

CHAPTER 1

Making Choices: Research Approach

This study begins in a contradiction which normal social science cannot register, because my own account of my personal experience provides the only evidence of its existence: a contradiction between my values and my actions, a living contradiction (Whitehead 1993) which I became increasingly aware of, and through which I felt puzzlement, pain and an overwhelming sense of disempowerment. I was working as a university academic, with the title of Director of Studies for the MBA in International Business. I had been deeply involved in starting up the MBA course, in a partnership with a French *grande-école*. The job was challenging and busy, involving on top of a normal academic and administrative workload, frequent international travel and representing the University at numerous social events. But I felt as if I was wearing an enveloping disguise, which took me immense effort to stay within. I was playing the part of ‘business-school academic’, but beneath the acquiescent mask, like a lonely and almost dirty secret I dared not share, I was hiding a set of values and opinions which were highly critical of the environment I was working in, and even my own actions. I rarely felt I could speak this critique, or act on it.

Here was the contradiction: I felt I both was, and was not, what I seemed to be. I wanted to tell myself that I “advocated feminism” (bell hooks’ formulation of words, in preference to saying ‘I am a feminist’ - Kemp and Squires, 1997). Yet it seemed that my attempts to find ways to live these values within my work were absorbed into the dominant meaning-system of the university and the business-school environment in ways I did not intend. With some trepidation I had to ask myself, what was there, about my actions, my words, my practice, which might express these values in the world? What was I doing that might be construed as ‘feminist’ - taking some step towards overcoming inequality based on gender? If I was any kind of feminist, what was I doing working in an élite education programme designed to help its participants - three-quarters of whom were men - succeed in business? What was the nature of the gender-relations that this business education

programme, within which I was working so hard, to which I was giving so much of my time and energy, was maintaining? Despite being in a position of relative responsibility and autonomy, I felt silenced. I was almost intrigued by the process of co-option I was experiencing (see Chapter 4) whilst feeling enveloped by it.

I could identify at least three sets of interconnected issues in this situation: I could call them experiential or personal, political and methodological. I will explore each of them in more detail below. The personal side was painful and exhausting, involving a lot of private 'knowing' and internal work to handle my experience of contradiction. An extract from my journal of March 1993 gives some indication of the distress I felt.

Journal Extract: March 1993

I am in Tokyo, in a hotel room. Outside my window is a view across the park to the Imperial Palace. The room is luxurious in the manner of international hotels: it has a TV channel devoted to taking you on a conducted tour of its restaurants and shops. Every evening someone comes into my room, turns down the bed, puts on the soft bedside lighting and sets gentle (western) muzak playing through the stereo. The exquisite Japanese flower arrangement in the desk is changed every day. The room is large and expansive, but it is full of my distress. I have hit a crisis. I have let go of the feelings I have been holding in, and I am letting myself feel my pain. I am close to panic. I am on my own. I want to go home.

I have now been running this course for nearly a year. I have moved it into new premises, leased by the university specifically for us. I have seen the second intake though most of their academic year, and I am here with a group of them and

colleagues from the Paris programme. I have had though this period a great deal of responsibility, and not enough authority in the university system to help me very much. I have learned a good deal about that system, and the political manoeuvres it demands, and I have had to develop strategies for dealing with colleagues who oppose the existence and growth of this course. I want to get out. I want to stop pretending to be someone I am not. I want to stop having to spend time with people I dislike for their political views and sexist and racist behaviour. I do not want to serve the interests of these people, or this institution. I have worked very hard to nurture this course, to try and protect it until someone better suited to it than me can come and take it over. (And most of what I have been doing is academically invalid - and hence will go unrewarded in the system.) I think it is the loneliness of my position that upsets me most. I feel as if I do not know anything any more, as if my role as container has become everything that I am, that I am worth.

I decide to go and see Celia¹ in the room down the corridor, even though it is late in the evening, and I ask her to listen to me. She does, offering me cups of herbal tea and tissues to mop my tears. I tell her how I feel, and that I am very, very tired, used up. She says that she too has felt some of these things; it's the nature, she says, of trying to build something dynamic in a conservative institution. We talk about gender. I say that I feel unheard and unrespected, as if I am having to work all the time to gain credibility, as if nothing is freely given. I name my experience in gender terms in a way she does not - but she says she does not do so because there is no-one around her who would hear what she says. Her institution is an élite engineering school, she is surrounded by male colleagues and does not choose to show vulnerability. As we

¹ Director of our partner programme in Paris, and on the Board of our programme.

continue talking, she begins to say something about her own isolation, and the costs she feels she has borne in her personal life for succeeding in the way that she has. We talk about our families. I acknowledge that I travel through my activities in the world as a person who is really loved by members of my family. It gives me a sense of stability and strength from which to encounter the world. It has always been so for me: I was a loved child, and now I am a loved partner and parent. Now it is Celia's turn to cry, as she tells me about her marriage failing before she had children. She says that she regrets it greatly, and tells how her negotiation with her husband about when they should have children precipitated the final deterioration in their relationship. She now lives with a man some years younger than herself, who turns to his mother for domestic care, because she does not give it to him.

