

curriculum. "If by 1980, the number of courses and programs has doubled or tripled," she wrote in 1974, "and if in freshman English the students are still reading male writers on male lives, and in United States history the students are still studying male-culture heroes, wars and male political documents, then we shall have failed our mission, or at least not yet succeeded." She parts company with those feminists such as Bowles and Klein (Gloria Bowles and Renate Duelli Klein. *Theories of Women's Studies*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983) who argue for autonomous women's studies programs. She agrees with them, however, that it is impossible in most areas of knowledge to simply add women to the curriculum. Her vision is of a new curriculum that goes beyond both the male curriculum and women's studies as we know them today. Education would become truly "coeducational."

As Howe makes clear, her own activities in higher education as well as the progress of women's studies itself have been, at least in part, the result of tokenism. Even in 1983, when she was invited to give the opening lecture at the University of Wisconsin for a centennial celebration of the teaching of American literature, she was a "token woman." Such an experience was not unusual for Howe. From being a Jewish child in a Protestant culture, to being a working-class girl in middle-class schools, she has not been unaccustomed to being marginalized. In 1969, she became the first chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women set up by the Modern Language Association, and in 1971, her office became the clearinghouse on women's studies syllabi. Howe was also responsible for establishing the Feminist Press that was so instrumental in recovering the legacy of writing by black and white women in the United States. Currently, she is president of the Feminist Press and Professor of American Studies at the State University of New York, College at Old Westbury.

Howe's personal and intellectual commentaries on the relationship of education to an American culture that is racist, patriarchal and elitist allows us to appreciate more fully the founding and development of women's studies on North American campuses. By her teaching and activism, she helped to create what we understand today by women's studies.

We can be grateful for the courage, creativity, and passionate commitment that Florence Howe has devoted to the development of women's studies. We are fortunate to be able to share in this book her struggles, achievements, and visions. That she has been so successful may help to explain, however, why the impact of this book is limited. The book is a pleasure to read, but it has little new to offer.

The repetition in several essays of the same fragments of themes, arguments, illustrations, and personal accounts even becomes irritating. She provides some useful ideas regarding changes in pedagogy and curriculum. She does not address some of the more difficult and pressing questions that demand attention. How is women's studies related to other strategies for the liberation of women? How can women's studies acquire a position in academe beyond that of tokenism? What ideas has feminist scholarship produced so far that could possibly lead to the transformation of the curriculum and make it truly coeducational?

To end this review on that note would be churlish. Howe's book remind us of how much has been accomplished, how difficult the struggle is, how important it is for women to read about other women's lives and struggles in order to understand their own experiences, and how much more is yet to be done.

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Breaking Out: Feminist Consciousness and Feminist Research. Liz Stanley and Sue Wise. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983, Pp. 202..

Breaking Out is at once the most radical and the most intuitively valid piece of feminist writing I have come upon in the past decade. Why? Because it fits with, and make analytic sense of, my personal experience. Like the authors, I, too, have felt discomfited by and increasingly distant from the kinds of feminist ideas which tell me "how it is" and that I "have it wrong" if I articulate a lack of fit between my own life experience and the given categories of "feminist socialization" and "woman as victim." Though dissimilar on the surface, these various typologies of feminist theory (e.g., socialist-feminism, Marxist-feminism, even so-called liberal feminism) share common and quite conventional assumptions about social reality. What Stanley and Wise call "feminist orthodoxy" refers to a deterministic explanation of how women are oppressed by social structures and social systems (whether conceptualized as patriarchy, capitalism, or some amalgam of the two system), and they argue that such explanations operate within the paradigm of positivism, the essence of conventional social science.

