

## **‘That’s not philosophy’: Feminism, academia, and the double bind**

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In this paper I explore the situation of feminist academics, positing a tension between the demands of feminist research and the norms of academia. I give three examples of the way that this tension may manifest. Feminist research, I suggest, may be subject to de-legitimization on the grounds of supposed lack of objectivity; to marginalization from the main body of a discipline; and to conceptual hostility when operating within the main body of a discipline. I then show that the situation of feminist academics can be conceptualised as a double bind: a set of circumstances in which an agent is given a set of competing demands, with no possibility of receiving clarification as to which demands to pursue. I argue that this interpretation of the situation of feminist academics is helpful because it prompts constructive ways of thinking. It encourages feminist academics to adopt a non-judgemental attitude towards ourselves and towards others, and it reminds us to fix our sights on long-term strategy. These suggestions in turn lead me to urge a renewed solidarity between feminists in academia. The form of solidarity I advocate is action-based and inclusive, spanning disciplines, genders, and research specialisms. Such solidarity can enable positive responses to the double bind facing feminist academics.

**Keywords:** feminism, academia, double bind, austerity, philosophy, solidarity

At a social gathering on the first day of my MPhil course in philosophy, a fellow student asked me the standard question for such scenarios: what did I work on? On explaining to him that I planned to write my dissertation on feminism and the metaphysics of gender categories, he confidently told me, ‘That’s not philosophy’ – adding (presumably for good measure) that neither was it ‘interesting’. Whilst it’s easy to dismiss this kind of incident as mere sexist hostility, it seemed to me that his reaction arose in part from genuine bemusement: my project really was not recognizable to him as a philosophical enterprise. I suspect that this kind of attitude, though seldom stated quite so bluntly, forms part of the institutional background against which many feminist academics must operate. In a way, this is not surprising. On the one hand, feminism as a political approach is distinguished by its methods as well as its content; as Catharine MacKinnon puts it, paraphrasing a comment of Andrea Dworkin’s, ‘women’s situation requires new ways of thinking, not just thinking new things’ (MacKinnon, 2005, p. 25). On the other hand, academia as an

institution has standards and guidelines, both formal and informal, which govern the recognition of research. These norms inevitably privilege certain ways of thinking over others, and change only gradually. Given the relatively recent development of feminist academic study as a concerted project, not to mention the history of women's exclusion from academia, it seems likely that the norms operating in academia will not easily accommodate the 'new ways of thinking' required by feminism. In this case, the feminist academic will be placed in situations where her feminism suggests that she think in one way, but the status quo of academic recognition and success requires that she think in another, contrasting way. Under these circumstances, pursuing her research will involve violating, to some degree, the norms of the very institution that makes it possible for her to undertake that research in the first place. Such a violation is liable to generate negative responses, ranging from confusion to hostility – such as the response I met with from that fellow student on my first day of graduate study.

In this paper, I will use the notion of a double bind situation to analyse the structural challenges facing feminist academics, and to highlight the possible responses that are available to us. In speaking of 'feminist academics' here I mean to refer only to academics engaging in research that can be described as feminist, not to all academics who would identify themselves as feminists. These feminist academics in the narrow sense are the main focus of my discussion, although towards the end of the paper I will also discuss the broader category of academics who are feminist. I begin by giving some illustrations of the kinds of tensions feminist academics may encounter. I then introduce the concept of a double bind, and show how the situation of feminist academics can be conceived of as a double bind. I discuss the way that this situation is exacerbated, and the double bind intensified, by the current moment of austerity. Finally, I use the analysis I have developed to propose two positive responses to the challenges facing feminism in academia.

The ways in which the norms of academia conflict with the pursuit of feminist research vary greatly across different locations, including across different disciplines, different institutions and different geographical regions. For this reason, I will not attempt to give a unified and uniform account of the difficulties facing feminist academics. Instead, I will explore the situation of feminist academics by highlighting three points of divergence between the demands of feminism and the norms of academia, in terms of both approaches and topics, each of which I have encountered during my own experience within philosophy departments in the UK. These examples are offered for the purposes of illustration; I do not take them to apply universally, and they are not intended as an exhaustive list of possible conflicts.