At the end of our talking I am calmer, less caught in my distress. Celia asks me: what will you do now, and I say I don't know. "If you withdraw from the programme, the heart and soul will go out of it" she says, "You bring a crucial perspective, which is broader than just that of the business disciplines. You understand what we are doing here." To some extent, I know what she means: I do understand her vision. But the cost on me, I reply, is very high. I don't have anything left.

I don't know what to do.

But I was aware of another layer to this experience, recognising it as paradoxically both unique to me and systemic, socially structured, repeated for many people in many situations with different particularities. My failure to express my dissent from the dominant values I found around me had the effect of recreating and supporting those values. And since I was working within an educational programme, I was party to the muting (Marshall, 1984) of alternative values and forms of self-

expression among the participants on the course, many of whom were from non-Western cultures. A question I asked myself was, if I was holding back my perspective, and struggling to fit my private world with the public, might not at least some of the students taking this programme be carrying out similar private work, and in the process be denying or confirming their gendered, raced and differently-cultured selves? Was not my silence within my contradiction part of the process by which they were silenced? Weren't these individual acts of self-management part of the process by which our collective reality was being enacted, moment-by-moment? Such thoughts give additional significance to the personal contradiction I had identified - it moves it from the realm of the 'simply personal' to that of the political, identifying this process of muting as one of the means by which systems of 'normality' and hence power are maintained in everyday occurrences. It follows that one way in which I might begin to better live my values would be to explicitly work with the feminist notion of 'personal as political' - that personal experiences express political events, and that therefore paying attention to personal experiences offers an important perspective on the political domain. bell hooks writes: Speaking of her experience of both race- and gender-construction, bell hooks writes:

“In reflection, I see how deeply connected that split [between private and public] is to ongoing practices of domination...the public reality and institutional structures of domination make the private space for oppression and exploitation concrete - real. That's why its crucial to talk about the points where the public and private meet, to connect the two (1989: 2)

This in turn raises a set of methodological questions: what might 'paying attention' consist of? What validity might be claimed for inquiry, which rests in such personal experience? How is it possible to pay attention to what is not present in a situation - an absence of speaking, a withholding of voice - rather than to what is? And yet I suspected that if I could move from just enduring my personal contradiction to inquiring into it, in a disciplined way, affording this situation attention, I might not only develop knowledge about it, but also find some way to change some aspect of it. I could attempt to turn this problem into an opportunity, to develop new practice. I could make a choice here.

One of the conditions under which I had agreed to take on the role of Director of Studies for the MBA was that I would receive support from my head of department in beginning work on a PhD. The assumption in the department was that this would be in some aspect of management and organisational behaviour - the topics on which most of my teaching was based. But from the work I had done when writing my Masters degree dissertation (Coleman 1990), I knew that participative, collaborative and action-oriented forms of inquiry offered the possibility of engaging in the kind of process I was seeking - a way of doing research which is also “a form of education, personal development and social action” (Reason, 1988:1). Instead of looking for supervision within my own university I contacted Judi Marshall at Bath University, and discovered that the newly-established Centre for Action Research and Professional Practice (CARPP) was in the process of recruiting the first intake to its PhD programme. I applied at once.

This, to me, was a values-led choice: I was choosing to explore the life-force in my living contradiction, to attempt to validate my sense of self and the position I was in by treating it as a piece of feminist inquiry into gendering processes in my work situation. I felt that if I tried to explore these issues from the perspective of mainstream social science - a qualitative study, perhaps, on ‘women’s experiences of business education’ - I would be covertly exploring my own position, whilst reproducing the denial I was experiencing - in effect silencing my own voice and reinforcing the position that first-person accounts are not a valid source of knowing.