The main intellectual task of this book is the repudiation of positivism, which claims that there is a knowable social reality "out there" beyond the subjective experience

and interpretation of individuals. Positivistic social research assumes that with adequate theory and scientific methodology the researcher can uncover the “objective truth” about social phenomena. The writers argue that this model is eminently unsuitable for thinking about social reality. Certainly feminists have already heavily critiqued “normal social science” for its inherent masculinist biases which, prior to feminist scrutiny, was passed off as nothing less than “objective reality.” Stanley and Wise go much further than asking that women be added in or even that the models be reconstituted to incorporate women’s as well as men’s experiences. They reject grand theories on the ontological grounds that what is knowable cannot be separated from the knower, *i.e.*, from subjective experience. Grand theories are abstracted from the lived experience through which individuals construct social reality, and they postulate causal, therefore deterministic relationships.

Determinism, whether of the left or right in terms of conventional (male-constructed) politics, assumes that people’s thoughts, feelings, attitudes and behaviour are caused by specific conditions or structures out there. People are not understood to be actively creating, choosing or negotiating their situation; predictable things happen *to* them. Feminist theory, so radical and path-breaking in its exposure of, and challenge to, masculinist bias, has been decidedly traditional in adopting the deterministic assumptions and methodology of normal social science. There has been, according to the writers, no real discussion within feminism of the troublesome inherent contradictions. On the one hand, deterministic biological psychological and social theories which have explained and buttressed male dominance are rejected. On the other hand, there is acceptance of a “feminist determinism,” which portrays women as passive victims of social conditioning and family-based oppression, which serves the requirements of the capitalist and/or patriarchal system.

Stanley and Wise criticize these theoretical assumptions as at once overly-socialized because they depict the female child as passive, totally malleable, and entirely determined by society; and psychologistic because the theories suggest that there exists within the child certain innate traits. The socialization model, which has been central to feminist theorizing about oppression, is also said to be reificatory in its abstracted portrayal of the demands of the family and the social system. Their final criticism is of the model’s nonreflexiveness: it cannot explain feminism! Somehow, in a way never explicated by feminist writings, feminists would have to be special and outside the determined order of things in order to have escaped the fate held to be unavoidable for women in general.

Stanley and Wise assert two alternative theoretical ideas which form the basis of their own position in this book. Their first claim is that the personal is centrally involved in the production and evaluation of ideas; the second, a corollary, is that the personal is equally implicated in oppression: “Institutions, structures do not oppress. *People* oppress people—they make decisions to do so, and the oppressed sometimes comply in acts of oppression” (p. 82).

Breaking Out is a book about the theoretical and practical validation of personal experience—not to get to the reality beyond, à la naturalism in social science, but precisely because there is nothing beyond the personal. “To talk about ‘going beyond’ is to posit a false distinction between experience and theory and between structure and process” (p. 83). The revolution which feminists require if we are to break out of our oppression is not a major event out there, but rather many little revolutions in our daily lives. Feminism is not what you preach but what you live. Similarly, sexism is not a disembodied system out there, but is at its root “a set of practices, contextually located and daily enacted, which fix us within them” (p. 183). In other words, positivistic and deterministic accounts of our situation as women deny the primacy of our personal experience and interpretation of reality, ignore our active participation in the contexts in which we operate, and minimize our capacity to make subjectively meaningful choices about our lives.

Nowhere are these tendencies more fully evident, in the authors’ view, than in Marxist-feminist theory. They reject Marxism as an essentially masculinist grand theory concerned with abstract debates disconnected from everyday experience. Marxist-feminism tries to fit women into a masculinist world view in which the personal gets lost in a realm of ideas and structures. The separation of theory from experience is an inevitable result of building grand theories which rest on generalizations, cannot do more than approximate reality, and centrally assume a determined social reality.

Feminist consciousness constitutes a particular and unique way of going about making sense of the world. It arises in the first instance from the fact of being female and being treated as female (males cannot possess feminist consciousness). Such consciousness needs to be understood as both process and state, says the authors, “because differently situated and changing understandings underpin any ‘state’ of consciousness” (p. 123). This leads them to the position that there is no one true feminist consciousness but rather a multiplicity of feminist constructions of “differently situated and contextually grounded

experiences” (p. 123).