The first point of divergence between the demands of feminism and the norms of academia relates to the issue of objectivity. This is principally a difference of methodology. Academic norms in philosophy, as in many disciplines, feature a more or less tacit commitment to a particular idea of

objectivity. The philosopher is supposed to be impartial and detached, reporting on the state of reality from a neutral vantage point. But, as Julia E. Maybee argues, this way of doing philosophy ‘reflects the social position of those White males who have spread out their vision and made it the dominant one, whose ignorance of the social positions of others has allowed them to be convinced that they really do represent the universal point of view’ (p.143). Notably, Donna Haraway has described this model of objectivity as the ‘god-trick’ of seeing everything from nowhere, an ‘illusion’ of ‘infinite vision’ (Haraway, 2004, p. 87). As Maybee highlights, this supposedly neutral and disembodied perspective may turn out, implicitly, to be marked as male, white, or otherwise privileged, revealing its claims to objectivity as deeply suspect.<sup>1</sup> The naïve conception of objectivity that still holds sway in some areas of philosophy is in conflict with methodological commitments held by many feminists: that knowledge is typically situated and partial, that the personal is political, and that the individual perspective of the researcher does have a legitimate role to play in feminist research. Although these feminist commitments do not automatically entail that objectivity of any sort is impossible to attain, they do demonstrate that objectivity cannot simply be presumed: claims to objectivity stand in need of scrutiny and justification, especially when they are being made by those speaking from privileged sociallocations. This tension between academic ideas of objectivity and feminist methodologies that favour a more situated approach to knowledge is often reflected in conventions concerning language choice and writing style. The result is that a feminist researcher’s style may be criticised for being too ‘emotive’, ‘personal’, ‘unbalanced’, ‘biased’, or simply too ‘political’, when what is actually at issue is a difference of methodology.

Judith Bennett identifies this methodological tension in action in the field of history (2006). She argues that the naïve view of the historian as aspiring to reach ‘god’s eye truths about the past’, although no longer explicitly avowed, ‘lingers on in our profession’s continued discomfort with the mingling of history and politics’ (p.14). This in turn gives rise to a suspicion of feminist history, which is ‘caricatured as ahistorical politics’ (p.14) – an attempt, it would seem, to situate it outside of the field of history “proper”. Citing Joan Scott, Bennett suggests that this suspicion has contributed to a sustained shift away from the term ‘women’s history’ to the supposedly less political, and hence less threatening, ‘gender history’ (Scott 1986, p.1056, cited Bennett 2006, p.14). Directly confronting attitudes of suspicion towards feminist history, Bennett writes: ‘My work necessarily reflects my feminist politics, just as the interpretations of all historians reflect their political views... Feminist historians might be more forthright about their politics than are other historians, but this political – one might almost call it “moral” – dimension is as old as the profession itself.’ (pp.14-15)

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion of this critique of objectivity, see also Pateman, 1988, MacKinnon, 1989, Collins, 1990, Young, 1990, Harding 2004.

A second point of tension between feminist methodologies and academic norms lies in a way of conceiving of academic disciplines that marginalizes feminist research. This tension concerns the ways that certain topics and issues are understood to fit within a particular field of study. Whereas feminist research tends to conceptualise feminist issues as central, dominant conceptions of a discipline may instead position feminist topics at the fringes. Within philosophy, for example, there exists an indefensible tendency to lump all feminist philosophy together and position it at the outer edges of the discipline (Superson, 2002, 92, 103). Feminist philosophy may be viewed as suspiciously close to sociology, politics or cultural criticism. I suspect that this marginalization is the main factor in dismissive attitudes of the kind expressed by the graduate student who told me that my work on the metaphysics of gender categories is ‘not philosophy’. Whilst the philosophy *of gender* – the conceptual task of theorizing gender categories and gender relations – can legitimately be seen as a specific topic within philosophy, like the philosophy of time, there is no reason to consider it marginal within the discipline. Moreover, feminist philosophy *as a whole* cannot, of course, be contained within the label of the philosophy of gender, for feminist philosophers have made important contributions throughout the discipline.