I have chosen to work with some forms of feminist critique while carrying out this piece of work. In doing so, I have asked myself many times whether I am a “feminist”, and if so, what that means. Perhaps this is an exploration of postmodern feminism, with all the contradictions such a title might imply. I could have chosen other places to sit...as a proponent of an ecological/participative worldview (Reason and Torbert 2001, Reason and Bradbury, 2000), as a humanist educator (Rowan, 2001), as a woman manager. To me, focussing on gender offers a structural, political perspective through which to view currently-constructed reality, rather than a route to a definitive ‘ideal’ society (Marshall 1995). But in taking this position, I also am choosing to explore it in some depth, without always qualifying and compromising, even though I am very aware that the compromises exist. In

doing so, I am not wanting to proclaim that the future is female (to echo the title of Lyn Segal's book of 1985): a female future would doubtless contain its own oppressions and suppressions. But I want to consider the contribution of 'female-ness' to the future of management, business and business education, highlighting the extent to which gender inequalities are expressed even in settings where they seem to be absent, and considering what this awareness implies in terms of practice.

I need to say something about language: in what follows, I will talk about 'male dominated', 'masculinist' and 'masculine' structures, ways of thinking, behaving. When I do so I am not talking about men and women, but about sets of values and attributes, which are socially, culturally and historically associated with males and females. As Sinclair, says: "masculinity refers to gender-identity as a man, a historically and socially-constructed category which defines what are deemed appropriate behaviours and identities for men" (1998: 54). To say that a profession, for instance, is male-dominated is not to say that all men dominate: that is not my experience. When I say that something is 'masculine', I am not trying to say that it is bad, I am suggesting it is expressive of a value that is not-female. I am very well aware that 'masculinity' can be both positive and negative for men (echoing the ambivalence of 'femininity' for women), and I welcome the various kinds of work being done by male writers on gender, to explore multiple masculinities and their implications (for example Jacques, 1997, Barrett, 1996, Collinson and Hearn 1996, Connell, 1995)

Let me consider in more detail, then, each of the interconnected issues I identified above as themes within my contradiction: questions of experiential or personal knowing, questions of political knowing, and questions of method.

(i) Experiential or Personal Knowing

I cannot claim to know that my immediate experience speaks 'truth' to me²: indeed, I know that over time, I can give different meanings and significance to the same experience. But I can claim a certain

² Harding cautions against what she calls "experiential foundationalism" - believing that "spontaneous consciousness of individual experience" provides a uniquely legitimate criterion for 'true' or 'less false' beliefs (1991, p269). See also Oleson (1994)

kind of validity for the first-hand, impact-ful, feeling-ful experience in itself - because of its immediacy, because of its impact and influence on my sense-making.

Let me give an example, concerning what are certainly among the most powerful experiences in my life, those of childbirth. I know what it is to give birth to a new human being, by direct encounter.

Through this so-human and so-female experience I have learned powerfully about human interconnectedness and inter-personal encounter. I can recall in great detail each of my children at their moment of birth and as moments-old infants: the texture of their skin, their hair, the shape of their heads, hands, feet, noses; their eyes, seeming to me like windows to their soul, telling me about the people they already were, their personhood, their relatedness to me, tightly linked to my bodily sensations of the birth. The remembrance of these moments resides within me like a reservoir of knowing, and will do so for the rest of my life. They connect me at some tacit level with all women who have given birth and gazed on their child, even though I know for many in the world that will be an experience of utmost grief and anguish, a time of pain, degradation poverty and death.

You, reader, must carry within you your equivalent life-shaping experiences- joyful, painful, poignant³. But we have learned to make private this sort of knowing. Why? Why is it consigned to the life Western culture calls 'personal' and hence of lesser importance,

³ In the midst of writing this chapter, I have had a period of acute illness, involving significant pain and surgery. The 'experiential knowing' of this episode is currently playing and re-playing in my consciousness, as if in vibrant and demanding technicolor; I can't fully reproduce the experience in words, although I can, and do, tell stories about it.

trivial, the territory of the over-emotional, of gossiping women? This is knowing which is denied as a source of valid information about the world. It does not appear in the world of 'facts', surfacing rather through poetry, art.

But I want to carry out an inquiry which is not fiction, not a work of creative literature. I am seeking to engage with the wholly concrete, factual world of global business and some of the education offered to potential actors within it. Yet one of the ways I understand my perspective on that world, make sense of it, is through the contradiction of my personal experience. I am seeking to connect these territories.

I hear the voice of authority around me, grounded in the epistemological assumptions of our day: that authority rests on a foundation of sound fact, that what is true corresponds to what is 'out there' in the world, potentially knowable to all people at all times. Empirical testing and inductive reasoning are the methods by which truth is established. This challenges me.