What does all this mean for doing feminist research? First and foremost, a feminist researcher should not distance herself from other women in order to make them the objects of her objective research. She should not treat objective reality and subjective experience as two separate entities because this process inherently invalidates women’s experiences and is thereby oppressive.

There is a continual contradiction between women’s involvement in everyday experience and the “language of theory.” The language of theory exerts a conceptual imperialism over experience...and one consequence is that women are not only alienated from theory but also experience itself (p. 163).

Instead, our starting point must be an exploration of the social construction of our everyday lives. The authors believe that feminism does not adequately understand how and why women are oppressed; until we do possess this knowledge we cannot claim that we know how to liberate ourselves.

Their discussion provides three main principles for doing feminist research: (1) the analytic use of feeling and experience to examine the personal should be the basis of feminist research; (2) the researcher should be explicitly situated in any research she undertakes, making her direct experience of the research process an explicit part of her social science work; (3) verbal and written language is highly important to the goal of liberation (a realization greatly influenced by the authors’ reading of Mary Daly’s work): “to break out of our ways of thinking, writing and speaking is, in effect to break out of how we presently live in all of its infinite aspects” (p. 186).

In this regard, the way in which *Breaking Out* is written is no less important than what it has to say. The authors’ subjectivity is always present and accounted for; they move easily and naturally between the personal and the general, always showing the links between what they know and how they came to know it for themselves, making particularly relevant use of their experience with the theory and practice of gay politics as data.

Their route to feminist understanding has already been marked out by those philosophical and social science schools known as phenomenology, social construction of reality, interactionism and ethnomethodology, all of which believe that people subjectively construct, interpret and negotiate social reality, though we almost always behave as if there was an objective reality. The authors

acknowledge these influences, particularly that of ethnomethodology which they find “interesting and useful” because it “takes the everyday and the personal as both a topic of its research and also the source with which it works” (p. 138).

Do Stanley and Wise take the extreme subjectivist position that there is nothing out there beyond the contents of our heads? As feminist they start from the incontrovertible awareness that women are oppressed; but they argue, in sharp contrast to feminist orthodoxy, that we are people who get oppressed by other people in myriad daily ways, and we actively define, interpret and participate in this process. We can change it only through our daily actions and choices. Structures are seen as crumbling or fading away at the point when people behave differently (or make different interpretations of reality) in grounded situations.

A recent personal experience is relevant. At a feminist workshop a presenter was arguing that only a structural revolution could bring to an end the injustice of working women’s double day. From the floor, I offered the view that individual women could change their double day by refusing to put up with it. I, for one, had never accepted to live with a man who would not do his share of domestic work. The presenter then suggested that perhaps for a few professional women like myself there might be a personal solution, but for working women in general, personal solutions were not possible, only structural ones. She did not explain why she thought this was so, but she did clearly attempt to invalidate my personal reality (which includes the experience of being free not to accept a man’s behaviour if it is objectionable).

It is this fundamental change to feminist orthodoxy which will likely disturb many readers of this book (or even this review). In assuming and arguing that women—like men—have the freedom to make choices, Stanley and Wise are claiming that we also bear responsibility as individuals for the choices we do make and the realities thus constructed in our daily lives. Where many voices will likely clamor that this position is a blatant instance of blaming the victim, the authors try to show that it is, rather, a truly feminist position and that the woman-as-victim assumption is really antifeminist in its implications.