Phyllis Rooney (2011, 5) explores the marginalization of feminist epistemology, noting ‘a persistent refrain in mainstream epistemology that feminist epistemology is not epistemology ‘proper,’ and thus not something with which epistemologists need concern themselves’ (see also Webb, 2002). She shows how feminist epistemology is overlooked even in discussions advocating new approaches to epistemology, such as virtue epistemology, which concern ideas that have been explored at length in feminist philosophy over a number of decades (p. 19). This state of affairs is revealed as doubly ironic. First, the attitudes adopted towards feminist epistemologists by many of their critics involve failures to apply the basic norms of respectful argumentation – a distinctly epistemic fault. Second, recognizing these faulty attitudes for what they are ‘requires insights developed specifically in feminist work, the very insights that many of these critics (with their relatively superficial reading and understanding of that work) clearly aim to keep at arm’s length.’ (Rooney, 2011, p.10) Thus, mainstream epistemologists who dismiss feminist epistemology both violate their own norms of argumentation and cut themselves off from the insights that could act as a corrective measure to this distinctively epistemic shortcoming.

Pigeonholing and marginalization causes career problems for feminist researchers, delegitimizing our work, and deprives the discipline as a whole of important insights.<sup>2</sup> This can be

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<sup>2</sup> Cudd (2002) has further argued that this marginalization is part of an ongoing backlash against feminism in philosophy – a hostile response from others in the field that is closing off opportunities for feminist philosophers to occupy ‘top and mainstream’ positions in academia (p.13). Burgess-Jackson (2002) identifies three specific tactics by which this hostility is expressed: lack of charity towards feminist philosophy, application of double standards, and bullying attitudes. These arguments are convincing, and the topic of backlash is an important one. I note, however,

compounded by straightforward sexism concerning feminist research that draws on the history of philosophy. For instance, research on obscure female figures may encounter more scepticism about its value than research on obscure male figures, and is vulnerable to being dismissed as politically motivated ‘reclamation’. This latter attitude trades on the idea that political motivations are incompatible with genuine scholarly value – a manifestation of the problematic conception of scholarly objectivity discussed previously.

A positive response to the marginalization of feminist research has been the creation of special programs, research groups, journals and so on devoted explicitly to feminism or women’s studies. Excellent as these are, however, they can only provide a partial solution. For example, it may be the case that the best chance a feminist academic has of publishing her work is in a journal specifically dedicated to feminism; anecdotal evidence suggests that this is the case in philosophy (Haslanger, 2008, p. 215). Obviously, then, the existence of specialist journals helps to disseminate feminist research; but publishing in a feminist journal could prove detrimental to an individual researcher’s career prospects if the broader academic environment does not have a fair assessment of the importance of that journal. As a case in point, consider *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, which is the leading journal devoted specifically to feminist philosophy. In an article first published in 1999, Ann E. Cudd (2002, p.13) notes that ‘it is still difficult to get one’s male colleagues to accept [*Hypatia*] as equally valuable as, say, *Philosophical Studies*, which has about the same reported acceptance rate’. More recently, in 2008, *Hypatia* was discussed dismissively by Brian Leiter, who is a Professor of Jurisprudence at the University of Chicago and runs the extremely prominent philosophy blog, ‘Leiter Reports’. Leiter was responding to the inclusion of *Hypatia* in the top (A\*) category of an Australian Philosophical Association ranking exercise. After speculating that it was among several ‘dubious’ inclusions that were ‘probably meant to pander to this-or-that interest group’, he remarked, ‘[t]he best work in feminist philosophy, for example, has surely appeared in many of the other A\* journals, not in *Hypatia*’ (2008). This casual assertion, coming as it did from such a high profile figure and in such a public context, is quite staggering given the exceptional quality of the journal in question, and indicates that the attitudes detected by Cudd in 1999 still persist in at least some quarters. I am keen to stress that, in pointing out this problem, I do not intend to criticize specialist journals and other resources dedicated to feminism. I merely note that these valuable resources offer at best only a partial solution to the marginalization of feminist research.