Feminist scholarship on epistemology - theories of what counts as knowledge - has offered me a way of understanding some of the dimensions of this conundrum. I first became familiar with some of this literature (Stanley and Wise 1983, Oakley 1981, Nicholson 1990, Weedon 1987) when I started working as a lecturer in a university department of applied social policy, when my three children were of pre-school age. It gave me a way of understanding my own personal spanning of seemingly disparate worlds, that of my private, mothering life, and that of my professional life. It helped me tell a coherent story about my own experience, and make sense of a starkly gendered world I seemed to have entered relatively unawares, through becoming a mother. It seemed to explain to me why the

picture of reality I worked with professionally so poorly represented the reality of the life I - and everyone else who struggled to be a good mother, good partner and good worker - actually lived.

Although the spur for feminism, both in its first and second waves, was protest and action, it has given rise to an extensive body of political, social and philosophical critique, which attempts to link the social subordination of women to the conceptual framework through which that subordination is justified - to take the struggle for 'women's liberation' into the realm of ideas. In the more than three decades since the second wave of feminism began, feminists of many different persuasions have become increasingly concerned not just with action, but also with issues of epistemology, ontology and representation. Kemp and Squires describe this as a movement from asking 'what is to be done?' to 'how can I claim to know things?' and 'who is the 'I' that makes such a claim?' (1997: 8). Feminist thinkers ask how knowledge is defined, and who maintains the power to make such definitions. Feminists have increasingly taken their task as not simply the process of adding the marginalised contribution of women into an existing social order, but as also attempting to take apart the intellectual tools of that order, in such a way that alternative ways of thinking, acting, valuing, and expressing become validated.

Our current Western epistemological understandings have been developed over more than four centuries, stemming largely from conceptual developments of the Scientific Revolution in the 16th and 17th centuries (Berman 1981, Tarnas 1991, Reason 1994, Skolimowski 1994, Toulmin 1990); Descartes and Bacon, who are attributed with articulating concepts of rationality and empiricism respectively, were key figures in shaping what we now take to be science. In his review of the historical process of the "disenchantment of the world" (Max Weber's term) which characterises the modern period, Berman suggests that the fundamental discovery of the Scientific Revolution lay in establishing a dynamic relationship between the two ideas of rationalism and empiricism:

"The former says that the laws of thought conform to the law of things: the latter says always check your thoughts against the data so that you know what thought to think." (1981: 28)

Good science came to be based firmly on the separation of knowledge from the person, and the body, of the knower - truth standing independently of the messy vagaries of people, time or place. Descartes declared the separation of mind and body, with mind (human mind, that is) being in the superior place, and gave foundation to an intellectual tradition that relegated not only bodies, but all physical phenomena of the world, to the place of secondary and mind-less objects. Previous eras in which the idea of the *anima mundi*, living earth, or belief in divine order, were replaced by belief in the ability of the human mind to determine truth on the basis of disciplined observation of physical phenomena in separation from the observer. Skolimowski has called this a time of *mechanos*, because the deepest metaphor for how the world works is mechanical - we see it as functioning in an essentially orderly and repetitive way, potentially totally accessible to the human mind, and ultimately controllable, if all the parts are understood in sufficient detail. Understanding, from this perspective, consists precisely of breaking down the whole into constituent parts, and seeking to observe the smallest indivisible units from which the behaviour of the whole can be determined - atoms in physics, cells in biology, chemical elements in chemistry (Capra 1996). Modern science, with all its miraculous discoveries and attendant explosion of human ingenuity and activity over 400 years, is still at root operating according to Bacon's dictum that to gain knowledge we should "put Nature on the rack and wrest her secrets from her" (Griffin 1984). I will return to issues connected with the concept of rationality in Chapter 4.

Feminist epistemologies argue that one of the results of 'patriarchy'⁴ - the systematic domination of men over women, across time, place and culture - is that ways of thinking and knowing about the world are "masculinist", that is, created by and for men. This is not a local problem, overcome by utilising the knowledge generated by patriarchy, but a paradigm-problem, concerned with the assumptions of separateness, autonomy and mastery of man over nature contained within the deepest epistemological and ontological beliefs of the modern world. Voicing such a critique, Spretnak characterises modernist thought as:

⁴ A contested, modernist term: Kemp and Squires note that "monocausal and totalizing theories of patriarchy have been largely replaced by multifaceted explorations of the contingencies of gendered experience" (1997: 6)

“an energetic dynamic that has stomped on the encompassing organicism of Gaia, degraded any soft boundaries of interdependence, delivered a sucker punch to religion, pumped up the haunting war against nature with aggressive scientism and through it all held the female at arm’s length by denying education or other access to the playing fields of culture” (1991: 259)

