiential forms of knowledge and activity.

Patai and Koertge point to what they call the interdisciplinary “opportunism” of Women’s Studies, especially in the undergraduate classroom: there, they charge, teachers in Women’s Studies too often appropriate feminist work haphazardly and uncritically, from disciplines in which both they and their students are untrained. As a sometime teacher in such courses, I share their uneasiness; it is very difficult to represent adequately both feminist scholarship in disciplines and the genealogy of the disciplines themselves within the time constraints of the course calendar. It is still more difficult when the professor organizing the course is herself (myself) working backward from feminist scholarship in particular disciplines to reconstruct the intellectual traditions from which that scholarship emerges.

Yet much of Patai and Koertge’s evidence for this “opportunism” and its supposed dangers remains anecdotal and hypothetical. Although the e-mail Women’s Studies list, to mention only one source, maintains an extensive file of Women’s Studies course syllabi, Patai and Koertge do not draw on these resources to understand what interdisciplinarity means in practice for the undergraduate Women’s Studies classroom. Instead they speculate on how Susan McClary’s 1991 Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality, for instance, might prove provocative in a disciplinary context of “experts” but pernicious in “the happy-go-lucky world of Women’s Studies, where interdisciplinarity reigns and no professional caution keeps anyone from using material from fields in which they have little or no learning”; there “its worst injuries,” they forecast, “will be done to the nonmusicians among Women’s Studies students, who will simply add classical music to their already long list of areas with which they need not bother” (151).

The students cast as passive victims in Patai and Koertge’s forecast of the damage that might be done by a book like Feminine Endings in the loosely interdisciplinary Women’s Studies classroom turn up elsewhere in Professing Feminism, however, as active persecutors—of their teachers and of their fellow students. Its ambivalent picture of students is not the least troubling aspect of Professing Feminism, but some of the faculty stories of student anti-intellectualism have a familiar ring to them. “My Women’s Studies students,” one faculty member complains,

are generally far more interested in discussing “issues” such as pornography, abortion, advertising, rape, personal appearance, and hygiene than in learning about less immediately “relevant” matters. . . . The discourse of feminism they were picking up elsewhere reinforced their own inclination to concentrate on the confession of per-
sonal feelings and to disdain the hard work of intellectual and scholarly critique.

The organization of some basic courses in Women's Studies may, as Patai and Koertge argue, collude with the tendency of students to view the field as a succession of such "issues" (rather than as a collaboration of disciplinary perspectives), ordered around simple schemas of victims and persecutors. Women's Studies, *Professing Feminism* concludes, "seems to need angry students" (96) rather than reflective ones.

The problem is that Patai and Koertge's "model" for understanding these and other issues facing Women's Studies programs is ultimately, despite their disclaimers, conspiratorial and psychological rather than structural and dialectical. For all their concern over their findings of anti-intellectualism in Women's Studies, Patai and Koertge themselves fall into anti-intellectual and magical categories of explanation. Excoriating academic feminists for playing "word games" and believing in "semantic sorcery," *Professing Feminism* dabbles in no inconsiderable word-magic of its own. Itemizing what they see as the unitary ideology behind all Women's Studies programs through mnemonic abbreviations like "IDPOL" (that is, "identity politics") and "TOTAL REJ" ("total rejection" of patriarchal intellectual traditions), Patai and Koertge trade among other things on old red-baiting magic—I think COMINTERN here. Their world view and their intellectual methods, no less than those of the students who make them so uneasy, rely on pictures of isolated victims overwhelmed by persecutors and reduced to appealing to faceless offstage powers for succor.

On the issue of men in feminism, for example, Patai and Koertge sympathetically quote an allegorical narrative written by Allan Hunter (then an undergraduate, "now a graduate student in sociology and Women's Studies" at SUNY-Stony Brook) that tells of a young man, "The Amazon's Brother," seeking to join the Amazon community, only to be turned away with the advice that he should go "tell [his] brothers," rather than the Amazons, about his commitment to gender equality (52–53). The allegorical form of Hunter's narrative automatically casts him as a lonely, innocent quester in a dangerous world—while avoiding the issue of what non-allegorical actions in the world outside this text would evince a man's genuine commitment to feminism. (The logic of *Professing Feminism* really ought to celebrate rather than deplore the Amazon's parting injunction, since Patai and Koertge are very much concerned that feminism explain itself to men, and presumably male feminists are not exempt from this duty.) By leaving this "voice" to tell its tale, Patai and Koertge ratify Hunter's fictional portrait of the isolated male victim of feminism as fact, thus begging a good many questions. Had they made the methodological choice to seek a larger sample of men in Women's Studies programs, or to represent scholarly writings on men in feminism (none are mentioned or cited) alongside individual voices of experience, or to assess under what circumstances
some men have prospered doing scholarly work in gender (in other words, to pro-
vide the sort of "qualitative comparisons" whose absence justly troubles Patai and
Koertge in feminist scholarship à la Women's Ways of Knowing), the picture of vic-
tims and persecutors here would have been considerably more complicated.