This marginalization generates a further tension for feminist academics who are committed to operating within the mainstream discipline as much as possible. This third tension concerns the

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that my analysis, although compatible with the existence of a backlash, does not rely on any of the tensions I discuss being understood as products of a backlash.

terms on which debates are conducted. The academic researcher is expected to locate herself within the literature on a given topic, and especially to reference 'canonical texts'. But when feminist insights have not had sufficient impact on the shape of a discipline, feminists within that discipline are likely to find this problematic. Canonical texts may well be either explicitly or implicitly anti-feminist, so that a feminist scholar is obliged to spend her time, space and energy going over old ground correcting the work of others rather than moving forward into a new arena, as she may well wish to do. Even if the works in question have already been criticized by other feminists, these criticisms may need to be rehearsed again for the benefit of those readers who are less familiar with feminist scholarship. Moreover, the terms of the debate may be set up in a way that requires feminist criticism, and, unlike a mainstream scholar, a feminist researcher will then have to begin her argument from a more basic starting point, rather than simply picking up a well-defined issue and moving it forward. In other words, a discipline that has marginalized feminism will feature, in its main body, a conceptual landscape that is hostile to feminist work. Feminists operating in this environment will therefore be constantly on the back foot, placing them at a disadvantage to their non-feminist counterparts.

I have suggested, then, that feminist research faces problems in three areas: delegitimization, especially on the grounds of supposed lack of objectivity; marginalization from the main body of a discipline; and conceptual hostility when operating within the main body of a discipline. As I noted earlier, the tensions facing feminist academics vary hugely between disciplines, regions and institutions. Thus, these examples are by no means intended to be comprehensive or universally relevant. The purpose of offering them is to sketch a general idea of the kinds of tensions that I have in mind, and, although I have mainly used examples drawn from philosophy, I believe that they will be sufficiently recognizable to feminists in other areas of academia to make my analysis and suggested responses more widely relevant. Of course, any assessment of the scale of the problem facing feminist academics will depend on the extent to which the new ways of thinking that women's situation calls for are understood as departing from the ways of thinking that have traditionally been recognised by the academy. The more that women's situation is seen as calling for radically new ways of thinking, the more severe the problem facing feminist academics will seem. I do not presuppose a consensus on this point.<sup>3</sup> Rather, I aim to focus on the general shape of the problem facing feminist academics as I understand it, thereby offering an analysis that can be adapted to suit varying assessments of the

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<sup>3</sup> I also note the interesting argument advanced by Rooney (2011) concerning the potential benefits of at least one of the tensions that I have identified. Rooney interprets the situation of the feminist epistemologist within epistemology more broadly as conferring an 'outsider within' status (Collins, 1990) that can yield distinctive epistemic benefits. Rooney's argument is convincing, and my focus here on the problematic aspects of these tensions should not be taken as a denial that they can also have productive implications.

severity of the situation.

I want to suggest that we can profitably conceptualize the difficulties encountered by the feminist academic as a form of double-bind. Although the idea of the double bind was not originally a product of feminist research (see Bateson, 1972), it has been used by many feminists (see, for example, Frye, 1983). A double bind situation is one in which a person is subject to what Gregory Bateson, the originator of the term, described as ‘unresolvable sequences of expectations’, or ‘pattern[s] of competing injunctions’ (Bateson, 1972, p. 156). More specifically, a double bind situation has a number of features. The agent is given two (or perhaps more) injunctions as to how to behave, and these injunctions conflict, so that it is not possible to fulfil both of them. Furthermore, failure to comply with one or more of the injunctions has negative consequences, and the person cannot leave the situation. Finally, there is no way for the person to seek clarification or a meta-injunction about what to do. It is characteristic of a double bind situation that any action taken to try and evade the problem will in fact make the negative consequence more likely. This is what gives rise to the image of a ‘double bind’, which refers to a particular type of knot that gets tighter when either end is pulled (see Laing, 1970).