Feminist critiques of disembodied knowledge are wide ranging, embracing natural sciences and the notion of ‘scientific knowledge’ itself (Spender 1981, Harding 1987), social science knowledge, and social research methods (Reinharz 1992, Harding 1987,1991, Oleson 1994). Harding comments:

“feminist critiques are not isolated voices....but are linked thematically and historically to a rising tide of critical analysis of the mental life and social relations of the modern, androcentric, imperial, bourgeois West, including its sciences and notions of knowledge” (1991: viii)

The feminist critique of ‘normal’ science asserts that what has been taken for knowledge in the West is partial in two ways: it is based on a view of the world which is enacted in public places and social spaces in which women have been historically systematically under-represented. But it is also partial in that it counts only certain kinds of knowing, validated through canons of objectivity, as knowledge. Stanley and Wise comment:

“The world is defined and constructed in male terms through male eyes. The resultant ‘reality’ is at best partial, propounded by one group of people and almost necessarily accepted by others as ‘the truth’ about and for everyone.... Women do experience reality ‘differently’, just by having ‘different’ bodies, ‘different’ physical experiences, to name no others (and we put ‘different’ in quotation marks because using the word ‘different’ means using male bodies and experience as the norm, from which women differ” (1983: 146)

Eisler describes recent world history as a period deeply underpinned by a *dominator* principle, as opposed to one of partnership, and draws connections between these contrasting tendencies and gender-relations:

“the way that we structure the most fundamental of all human relations (that between men and women) ...has a profound effect on every one of our institutions, on our values, and on the direction of our cultural evolution, particularly whether it will be peaceful or warlike” (1987: xix)

Both men and women are constrained by these conceptual parameters. But women have little choice but to view the world “skewed” through sense-making lenses created by men. According to sociologist Dorothy Smith, therefore:

“It means that our experience has not been represented in the making of our culture. There is a gap between what we are and the means we have to express and act. It means that the concerns, interests, experiences, forming “our” culture are those of men in positions of dominance, whose perspective are built on the silence of women (and of others)” (1978: 282)

Kemp and Squires, in their review of feminist perspectives on knowledge-making, suggest that:

“Though diverse in form, these feminist epistemological frameworks tend to share a critical stance in relation to rationality, objectivity and universality, asserting the significance and legitimacy of emotional, politically engaged and particularistic ways of knowing” (1997: 142).

They continue:

“It is the privileging of women’s subjective experience (however that might be framed) and the commitment to political change that recur....as the distinctive and fundamental aspects of a potential self-reflexive feminist epistemology” (1997: 145)

(As I write this I experience the discomfort of locating myself in this fiercely female place: I feel simultaneously strengthened by it, and aware of the danger of over-simplification, of falling into

men-bad, women-good language, masking huge disparities of class, race, ethnicity which cross-thread through gender differences. The 'others' Smith alludes to are also silenced and historically missing. But I will let myself stay here for the moment, and see where it takes me....)

One of the enduring features of the feminist movement has been its commitment to giving voice to women, struggling to overcome the centuries of public silencing to which they have been subjected. Although women, of course, have never been silent in the homes, around their children and in the workplaces in which they spend their lives, public life has been, and continues to be, dominated by men. I am still aghast at the absence of authoritative women in newspaper stories and pictures, serious television coverage, politics, and at the same time I note my own ambivalence about taking on authoritative positions framed in ways I find uncomfortable. I notice myself sometimes stepping back from claiming time and space to make my voice heard in public settings, feeling overwhelmed by the compromises involved, the way of being it demands, and understand this as an instance of processes which reproduce this imbalance. Belenky et. al. have noted that for those operating from a perspective of connected knowing, in which the construction of knowledge is appreciated, "true experts must reveal an appreciation for complexity and a sense of humility about their knowledge" (1986: 139). I will revisit the gendering of how authority is expressed in Chapters 6 and 9.