Similarly with matters of race and sexuality, where isolated "voices" come to
stand all too easily for beleaguered liberal reason. "Silvia," a self-identified lesbian,
tells Patai and Koertge of the "barrage of criticism" that "came when I made the
statement that we lesbians have treated our bisexual sisters much the same as het-
erosexual society has treated us, and that we should be ashamed of ourselves be-
cause we should know better" (59). Silvia's personal narrative might have been
amplified here with some notice of the last few years' outpouring of scholarly and
popular debate over just such questions vis-à-vis lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer
identities and communities, but doing so would obviously have compromised the
courageous isolation of "Silvia's" voice and obscured its reassuring liberal formula
(which Patai and Koertge consistently reiterate in sketching contemporary femi-
nism's dealings with race and sexuality) that we've all oppressed one another to
much the same degree.

Liberalism at this pitch is fundamentally anti-intellectual—to turn Patai and
Koertge's epithet back on them. In the end, many of the intellectual practices and
positions of academic feminism, even as described by Patai and Koertge, seem to
me more coherent and answerable to the world than the pale version of liberal fem-
inism implied by Professing Feminism. Although Patai and Koertge struggle to ar-
ticulate why they think feminism remains an ongoing necessity in the world, liberal
feminism as they represent it here ultimately cannot account for women's persis-
ten disadvantages as a group (any more than for systemic hierarchies of race and
sexual orientation), since Professing Feminism will not allow itself to name any par-
ticular group of people as having anything to gain by the continued subordination
of women.

Professing Feminism might well have raised the best of its searching questions
more constructively. Above all, Patai and Koertge might have paid more attention
to what their conclusion only glances at: the contingent "local conditions" that may,
they allow, have produced meaningful differences among Women's Studies pro-
grams and even some successful programs by their own standards: "In some
Women's Studies programs, in universities that have managed to keep their bal-
ance, the adherence to rigorous scholarship and open inquiry may be strong
enough to sort through the deluge of propaganda being published and taught under
the general rubric of Women's Studies and gender studies" (208).

If Patai and Koertge were seriously interested in reforming Women's Studies pro-
grams, by whatever intellectual lights, is this not where they would have begun
their research—by designing procedures and questions that would have allowed
them to tease out what separated good programs from bad? By instead starting
from the idealist assumption that a single ideology underlies all Women’s Studies programs and generates all of their problems, *Professing Feminism* renders differences among programs unthinkable and unanalyzable, random rather than meaningfully contingent (and its authors thus consistently refuse to follow up their informants’ suggestions that they have had significantly different experiences in different Women’s Studies programs). The closest *Professing Feminism* comes to revising this basic assumption is in venturing that the more autonomous any given Women’s Studies program is with respect to traditional disciplines, the more likely it is to go astray from liberal values of inquiry. But as David F. Austin suggested in the WMST-L e-mail discussion of *Professing Feminism*, Patai and Koertge might have here, at best, a “hypothesis worth investigating”—surely not, given the book’s methodological limits, an established fact.

Had *Professing Feminism* tried systematically from the outset to account for differences among Women’s Studies programs, I suspect that its authors might well have been able to generate further hypotheses, and that they would have better represented what some of their informants were saying. Had they done so, I would not be utterly surprised if Patai and Koertge had found that differences of the kinds they (and frequently I, too) would value among Women’s Studies programs—like differences among, say, English departments—correlated (imperfectly, but still significantly) with matters of academic prestige and institutional resources: the “strange world of Women’s Studies” answers to familiar academic class hierarchies in ways not only Patai and Koertge but their various audiences might want to analyze further.

The strongest essays in Deats and Lenker’s *Gender and Academe: Feminist Pedagogy and Politics* (a collection of papers delivered at two interdisciplinary conferences at the University of South Florida) reflect on just such questions of academic feminism’s entanglement with disciplinary and instructional class hierarchies as well as with long-term structural changes in higher education. Kathleen Day Hulbert’s “Gender Patterns in Faculty-Student Mentoring Relationships,” for example, investigates the psychology of teacher-student relationships while also calling attention to the “powerful economic and demographic trends” that have universities pressuring faculty members “to do more with less—to teach larger and larger classes, to carry larger numbers of advisees, to bring in more grants, to produce more publications” (259–60). These trends, Hulbert suggests, bear heavily on the gendering of women’s work and presence in higher education: as institutions expand their para-academic “support services,” splitting off student advising and mentoring from academic instruction, they tend to staff those services with women—thus continuing “the primary delegation to women of those activities that depend on nurturance and an acceptance of responsibility for others” (260). In light of this ongoing gendered division of academic labor, the cultural feminism of some of the Women’s Studies scholarship targeted by *Professing Feminism* seems less an
exercise in willful “interdisciplinary opportunism” than a response to very real economic and demographic pressures impinging on Patai and Koertge’s idealized ivory tower. *Professing Feminism* implies that writers like Carol Gilligan and Sara Ruddick are chiefly responsible for assigning women to nurturance rather than intellectual activity—as if feminist scholarship had such magical powers! Hulbert’s essay and the best of others like it in *Gender and Academe*, by contrast, assess the accomplishments and unfinished business of academic feminism in messier, more realistic institutional contexts.