To give an example of a double bind situation, suppose that a professional woman is trying to implement a set of objectives in her job, and in order to do so she requires her colleagues to follow her instructions. There is a social stereotype that women should be submissive. Suppose that due to this stereotype, whenever the woman uses assertive tactics to try and get her colleagues to cooperate with her directions, they respond negatively, due to having their expectations frustrated, and do not do as she asks. There is also a social stereotype that leaders should be assertive and authoritative in manner. If, then, the woman adopts a more conciliatory tone and a more submissive demeanour, as her colleagues expect her to, then they will see her as unimportant, inferior – in short, not as a leader; and so, again, they will not follow her instructions. The more she tries to get her colleagues to do as she asks, either by being assertive or by being conciliatory, the less they are inclined to cooperate. In this situation, the woman is receiving two competing injunctions: don't be assertive (‘pushy’), and don't be timid (‘a pushover’). It is impossible for her to seek clarification about these injunctions: attempting to do so would undermine her authority, would be socially awkward and would most probably be unproductive anyway, since these attitudes on the part of her colleagues are likely to be implicit and subconscious. She cannot just exit the situation – her job requires her to complete the task. The situation is such that every attempt she makes to implement her objective in fact takes her further away from achieving it.

Note that the concept of a double bind is not quite the same as the concept of a dilemma. In some dilemma situations, the person faces a genuine choice between two unpalatable alternatives (e.g. to be aggressive and be obeyed but disliked, or to be conciliatory and be ignored but liked).

What is special about a double bind situation is that the person will face the *same* unwanted outcome *regardless* of which approach is chosen. For instance, in the case of the professional woman described above, her colleagues ignore her instructions in *both* scenarios. A double bind can thus be thought of as a specific kind of dilemma, the important point for present purposes being that there are many dilemmas that do not constitute double binds. Note also the importance of the impossibility of seeking a meta-injunction in completing the double bind. If the woman could sit her colleagues down, ask them what she needed to do in order to get them to cooperate with her, and receive an honest answer, then she would not be in a double bind situation.

Based on the tensions I picked out earlier, the position of feminist academics can be interpreted as a double bind.<sup>4</sup> On one hand, a feminist academic can undertake her research in a way that fits with the academic status quo. This is likely to bring her recognition, and therefore the resources and platform she needs to continue and communicate her work. But her work itself may not exhibit the kind of thinking that is needed to advance feminist aims most effectively. In the worst case, she herself might gradually lose the will to engage in that kind of thinking anyway, becoming convinced of the validity of the standards that she initially adopted for strategic reasons. On the other hand, a feminist academic can pursue her research in a way that challenges the academic status quo, and she will be likely to generate work that is capable of advancing feminist aims. But then her work may not receive the platform that would enable it to reach its audience, so it does not in fact advance feminist aims. Moreover, her ability to continue producing feminist work depends on her receiving academic recognition in the form of employment. In the worst case, then, this recognition may be withdrawn and she will lack the resources necessary for further academic work of any kind, including feminist work.

The prospects of a feminist academic achieving resolution to her difficulties through a clarification or direction about how to negotiate the tension are more or less non-existent. Seeking such a clarification is likely to be both pointless and dangerous, since trying to talk about the tensions she encounters explicitly is liable to bring up a wall of denial and hostility. Furthermore, given that the dominant stereotype of the ‘successful academic’ is one of boundless self-assurance and unwavering conviction in the value of one’s research, an admission of methodological doubt is likely to be extremely damaging to an academic in the eyes of their peers. Thus, the possibility of receiving a meta-injunction is blocked, and the double bind is formed.

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<sup>4</sup> There will also be double binds that specifically affect *women* academics, as distinct from feminist academics. For example, Superson (2002, p.105) describes an experience she had as a woman academic that can be understood as a double bind situation. Recounting an incident when she was ‘crudely ogled’ first as a job candidate and subsequently as a new member of staff, she notes: ‘Complaining would jeopardize my chances of getting the job and foreclose the opportunity to form collegial relations. Acquiescing, though, perpetuates the view that women are sex objects and not competitive workers.’ However she responds, then, Superson’s standing as a professional philosopher is going to be undermined by the gender-based harassment she experiences in this situation.

The double bind facing feminist academics manifests particularly clearly in the tensions concerning marginalization and conceptual hostility. Operating in feminist enclaves at the margins of a discipline means being vulnerable to dismissal and de-legitimization, whereas trying to position oneself more squarely within the discipline means encountering conceptual hostility that hinders the progress of research. Neither option is satisfactory, but expressing doubt over either one would undermine a feminist researcher's position by implying either that she doubts the value of feminist research, or that she doubts her own suitability to working within the academic system.