The strand of feminist thinking and practice referred to as 'standpoint' feminism has sought to claim an alternative feminist epistemology, highlighting the right of women to be the ultimate 'knowers' about the reality of their own lives, particularly in so far as those lives are lived outside the public gaze, and do not conform to the tacit assumptions of the masculinist model. (Smith 1987, Hartsock 1997). Denzin (1997) notes the characteristic features of all standpoint epistemologies are: a starting point in the experience of those who traditional, patriarchal social science has excluded, challenging the notion of the non-located authoritative academic voice; a non-essentializing stance towards the categories that classify people; a location of social science within the autobiographical experiences of the writer; and a desire to use the ethnographic process to recover a "self that has been subjugated by the dominant structures of racism, sexism and colonialism in everyday life" (1997: 58)

According to Harding (1987) standpoint theories draw on materialist arguments developed by Hegel, Marx, Engels and Lucaçs, which assert that the material conditions in which humans live their lives structures and constrains their understanding of their situation. New consciousness may be gained through struggle against domination. If women and men live their lives differently, doing different things with different areas of responsibility and attention, it follows that they will understand their world in different ways. Standpoint feminists argue that the dominant group - men - cannot 'know' women's experience, even though women know a lot about men's experience, because it is taken as 'normal' and widely disseminated in patriarchal society. Women have little alternative but to use the "father tongue", unless they consciously work to develop alternative forms of expression, and topics for expression - and in so doing develop new ways of conceptualising, naming, their experience. Smith, describing her own feelings of mis-fit within professionalised sociology, says:

"We learn to think sociology as it is thought, and to practise it as it is practised. We learn that some topics are relevant and some are not.....should we think other kinds of thoughts or experience the world in a different way or with edges and horizons that pass beyond the conceptual, we must practice a discipline which discards them or find some procedure which sneaks them in" (1987b: 87)

One particular area of attention has been the widespread use of either/or categories in Western thinking, resting on deep assumptions of dichotomies. Hartsock locates women's 'different' physical experience of life - menstruation, childbirth, breastfeeding, childrearing, preparing food - as the standpoint from which either/or categories are experienced as foreign, imposed from outside:

"the concept of a standpoint depends on the assumption that epistemology grows in a complex and contradictory way from material life.....

If material life structures consciousness, women's relationally defined existence, bodily experience of boundary challenges, and activity of transforming both physical objects and human beings must be expected to result in a world view to which dichotomies are foreign" (1997: 158)

Thinking in dichotomies is an expression of certainty - the thing is either an X, or, if it is not, it must be a Y. It rests on the 'law of excluded middle' in Western logic. It helps avoid not-knowing, and is very prevalent in business discourse – a point to which I will return in Chapter 4.

Other feminist scholars have explored the significance of language or 'voice' in masking differences between men and women's meanings. Gilligan, in her influential book on men and women's conceptions of morality, states:

“My research suggests that men and women may speak different languages that they assume are the same, using similar words to encode disparate experiences of self and social relationships....As we have listened for centuries to the voices of men and the theories of development that their experience informs, so we have come more recently to notice not only the silence of women but the difficulty in hearing what they say when they speak” (1982: 173)

These considerations raise problems for the representation of feminist scholarship. Interlinks between the *forms* in which expression may, according to well-accepted social rules, take place, and the *substance* that can be contained by such expression, sets particular challenges. As Gergen says:

“If I write in all the acceptable ways, I shall only recapitulate the patriarchal forms. Yet, if I violate expectations too grievously, my words will become nonsense” (1992: 127)

The extended epistemology of participatory and action-oriented research approaches has a contribution to make here – a point to which I will return below.

The feminist standpoint position has been criticised for its tendency to generalise the concept of 'women's experience': as black women, working class women and lesbians have increasingly

pointed out over the last three decades, not all women's experience coincides with that of the predominantly white middle-class heterosexual women who have been the main proponents of the 'women's voice'. Gendering takes place differently within the striations of race, class and sexuality, and the notion of a 'women's standpoint' has somehow to negotiate the intricacies of sameness and difference, encompassing enough of both, if it is to make any sense. Most standpoint feminists respond to this by seeking to keep a close connection between the claim made for knowledge, and the identity of the knower: Stanley and Wise (1993) for instance, are not alone in advocating feminist research leading to "localised, contextualised theory based on women's experience" - entirely rejecting the idea of objectivity, generalisability, and repeatability which underpins normal empirical research.

Nevertheless, there is a strong theme within the idea of the standpoint which wants to claim the value, of speaking out from silenced experience - and from that the connected idea that, if this sort of personalised, emotionalised, contextualised knowing were given greater attention by modernity, perhaps a wiser and gentler way of being in the world would evolve. Many feminists have drawn connections between the dominance of objectified knowledge in modernity, and the separation this has enabled between human consciousness and the ecology within which we live - with consequences that are becoming increasingly serious. (Daly 1978, Spretnak 1991, 1997, Mies and Shiva 1993). I will explore this in greater depth in Chapter 4.