Speaking for myself, the philosophical and empirical arguments of *Breaking Out* are logical and valid. I had already decided that I would only do research on topics which were relevant to my direct experience and/or personally important, and that my methods would be interactive and engaged. After reading this book, I am much

better able to articulate why this is the only research approach with which I feel comfortable. This work also represents for me the cognitive bridge between my consciousness as a feminist and my understanding of individual psychology. As a feminist I habitually identify, critique and challenge assumptions and practices of male dominance which I personally experience as objectionable. As a psychotherapist working with women, I identify, critique and challenge all individual assumptions and practices which women use to impede their own attainment of personal autonomy. It is clear to me that the individual must, and can, free herself from internally held constraints (regardless of where they originate) which typically exert far more cruel limits on her potential than do any external, societal barriers. In helping women move through this process, I predictably encounter initial anger and resistance. Stanley and Wise provide an explanation which concurs with my own:

structural explanations...enable people to hide in collectivism, in the sense that they can avoid taking responsibility for their own lives and actions. (p. 107)

Breaking Out offers to any woman who cares to hear the message a vision of how to break out from oppression in her own daily life without waiting for something to change externally. For the feminist researcher there is much more revealed about what not to do than recipes for good feminist research. Stanley and Wise devote most of the book to explaining their total revolt against positivism and determinism; a heavier emphasis, perhaps, than was needed. Their protracted paradigm-smashing was felt to be necessary, I suspect, because of the intimidating force of conventional structuralist assumptions about social reality. In this regard the authors note, "Many women appear to be very wary of standing up to Marxist-feminist heavies who in all circumstances appear to remain absolutely convinced of the rightness of what they say" (p. 107).

Breaking Out attempts to show us how we can make sense of our lives and our milieu as individual women. Yet, we are still left with the problem of structure, even if it is people who oppress people, structures do exist in consensual reality and at least at the macro- or policy-level must be dealt with in their own terms. To pursue the liberation of women, we must work together for changes in social policy; but, above all we need to strive for the kind of personal insight which will guide us to improve our private lives.

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Feminist Literary Studies: An Introduction. K.K. Ruthven. Cambridge University Press, 1984..

If nothing else, K.K. Ruthven has done a commendable job of anticipating objections to his work. Indeed, most of the positions from which one might choose to respond to this survey of feminist literary criticism seem already to be occupied by the various straw women of the author's imagination. One may question the motives that impel a male academic to analyse the feminist project, but only at the risk of joining the nameless "vulgarians" (p. 9) and "vigilantes" (p. 93) who make their appearances in this book. One may object to the harshness and lack of discrimination that cloud many of his appraisals of standard feminist arguments, but only at the expense of being identified with the practitioners of "feminist terrorism," an extraordinary company which enjoys "the vicarious satisfactions of retaliation and reprisal in the war of the sexes for which the only end is unconditional surrender of all power to women" (p. 10). One may assent, of course, to some of his judgements, but, thanks to the intimidatory rhetoric of radical feminism, even this option is open only to those brave enough to risk association with a contemptible figure branded as the "patriarchally brainwashed traitor to her own sex" (p. 14). Whom is Ruthven writing for, one wonders.

Given his obvious contempt for feminist readers, it is with particular trepidation that I confess that, until Ruthven raised the issue, I had never been greatly alarmed at the prospect of a man's writing or commenting on feminist criticism. The proposition that only women can speak on matters that concern women strikes me, as it does Ruthven, as both a betrayal of the precept that feminism concerns everyone and a replication of the most objectionable feature of prefeminist exclusionism. Ruthven is quite right to point out that if, as many feminists have argued, all those characteristics associated with female thought and expression are acquired and not innate, it is unjustifiable to declare *a priori* that gender alone should disqualify anyone from thinking or expressing anything. Had he pushed the argument a stage further, moreover, he would surely have seen that the hypothetical protest he is so anxious to discredit is self-contradictory as well. That is to say, for a woman to maintain that a man, simply because he is a man, can know nothing about femaleness is to presume that she herself knows enough about maleness to see that his ignorance is hopeless. This confirms precisely the possibility of a knowledge of the other sex that this imaginary objector to Ruthven's claim is attempting to deny. Instead of seizing on what seems to me a conclusive demonstration of his right to publish his opinions, Ruthven harangues his readers with a series of circum-