The double bind faced by feminist academics is intensified under the current conditions of austerity – the economic regime of limitations and cuts to public spending precipitated by the 2008 financial crisis – affecting academic institutions in Europe and elsewhere. Austerity will increase competitions for resources within academic institutions, placing greater pressure on academics to produce research that meets codified and measurable standards of recognition. This places feminist academics under greater pressure to 'perform' according to the dominant standard of academic success. At the same time, austerity measures more generally, such as cuts to public services and to benefits, are affecting women more severely than men. This strengthens the political and ethical imperative to pursue feminist aims, and further increases the value of feminist research. Thus, the fact of austerity means that feminist academics experience increased pressure on both sides of the double bind.

I want to stress, however, that the formation of the double bind pre-dates the current regime of austerity. Understanding the tensions facing feminist academics under austerity requires an understanding of the persistent unfairness present in academic institutions prior to the introduction of austerity measures. It is important to recognize this in order to block the insidious suggestion that the problems experienced by feminist academics are a regrettable but inevitable consequence of austerity, on a par with the difficulties currently being faced in all aspects of academia. This suggestion permits a particularly unhelpful attitude to arise in response to valid feminist complaints – an attitude that says, with a regretful shake of the head, 'none of us like it, but we must all expect things to be a little harder for a time'. Whenever this attitude manifests, in the background are sexist stereotypes about hysterical feminists taking the most innocent things personally, and flimsy women dropping by the wayside at the first sign of hardship whilst the rugged men grit their teeth and struggle bravely on. So, to be clear: Austerity makes things harder for feminist academics, but it does this by *exacerbating existing problems*, and adding to a *long-standing unfairness*, and not just in virtue of making things harder for everyone in general.

A few clarifications are in order at this point. First, I'm not suggesting that the double bind I identify has absolute force, even under circumstances of austerity. Clearly there are many feminist academics who are both firm in their feminism and eminent in their academic fields. Furthermore, it

seems undeniable that progress on attitudes is, in the long run, being made, with corresponding practical gains. What I'm suggesting is that there is still a discernible set of tendencies and pressures that have the shape I have described, and which can be understood as forming a double bind that is potentially damaging for feminism and feminist researchers. Second, I'm not suggesting that the experience of double binds is unique to feminists in academia. Double bind situations also affect other groups seeking to enact 'progressive' politics within existing institution – for example, the left working within the system of parliamentary democracy: if your policies are too radical, you'll never get elected, but if you tone your policies down to get elected, you may end up being no different to the alternatives. Third, the concept of a double bind is not an absolute or objective one; there is no cut-and-dried distinction between situations that do and do not count as double binds. Rather, the concept of a double bind offers a way of interpreting a situation: to frame a situation as a double bind is to pay attention to particular structural features that it possesses. Thus, I'm not suggesting that the double bind *must* be applied to the situation of feminist academics, nor that it is the *only* way to make sense of that situation, nor that it applies in an *absolute* sense. My claim so far has simply been that it is possible to understand the situation of feminist academics in terms of the double bind.

In the remainder of this paper, I will argue that this interpretation of the tensions facing feminist academics is beneficial because it directs us away from some problematic responses and towards more promising options. There are two main benefits of conceiving of the difficulties facing feminist academics as a double bind situation. The first benefit is that thinking in terms of double binds directs us away from the idea of blame. The defining feature of a double bind situation is that there is no problem-free way to navigate it – you encounter obstacles regardless of which way you turn. Seeing this clearly may help us to pin the blame where it belongs – on the institution that creates the situation – rather than seeing the tension we experience as a result of personal failure. The thought here is that if there was no way of successfully navigating a situation, then not having managed to successfully navigate the situation is not a personal failure and is not blameworthy. This thought can help to prevent feminist academics from blaming ourselves for the frustrating situations we encounter. Moreover, it may direct us away from blaming others for what we perceive to be a failure to pursue feminist research in the 'right' kind of way, for example by adopting a trenchant and uncompromising feminist stance, or by turning to more mainstream research projects. Given that there is no perfect way of navigating the situation, different people will find various different ways of getting by, all of which will involve compromise. Seeing the potential necessity of compromise of some kind or another should make us less inclined to criticise others who choose different approaches to ourselves.