(ii) Political Knowing

In effect, I am choosing to work with these perspectives, which advocate feminism, because they offer me a possibility of voicing aspects of my experience which otherwise remain privatised and suppressed in the realm of 'serious ideas'. And because feminist thinking links private experience with the political structuration of social systems, voicing that experience is an act not just of self-expression, however worthwhile that may be in its own right, but a form of political action, taken with deliberate intent to challenge the form of voice which achieves authority.

For Stanley and Wise:

“the personal is political means that power and its use can be examined within personal life and, indeed, in some sense that the political must be examined in this way. It also emphasises that “the system” is experienced in everyday life, and isn’t separate from it. And so feminism argues that system and social structures, whether concerned with the economy, the family, or the oppression of women more generally, can best be examined and understood through an exploration of relationships, and experiences, within everyday life” (1993: 63)

For feminists, identifying ideas as *socially constructed* highlights crucial issues: first, that the form of that construction is contingent: it takes a certain form at this moment in history, but is potentially open to alternatives. Construction can become re-construction.

Furthermore, gender is a key dimension in understanding constructed knowledge. It is no coincidence that modern epistemology requires that knowledge is established in ways that have become strongly associated with masculinity itself - objective, rational, non-emotional, compartmentalised, formalised, detached from context. This set of characteristics have become associated with truth, and according to the binary logic of Western thinking, their opposite characteristics - subjective, intuitive, emotional, holistic, contextualised - are associated both with femininity and falsehood. So a set of self-reinforcing opposites is established, offering both men and women a choice between masculinised knowledge and feminised emotion. No valid alternative is available: to both men and women the sorts of contextualised, traditional participative knowledge of place, knowledge rooted in bodies which a part of, not separate from, their physical world, is rendered suspect (see also Abram, 1996, for a non-feminist argument along similar lines).

In parallel to the standpoint positions, some strands of feminist thinking are drawing on the development of ideas on postmodernity, citing modernist epistemology as an example of a ‘totalizing discourse’, or ‘meta-narrative’ which is held in place by a certain set of historical and

political relations. Knowledge and power are intertwined, even when the well-understood rules under which that knowledge is validated maintain its status as objective, standing outside power relations. Hartsock (1990: 163) comments that the academic voice is based on “the creation of the transcendent omnipotent theoriser, who can persuade himself that he exists outside time and space and power relations”. From a feminist perspective, revealing the suppressions and resistances hidden by the apparent neutrality of the undeclared observer is an important step in challenging the power and centrality of that knowledge: echoing the concerns of standpoint theorists, this sort of critique aims to reveal all voices as situated and partial, whether they declare themselves as such or not. As Hartsock says:

“we need to dissolve the false “we” I have been using into its real multiplicity and variety and out of this concrete multiplicity build an account of the world as seen from the margins, an account which can expose the falseness of the view from the top and can transform the margins as well as the centre. The point is to develop an account of the world which treats our perspectives not as subjugated or disruptive knowledges, but as primary and constitutive of a different world” (1990: 171)

Feminism and postmodernity sit together with some difficulty - as I will explore further below (Chapter 3). I am noticing that the theoretical strands which will become important in exploring issues of organisation and management in the body of this study, are also reflected in the epistemological and methodological choices at the outset. Like a set of self-reflecting mirrors, issues of what gets counted as ‘valid’ knowledge bounce backwards and forwards, offering little that is without question. But choices must be made, or I will not have the means to articulate anything: so my choice will be based on feminist conviction and intent, not in the belief that this is the path to ‘the truth’, but that this a route to offer an account that attempts to make some sense of my experience whilst connecting me, as an individual, with the broad canvas of my historical, cultural and political situation. It gives me a story within which I can locate myself, whilst holding the awareness that postmodern ‘doubt’ situates political processes in knowledge-making.

Although I have foregrounded feminist voices here, feminists are not alone, of course, in voicing a critique of the knowledge-systems of modernity, and suggesting a different sort of ‘science’ is emergent, is needed, in order to see, and do, things differently.