Unhappily, though, some of Patai and Koertge’s charges stick to conspicuously featured essays in *Gender and Academe*. John Clifford’s contribution to a piece co-authored with Janet Mason Ellerby, for instance, “The Hidden ‘A-Gender’ in Intellectual Discourse: A Dialogical Examination,” sweepingly characterizes the whole of Western philosophy as the project of “the traditional male intellectual . . . to police, replicate, even purify a discourse that he imagines to be as [sic] unproblematically objective and true” (273). Clifford’s condescension is as magnificient as his philosophical readings are unnuanced and his own thinking inconsistent: Plato’s dialogues are only “superficially” interested in interrogating the foundations of knowledge (274); Kant on the other hand had “something like the right idea . . . in proposing that men and women should complement one another,” but messed it up by assigning science to men and aesthetic appreciation to women (275). Would complementarity be any prettier if these roles were reversed? Thank heaven that we readers of the postmodern age, having given up our faith in “unproblematic truth,” remain confident in our possession of “the right idea.” Flirting with Patai and Koertge’s dreaded TOTAL REJ as well as “interdisciplinary opportunism,” Clifford shamelessly advertises the limits of his own firsthand knowledge of the philosophical tradition he rejects: *every* direct quotation of a pre-twentieth century thinker in his essay comes from one twentieth-century anthology of literary criticism.

Patai and Koertge have every right, if they wish, to castigate this genre of writing for intellectual irresponsibility—irresponsibility not only toward Plato and Aristotle, Kant and Christine de Pizan, but also toward the more sophisticated feminist and postmodern readings of intellectual history on which it draws. But they have much less reason, I believe, to fear that Clifford’s essay will drive Plato and Pizan, or eminent twentieth-century feminist philosophers like Suzanne Bordo and Carole Pateman, off the reading list in good Women’s Studies courses, or that it represents the state of the art of intellectual history in Women’s Studies programs. In the end, Clifford’s essay reveals less about the Western intellectual tradition of the male philosopher, or about current feminist critiques of Western philosophy, than it does about some specific imperatives familiar to late twentieth-century academic life. Some of these imperatives drive us in the name of “productivity” to read and, ultimately, to publish conference papers in areas where we are perhaps but hes-
itantly beginning to read and to teach. Others drive us toward interdisciplinary work as a marketable new commodity even as the real conditions required for good interdisciplinary work recede ever further: the same university that funds travel to the "interdisciplinary" conference as scholarly activity or grants a raise on the basis of a related publication may well have no mechanism whatever for valuing a simple on-campus conversation between the faculty member in English and her colleague in philosophy, still less for supporting a teaching collaboration between them.

Somewhere amid this welter of professional motivations and obstacles to interdisciplinary work, familiar to everyone who has ever been connected to a Women's Studies program, there still dwells for many of us the feminist conviction that interdisciplinary inquiry may not only make sense of but might actually change women's lives within systems of gender stratification. Patai and Koertge in *Professing Feminism* avert their eyes from the structural conditions of interdisciplinary feminist academic work in their effort to call readers back to what they regard as the bracing rigors and timeless intellectual liberties of the traditional disciplines in traditional colleges and universities. The essays in *Gender and Academe*, uneven as they sometimes are in quality, keep those conditions very much in the forefront of their attention, reminding us that we cannot understand the historical vicissitudes of academic feminism without considering the wider crises of late twentieth-century higher education—and vice versa.

**Note**

1The Women's Studies e-mail discussion list (WMST-L) is maintained by Joan Korenman at the University of Maryland. To subscribe, send the message "sub WMST-L <your name>" to LIST-SERVE@UMDD.UMD.EDU; other inquiries may be addressed to the list owner at KORENMAN@UMBC2.UMBC.EDU. New subscribers receive the WMST-L User's Guide, by Joan Korenman, which includes instructions for retrieving past discussions from the archives. All quotations from the WMST-L in this review are taken from the WMST-L archives on Professing Feminism by permission of the authors.