The second benefit is that seeing the double bind for what it is encourages us to re-focus our

attention on changing the structural situation we exist in, rather than only on trying harder to succeed under current circumstances. It's an intrinsic feature of double binds that they cannot be resolved simply by the individual within the situation pursuing one of the existing options. The structure of choices that is presented to the individual needs to be challenged, either by the individual herself over a period of time, or, more promisingly, by a collective that includes other actors. This challenge could take many forms. Possible measures include trying to get more feminists in decision-making positions such as the editorial boards of journals; making sure criteria for assessing research are as explicit and justified as possible, minimizing opportunities for bias in their application, e.g. with double blind marking and reviewing; and advocating for the inclusion of feminist research within taught courses in an integrated way.

It is also important to see these strategies as connected with the broader issue of women's involvement in academia. Of course, the relationship between being a feminist academic and being a woman academic is not straightforward: not all women are feminists, and not all feminists are women. Moreover, not all academics who identify as feminist, women or men, actually conduct research on feminism, and my focus in this paper is on feminist academics in the sense of academics whose research concerns feminism. Nevertheless, many feminist academics are women, and obviously this is no coincidence. An academic institution that is hostile towards women will therefore be less likely to produce and retain feminist researchers. Furthermore, an institution that systematically excludes women is, by definition, an institution that operates in ways that are contrary to feminist principles. Thus, the issue of women's involvement in academia must be taken into account by any specifically feminist strategy.<sup>5</sup> The need to think in terms of strategies for long-term structural change also has particular implications in terms of austerity, encouraging us to try to de-legitimise the imperative for austerity itself, rather than just trying harder to avoid the worst effects of austerity for our own particular endeavours.

Of course, all of these kinds of strategies already receive consideration and discussion, and I am not suggesting that this insight is new. I do think, however, that focussing on the double bind will remind us of the importance of collective feminist strategy and organizing for the day-to-day lives and work of feminist academics, especially in light of austerity.

Taken together, these two suggestions – that we avoid blaming ourselves or others and that we consciously seek out long-term strategies for change – point in the direction of a renewed emphasis on solidarity between feminists in academia. Positive and understanding attitudes towards oneself and towards others are pre-requisites of solidarity, and solidarity in turn is a foundation for

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<sup>5</sup> There are many existing initiatives concerning women's involvement in academia; see, for example, the Society for Women in Philosophy UK (*Society for Women in Philosophy UK* [Online]. Available: <http://www.swipuk.org> [Accessed 19/06/2013 2013]. See also Wylie (2011) for an excellent discussion of micro-level discrimination against women in academia (the 'chilly climate') in relation to feminist standpoint theory.

successful collective organising. Focussing on the double bind encourages us to see the common themes in the tensions facing feminism in academia across disciplines, rather than just focussing on the problem as it applies to our own subject area. This should encourage us to reach out to feminist researchers in different institutions and in different disciplines as people who are similarly situated and with whom we can work to improve our situations.

The notion of solidarity, however, has been criticised by some feminists. Judith Butler, for instance, has argued that idea of solidarity is bound up with the project of establishing a fixed 'unity' of women that would form the basis of feminist action. Butler contends that such a unity would prevent us from questioning and disrupting gender categories and that solidarity therefore functions as an 'exclusionary norm' (Butler, 1990, p. 21). Whilst solidarity is indeed problematic when invoked in that way and for those purposes, alternative understandings are possible which avoid enacting exclusion. Amy Allen advocates focussing on *feminist* solidarity, rather than solidarity *between women*. This feminist solidarity, which can encompass people of all genders, is defined in terms of a struggle against relations of subordination, and is 'achieved through a mutual promise or shared commitment to act in concert', rather than being 'an exclusionary unity that is presumed in advance' (Allen, 1999, p. 110). Naomi Scheman takes a similar view, describing solidarity as primarily a matter of identifying *with*, not identifying *as* (Scheman, 1997). These conceptions of solidarity separate it from the issue of unity altogether, placing the emphasis instead on coordinated action, especially on specific issues or in specific moments, thereby detaching it from any problematic implications. Since my interest here concerns solidarity between feminists rather than solidarity between women, the understandings advocated by Allen and Scheman are, in any case, more appropriate to my purposes than the problematic conception of solidarity criticised by Butler.