Tarnas, for instance, in his review of the historical development of ideas which underpin the contemporary Western world view, speaks of a range of postmodern thinking:

“Common to these new perspectives has been the imperative to rethink and reformulate the human relation to nature, an imperative driven by the growing recognition that modern science’s mechanistic and objectivist conception of nature was not only limited, but fundamentally flawed” (1991: 404)

Like feminist writers (notably Lather, 1993, 1997, to whom I will return in the next chapter), he seeks to re-connect epistemology and ethics:

“Since evidence can be adduced and interpreted to corroborate a virtually limitless array of world views, the human challenge is to engage that world view or set of perspectives which brings forth the most valuable, life-enhancing consequences... so in the ‘epistemological equation’ there is not just intellectual rigour, but also will, imagination, faith, hope and empathy” (1991: 406)

He acknowledges that feminist scholarship has been key in highlighting the gender dimension in these intellectual developments:

“Considered as a whole, the feminist perspective and impulse has brought forth perhaps the most vigorous, subtle and radically critical analysis of conventional intellectual and cultural assumptions in all of contemporary scholarship....so fundamental that their significance is only beginning to be realised by the contemporary mind” (1991: 408)

“The masculinity of the Western mind has been pervasive and fundamental, in both men and women, affecting every aspect of Western thought, determining its most basic conception of the human being and the human role in the world” (1991: 441)

Berman (1981) talks of his grandfather experiencing at first hand ‘the great metaphysical problem of our age’:

“For the rest of his life, my grandfather was condemned to struggle with... how to reconcile what he knew in his *head* with what he knew in his *heart*...” (1981: 269)

He goes on to explore the gender implications of such metaphysics:

“What is dissolving [in the late 20C] is not the ego itself, but the ego-rigidity of the modern era, the “masculine civilisation” identified by Ariès, or what the poet Robert Bly calls “father consciousness”. We are witnessing the modification of this entity by a re-emergent “mother consciousness”, the mimetic/erotic view of nature” (1981: 187)

So, I could say, perhaps, that this is an inquiry into how to bring mother-consciousness into business education. This phrase, for me, evokes something of the breadth of the territory, indicating the *type* of change a more-feminist world could require.

Exploring how to conduct my inquiry seems to take me into wider and wider territory. It feels ridiculous to locate my personal exploration within a debate about Western epistemology and the pervasive, masculinised disembodiment of knowledge - yet that is what I see reflected in my reading. It both terrifies me and energizes me. The terror lies in the pretentiousness of the debate (who am I kidding?) and the energy comes from grasping the importance or significance I attach to the emergent alternative voices, the multiple voices engaged in articulating a possible epistemological paradigm shift. From here I look in a different way on the territory of propositional knowledge, and my own ambivalent engagement in the academic world.

I recall a piece of writing which had had a significant impact on me when I first encountered it some years previously, helping me articulate the juncture between masculinity/femininity and

propositional knowledge. Corrigan's "The Body of Intellectuals/the Intellectuals' Body" (1988) makes connections between academic thought, denial of 'the body', including denial of sexed bodies, and dominating structures of power. Using the language of deconstructive postmodern sociology, he highlights the denied 'Other' which is always implied and seldom addressed in Western propositional thought, and explores the links between knowledge as it is concretised in intellectual 'disciplines', and other forms of knowing, held in bodies, simultaneously experienced and disconfirmed in formal discourse.

"Clerisy, literacy, script, inscription, scripture...Weighty tomes and special rooms: studies, libraries, reading rooms. Universities that have never been universal but, essentially, univocal: they consist of masculine bodies who will not name or identify their embodied selves, but claim to make observations without observers!" (1988: 369)

He continues:

"The masculinization of mind amidst these determining discourses also declares that what you see - what you can see - is what you are....the cognitive, calculating I of the sentence is the Eye of perpetual normalcy. All else is abnormal, a defect of vision, an error of grammar, a faulty depiction, an intrusion of the body. Hysteria. A passion." (1988: 374)

The first time I encountered this it so powerfully expressed aspects of my own experience that I literally jumped with excitement. Corrigan alludes to the particular connections between disembodied knowledge and feminist critiques of intellectual thought. The challenge it contains spoke to me powerfully of what I was engaged in at that time- an institutional process to encapsulate and intellectualise, disseminate a partial 'knowledge' about 'business' which did not acknowledge its own partiality, its 'perpetual normalcy'. This sort of knowledge can offer me no route to explore where I want to go, because the areas I wanted to inquire into lie in the spaces, the silences, rather than in the discourse. I need to use a 'faulty depiction'. I cannot carry out the inquiry I seek within the univocal position of Western propositional knowledge. I must draw on other positions.

For my purposes, a feminist perspective can make a distinct contribution to this territory. Other postmodern perspectives note that absence of enchantment, participation, holistic thinking, awareness of the body, and the power dynamic in the social construction and maintenance of knowledge: feminist thinking adds the dimension of gender to this - it is masculine power that is central to this process.

So, where does this take me? This is highly conceptual territory, What does it mean I do, in order to inquire into my living contradiction? Here I must turn to issues of method.