This vision of solidarity as based on action rather than identity is particularly appropriate for the case of feminists in academia because it circumvents the need to draw a sharp line between those who work on feminism and those who do not work on feminism. Resisting this division is a constructive way of resisting the compartmentalisation of feminism that I criticised earlier. Furthermore, academics who are feminist but who do not themselves work explicitly on feminism are in a particularly good position to disrupt the double binds that constrain those who do work on feminism. An academic who does not work on feminism, even more so a *male* academic who does not work on feminism, will have a much easier time advocating feminist research than someone who works on feminism, especially if they are a woman.

Imagine, for instance, an epistemology lecturer who is feminist but who does not work on feminist epistemology; for good measure, let's make this lecturer a man. If our lecturer includes a section on feminist epistemology in his undergraduate module he is relatively unlikely to encounter

suggestions of irrelevancy, personal bias, political motivations and so on. And if many epistemology lecturers included a section on feminist epistemology in their courses, then when a feminist epistemologist (a woman, let's suppose) taught a module that included feminist epistemology this would occasion much less comment (and if comments were made, she could refer her critics to the equivalent modules at other institutions). Again, this kind of broader move towards inclusivity would help to break down the conception of feminism as a separate and marginal branch of philosophy. I suggest, then, that solidarity from academics who do not work on feminism, and especially solidarity from male academics, is particularly important for disrupting the double binds facing feminist academics. The question of whether or not one explicitly identifies as a 'feminist academic', much less the question of whether or not one is a woman, is beside the point. As Scheman puts it, 'The issue... is not who is or is not really whatever, but who can be counted on when they come for any one of us.' (Scheman, 1997, p. 152). The double bind, then, calls for a form of solidarity that is inclusive as well as action-based.

In this brief discussion of the situation of feminist academics, I have advocated an understanding of that situation as a double bind, a circumstance in which incompatible demands give rise to paralysis. This understanding suggests that we adopt a non-judgemental attitude towards ourselves and others, and that we fix our sights on long-term strategy. These suggestions in turn have led me to urge a renewed solidarity between feminists in academia, spanning disciplines, genders, and research specialisms. Explicitly interdisciplinary institutions and initiatives such as Women's Studies or Gender Studies departments, research centres and programs can play a large part in fostering this solidarity. However, they cannot be the entire story, for the kind of solidarity that I have in mind must thoroughly permeate all areas of the relevant disciplines in order to be as effective as possible.

A heartening example of this kind of solidarity in action can be found in a recent online video made by academics and post-graduates in the School of English at the University of Sheffield (Regis, 2013). Titled simply 'We Are Feminists', the video was conceived by Dr Amber Regis as a response to the ambivalence she encountered when teaching feminist criticism and feminist theory to undergraduate students. It features 21 academics and post-graduates talking about their understandings of feminism, their reasons for being feminist, and the importance of feminism in their lives and research. Their remarks span many of the themes that have been raised in this paper. One contributor highlights the impact of feminist scholarship on the field as a whole by describing how feminism was crucial to developing the area of life-writing studies. Another, a male academic, critiques the marginalization of feminism by recounting the constant demands he encountered whilst writing his PhD that he justify his decision to work on women writers. A particularly good statement of broad solidarity comes from Dr Joe Bray, a Reader in Language and Literature.

Wearing a T-shirt bearing the legend ‘This is what a feminist looks like’, he says: ‘Although I don’t class myself usually as a feminist critic, a lot of my research is involved with negating stereotypical differences between male and female authors and readers that have arisen within critical literature.’ The context of this remark ensures that, far from being an attempt to *distance* the speaker from ‘feminist criticism’, it functions to remind the viewer of the broad significance of feminist themes and considerations of gender across the discipline, and the artificiality of constructing ‘feminist criticism’ as a separate domain.

Projects such as this video demonstrate the potential of solidarity to change the climate of academia for the better, disrupting the double binds facing feminist academics. As the pressure on feminist academics intensifies in this age of austerity, it becomes more important than ever that *all* feminists in academia collaborate to pick apart these double binds, rather than each separately tugging away on one end or the other as the knots tighten around us.

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